

Choppy Waters



A novella by

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Dedicated to the two Keewadin guides who inspired this journey:
Charlie Boyle and Temagami legend Archie Belaney

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[One](#)

Outfitting

His old university friend Choppy Waters was a master canoeist who had a way with words. At the time they knew each other during university, Redbeard knew him as Charlie Boyle - the guy who was wearing shorts with Birkenstocks and wool socks well into the cold end of November - and who never seldom went to his philosophy classes but was always still able to get an 'A' on the term paper. But when they met to go canoeing some twenty-five years later he learned that Charlie Boyle was known as Choppy Waters: the one who preferred to paddle in robust open waters rather than in the calm waters along the shoreline. He simply thrived on the roller-coaster style of canoeing. Choppy Waters and Redbeard had talked about taking a canoe trip for 20 years, so when their paths crossed they both agreed to make it happen. But for Redbeard it was only to be a two-week trip on Lake Temagami. He couldn't foresee that it would span 42 days and 42 nights with Choppy Waters - a man who would prove his nickname to be apt.

Redbeard had expected the canoe trip to be like a beer commercial, with some good memories and some fun times but what he didn't expect was an encounter with mental illness that put both his own life, and that of his dog Schopenhauer, in peril.

Having only seen Choppy Waters once or twice in the city for brief visits at parties, Redbeard had not known much of his life in Toronto over the last 20 years and the details of his recent past. He expected Choppy to be the eccentric smart dude he had been at university. He still dressed in the same odd manner and spoke in creative burst, but he didn't see any warning signs that would have raised red flags. So they agreed to meet Temagami at Lake Temagami - the best canoeing in the world. And the same network of lakes that Choppy Waters had been a canoe guide during many years throughout his youth.

"No Russian," was one of the first things he said to Redbeard when they met that first day late August in Temagami. They were busy piecing together all the items they had purchased for their trip, Redbeard's border collie Schopenhauer close at his feet.

"No Russian?" he repeated, but when he said it aloud he understood: there would be no rushing during their canoe trip no matter what.

Charlie Boyle/Choppy Waters was a unique guy. He was tall and athletic and strong but without an ounce of fat - slim and limber and svelte with deeply carved cheeks that were covered with a fairly bushy beard. His hair had thinned and he was guilty of a comb-over hairdo now in his forties. But he always wore a hat to hide his

hair-follicle-challenged piece. Blue eyes close together balanced an exceptionally bony and long nose that dominated his look - an archetype as ancient as the man's DNA. Hardy stock, his parents were wealthy and he had been the head prefect at one of the oldest boarding schools in Canada. But in every sense of the word he was an outdoorsman - both physically and philosophically. Seeing Choppy beside the water he could see how well he fit into his surroundings, especially in contrast to his Toronto self.

He was simply incongruous with the suit-and-tie persona of corporate Toronto. He was a canoeist through and through.

They were both unconventional to most others, both being old philosophy students who still took their philosophy seriously, especially when in the genre of Henry David Thoreau. Redbeard knew the outdoors and loved it but something in Choppy Waters was more immersed in the country - something more profound was in play. It was different up north in Temagami for Choppy. Redbeard could see it: Choppy Waters *was becoming* in the truest sense of the word - becoming his true self. Like a fish thirsting for water, the geomancy of Temagami stimulated with his *anima*: the life source of his person. At once he could see Choppy Waters was a master here at last able to ply his trade, finally home - a mournful soul full of echoes from deeds done here in the past. It was this reverent sadness that slowed the pace of time on these shores, with lakes like droplets of water cupped in Precambrian bowls.

Perhaps there was a reason why the Anishinabek here are said to have survived the last ice age. There was definitely something in Choppy Waters' intuitive apparatus that was responding to the deep history of the North American Indian history here in Lake Temagami, as if the Red Man's blood pulsed through his veins.

"I bought a \$30 piece of cheese last month and then proceeded not to touch it until it went bad," said Choppy. "So I chucked it. It's a good example of my disorder." Voice calm - an act of confession in the *Church of Nature*.

"What disorder?"

"That thing that's wrong with me. *Severe Personality Disorder* is what they call it." He patted Schopenhauer as he spoke. He loved Redbeard's dog.

"Just because some cheese went bad?"

"No because I wanted to see how long it would take to go bad. It's like me having the need to go off on an all-night panther walk every full moon. Even when my wife asked me not to go, I went anyway." He had heard from a mutual friend of how Choppy spent days on end off in the wilderness forests in the large parks throughout Toronto, often sleeping under the stars at night or making a fire under a bridge. It

was true that at times he looked like a hobo - his clothes dirty and tattered and his footwear cracked with holes, his beard wild and unkempt.

“Are you crazy then?” Attempt at being light-hearted.

“The exact term is ‘schizotypal personality disorder,’ so yeah, a bit crazy I guess.” As casual as talking about the weather.

Choppy Waters’ hands shook when he started rolling a cigarette. It was the first time Redbeard had noticed the palsy. Hands filthy and some pretty substantial body odor, Redbeard hoped the trip would help him return to the happy-go-lucky dude he had known so many years ago.

Fearful to ask more about it, Redbeard spread the map out on the dock. It was true he had heard some stories of his extreme behavior but it was all rumor so was discounted as such.

Despite the map being in Ojibwa, Choppy Waters knew the names of the routes marked on the waterways and the portages with the recorded length of each portage. This was measured by the number of chains. The Ojibwa rolled off his tongue as if a grandfather spirit was speaking.

“Obabika, Wasaksina and Tetapaga. We want to get down here in the south. We paddle from the far reach of the Northeast Arm and come through here where the pictographs are said to be.”

A red and white DeHavilland Beaver float plane was dropping gracefully from above the train station near the water in Temagami. The plane swooped down from the northeast over the Temagami Outfitters and the houseboats that lined the docks. Once over the houseboats, the pilot killed the throttle and in a light wind glided softly downwards in a swoop, just missing the surface of the water and then landing gently on its pontoons. Schopenhauer watched the plane land, her ears perked and curious. Redbeard, just like his dog, was perked and curious as to how things would unravel in this wild labyrinth of waterways with this smelly eccentric with the palsy.

Two

On the Water

Day One

After six days of camping in the backyard of Choppy’s friend John in the village of Temagami, they were finally ready to move out. Much of the equipment that was required items were kit that Redbeard would not have thought of, such as the

waterproof map case and the waterproof bag for valuables. Both proved useful on the trip. But it was the strange and absurd quantity of food that was spent by Choppy at the supermarket. Dried vegetables, flour, sugar, anchovies, cans of carnation milk, oats, etc. The list was long. It was way more than two-week's worth of food. When Redbeard expressed that it may be too much food, Choppy Waters replied that it was better to have too much than too little. He even offered to put in more money than Redbeard since his diet was different. The problem became bag space. They bought an extra bag and Redbeard used two of his as part of a dumped grouping of bags. Only when they removed as many items of kit and clothing could, they fit everything in the canoe. They had outfitted for almost a week but Redbeard was thinking that Choppy had overdone it.

There was only three inches on either side of the gunnels. And they weren't even in the canoe yet!

"Ummm." Choppy suggested they go out to test the raft a bit before tomorrow's departure

"Yeah. Let's give it a small test paddle," he replied. "It's the only way we can see if it will float." So Redbeard agreed and they went out on the water. He thought of saying something to Choppy about the high winds but he assumed he knew what he was doing and had his own plan.

The canoe was understandably low in the water so when Choppy began barking commands from the stern Redbeard at first thought it was a joke.

In this wind?

So he waited until he heard the same command again.

"Let's turn around in a circle."

"Here?"

"Yes, let's see how many paddles it takes." So Redbeard began pulling the canoe around in a circle in the big waters in the cross winds, waves threatening the canoe and their packs and Schopenhauer's life. Awkwardly and dangerously they performed the stunt before turning back to the cottage.

"And that was with the dog!" he yelled, manic in the face of the wind.

Only Choppy Waters would have taken an unexperienced canoeist and restless border collie with a fully loaded 1000-pound vessel during high winds for turning exercises.

It was a sign of things to come.

*

They left John's just before midday with a final load measuring a thousand pounds. Choppy became obsessed with packing in the least amount of space. They were at their maximum, which left them with barely three inches on either side of the gunnels. One serious wave from the side could have knocked them down.

Not your usual canoeing experience.

But the kit and food was to last them a month or more, until the Temagami blockade twentieth anniversary took place the first day of Fall.

Another seaplane flew overhead as Choppy Waters and Redbeard paddled out of the bay in their own independent, self-sufficient water vehicle. The canoe was low in the water and the packs were piled high, but they crossed the current for the south side of the shoreline along the Northeast Arm of Lake Temagami successfully. Schopenhauer understood her role of sitting quietly in the front of the canoe within the first half hour of canoeing, which calmed Redbeard's anxiety about his dog. Slowly they moved southwest past Bell Island to O'Connor Island where there was a small bay.

"Let's stop here for a pipe," said Choppy Waters.

"A pipe? I like that."

Choppy Waters began to speak when they were snug in a bay having a pipe.

"The Anishinabek used to measure their canoe trips by the pipe. They would stop for a pipe every hour or so, resting for five minutes, and then keep going. So if Bobby Too Good wanted to give directions, he'd say: 'I'm about 14 pipes from the town of Temagami, northwest of Bear Island.'"

"By the pipe? That makes perfect sense to me!" Redbeard saw the logic in it, especially with a heavy load.

"They used to stop every time they saw a protected bay, dock and sit around and smoke a pipe." Choppy had learned while he was a canoe tripper at Camp Keewatin - the same canoe camp where Archie Belaney, who was also known as Grey Owl in Canadian history, used to guide back in 1910. The camp, throughout its long history, had always recruited the best local Indian guides and had thus inherited a lot of the old ways, including the famous Keewatin campfire.

"Well, it's a good rest and the thick tobacco leaves would give them a jolt," said Redbeard, calming his border collie Schopenhauer that sat between his feet in the bow. The wind was still high, the waves just below white caps.

Since Choppy had never explored the southern part of the vast lake despite spending 15 years guiding canoeing trips, he insisted they do a figure eight of the lake to ensure they see it all.

After a dicey first pipe, the dog relaxed more and they began to hit their stride. It proved to be much easier than the practice day exercise yesterday doing drills in high winds, but doing militaristic Keewatin training during high winds was how Choppy did things. Redbeard was stoic enough to endure his baptism of fire and remain unruffled. And because he was unruffled, the dog was unruffled.

After the first pipe the waters calmed. Redbeard and Schopenhauer were more confident and began to enjoy the ride. The massive white pine trees towered over them near the shores, the air a magical perfumed fragrance of pine and spruce and cedar. The shore were void of cottages. The entire network of waterways were as they had been for hundreds of years, the Anishinabek careful not to have let development get out of hand. Only in a few places were there clusters of cottages where he could see some boats and the odd water skier.

They took their second pipe across from Ferguson Island. The third and fourth pipes were spent hugging the shoreline because the winds had picked up again. They remained in the canoe in inlets where the water was calm and unaffected by the winds. Schopenhauer was happy to jump out of the canoe and explore the shoreline as they smoked and studied their maps. In order for his dog to overcome her fear of being on the water, Redbeard brought some bacon treats that he would give to her when she jumped into the canoe at his feet.

It proved to be effective.

Choppy Waters wanted to stop at the mouth of the South Tetapagos River, but it was too small so they pressed on before they found an old campsite on a peninsula west of Broom Island. There was a cairn on the shore where the rock was ancient, hardened and sculpted into poses of defiance against the wear of the water. Deep holes and broken crests, the shoreline paddle was a tour of the front lines of the battle between water and rock.

Choppy Waters found beaver-cut pieces of hardwood for the fire and cooked pasta with an onion-garlic-anchovy-tomato paste sauce. After Redbeard's first day of paddling, it tasted great. He understood why Choppy bought so many tins of anchovies.

A row of old-growth white pines encircled a stone fire pit on the Precambrian rock, and some spots where there was soil and pine needles made for some good sleeping pockets. Despite this Choppy Waters slept under the stars with no tent.

The no-see-ums came out just as the sun fell away and the next morning with the overcast skies. Old ancestor spirits stirred in the trees from past explorers and traders, and the crosswinds blowing through the trees creating a sound, like a straight instrument. It created a stirring hum of sounds slow and gradual and calming.

The narcotic effect of the winds were enough to keep them there for two nights.

Three

Wind Devils

Day Three

The loudest sound around these parts was the roar of loons from the water. Redbeard saw evidence of beavers at work everywhere. The efforts of Grey Owl to conserve and curtail beaver trapping in these parts 80 years ago had had an impact. Pieces of beaver-chewed trunks of poplar trees were found in piles all along the shorelines. Grey Owl paddled these waters and knew these campsites. He had walked this path. The skills required then are still employed today to undertake the same trip. Everything was Precambrian shield covered with intermittent moss with some cedars sprouting from the rock as if it had hidden soil within. The land felt ancient and untouched as if it were all out of a fairytale.

The morning was calm and beautiful, the branches swaying in the lazy breeze, Choppy taking a morning dip in the crisp waters around them. Even before he had brewed his first coffee. Robust. This was his way to immerse in nature. He felt it deeply this man.

Redbeard had wondered why it had been so many years since Choppy Waters last canoe trip, so he asked him.

“About seven years ago I was still a guide at Camp Keewatin,” he said. “Until something happened. I was out on a trip with a group of ten and another guide named Constantine, and a few days after leaving Alex’s place, I decided to go back to Al’s to pick up the weed we forgot. We agreed they would camp there until I returned, but when I did finally return with the weed they had left.” He shook his head at the memory. “Constantine... Anyway, as I was canoeing to catch up with our group I hurt my leg. My pace, of course, slowed. The group arrived at the camp and they sent out a helicopter to look for me. It was a mess. They still have an expression at Camp Keewatin: *‘Don’t pull a Choppy Waters.’*” It had taken him a full lifecycle to overcome that. That was the story he told to Redbeard, but it wasn’t until they bumped into Constantine during their canoe trip weeks later that the whole truth of that incident became clear.

But for Redbeard, they had come together to honour one of our most accomplished Canadians in the early twentieth century: Grey Owl: *the Englishman-turned-Anishinabek Red Man*. All Archie Belaney wanted to do was to play Indian in the real-life game of Cowboys and Indians. He was a man who took the step into that fantasy and did what he saw as his dream. He became a champion of conservatism, learning how to canoe from watching the beavers cross the current to the mouth of a river to its home. He saw how it used its tail as a paddle and how it surfed the waves and cut a threat into an advantage. Grey Owl was a nocturnal canoeist, preferring the night paddle with fairer weather and calmer waters.

Choppy sang his praises like Longfellow sang his praises to Hiawatha, the lord of the forests. Redbeard was amazed and comforted to learn that Choppy Waters had brought *The Song of Hiawatha* on three separate occasions during his 10,000 previous miles on a canoe.

“Grey Owl was a man who almost single-handedly spearheaded conservatism in Canada and particularly the beaver,” said Choppy. He shared Redbeard’s enthusiasm for Grey Owl, but unlike Redbeard, Choppy knew more about the man from his years of canoe tripping in Temagami.

“A sniper and injured during World War One, he returned to the Canadian wilderness and lived like the Red Man.”

Choppy Waters and Redbeard went into the Temagami woods to live deliberately in the tradition of Henry David Thoreau and Grey Owl, a man who understood – and who could not relinquish – the timeless beauty of it all. For Redbeard to tread the Temagami waters like he was doing and to go to Bear Island where the Ojibwa lived was to honour this slandered British-born, Canadian-adopted hero. For him it was a solemn pilgrimage. He figured it was a statement that said: “We honour you Archie Belaney; your life has left impressions in the sand prints of time.”

The morning on the third day was hot and cloudy with some wind. Choppy Waters, Redbeard and Schopenhauer rested in a small enclave, protected from the wind. They had left their camp across from Broom Island and moved through the Skull Narrows where they reached the end of the Northeast Arm and were entering the body of the spider. (The bird’s eye view of Lake Temagami had the shape of a spider). To keep away from the white caps in the open waters they spotted an enclave where they rested and had a pipe, and studied whether their canoe could pass through the shallow, sandy narrows. It was too shallow to canoe so they both hopped out and pushed the vessel over some fallen logs and rocks. Technically it

was their first portage. If they hadn't had taken the shortcut they would have had to battle white caps and had a good 40 minutes more of hard paddling.

"It is a deep thirst that stirs within he who willingly goes into the face of danger," said Choppy Waters. Redbeard wanted to suggest they dock for a few hours to let the winds die down but Choppy was all for going straight into it. They hit an onslaught of oncoming wind turning south on the main lake that would have tipped them had they not done a dramatic U-turn and ferried west to the protection of the islands. The winds were strong enough they couldn't even control the paddle: it caught wind every stroke. Wind devils abounded but somehow Choppy Waters was able to steer them against the headwinds as Redbeard paddled with vigor. Schopenhauer kept her head below the bow, buried beneath Redbeard's legs. The narrows between the mainland and the islands that had become a wind tunnel and the white caps threatened to tip the canoe.

Turning in that narrows was pretty hairy with a thousand pounds of baggage and a doggie. It forced them to traverse the lake to the west side that took them a few hours of white-knuckle wave crunching with more than a few waves landing over the gunnels. They found a camp on a small rocky island but the wind was too strong and the site too exposed, so they kept ferrying across the white caps.

Choppy Waters did an excellent job steering diagonally at 45 degrees off each wave through the choppy points around each outcropping from the shore. They were forced to dig in and keep their paddles working in the water. They finally reached Camp Wonikon where they took anchor and chatted with the owner. White caps and the full five o'clock winds dominated the waters. They waited half an hour talking on the dock and then did the last half hour grind around the dangerous high waters around the southern lip of Temagami Island, where the current separates and the vacuous and irregular wave patterns and the unhindered southwest winds required them to forget about their sore hands and their shoulders of fire. They focused on not tipping and getting around the point to the campsite. For a few long moments it felt as if they weren't moving forward, but with meaningful, purposeful strokes of good technique they moved closer to their destination.

Just after the point they went to the second peninsula past the native cemetery and found a good site. Despite the wind, Choppy had a fire up and going within a half hour of them retiring from the water for the day. They were both wet from the waves splashing over the sides of the vessel, so they warmed themselves by the fire after changing into some dry clothes. It was only their best canoeing that brought them to safety on the southern tip of Temagami Island. Even around the tip the waves were still mature when they finally slammed to shore.

“A thousand pounds, seven pipes from halfway down the Northeast Arm to the southwest corner of Temagami Island on Lake Temagami,” he said Choppy, relaxing beside the orange flame. Schopenhauer was adjusting to the high jinx on the water and soon settled beside Redbeard’s side, falling asleep.

“We covered a lot of pipes today. Maybe six hours of paddling with perhaps seven pipes?”

“That sounds right.” Choppy looked purposely at Redbeard. “He who puts their life on the line, who loves life as much as me, being outfitted sufficiently is a deadly serious thing. The last 50 dollars I spent on supplies could make or break a successful trip.”

“Indeed, like the little things that, if ignored, could develop into a problem: a scrape, blister, burn, bite, sunburn, tweaked knee, stiff back. Careful maintenance along the way requires the proper tools and the right philosophy of time. *Not being Russian* is the starting point of such a philosophy.” Choppy Waters stared into the fire with a glazed look in his eye, and bloodshot from exhaustion, too drained to show his inner smile.

“Making time to change socks to take a dip is dictated by practicality, as the old trappers knew. Things like starting a fire with birch bark on the inside surrounded by dried cedar, or always having an ongoing collection of birch bark during the trip are secrets and tricks of the trade from *les voyageurs*.”

“Like our man Pierre Radisson.”

“Yep, and his mate Grosseilliers.”

“And even Étienne Brulé.”

“Our wanigan and the tump lines and the knots and the paddle strokes all descend from the earliest canoeists.”

Into the muck of nature and into the thickness of her soup, Redbeard could hear the drumbeat of her soul. Redbeard listened until his eyes could stay open no longer. They were both so exhausted at nightfall that after dinner they left the leftovers in the pot. Thinking it might be an open invitation for bears to infiltrate their camp, Redbeard let it go without a word because the pot was closer to Choppy Water’s tent.

Four

Grey Owl

Day Four

The forests echoed with the sounds of birds and wildlife, like a jungle of pine and spruce and birch. But it was the loons that ran this lake's audio channels. They call to each other from down the lake, hanging solo or in packs like seagulls. The leaves on the maple trees created a symphonic echo effect that make the sounds of nature linger that penetrated deeply into the ancient instincts of what it was to be a man in the wilderness.

Schopenhauer had so far adjusted well: during the rough patches on the water she was scared, especially with the water splashing over the bow, but she had learned to stay at Redbeard's feet in the bow. She had learned the importance of hunkering down, burying her head in his crotch during the roughest spots. Only once did she stand on the gunnel, which tipped the vessel to port. Redbeard had to push her down and tell her to sit only once. She understood after that that standing on the gunnels when on choppy waters was unsafe. Otherwise the little border collie was riding well. She was blind in one eye but she had a knack for understanding what Redbeard wanted, and was a very happy canine at his side. Their partnership was born to be, each knowing each other as well as could be. He would die for her, and her for him. And this canoeing trip was another adventure for them to show their love to each other. A few times he had had to tell Choppy Waters to stop giving her so much attention because she was a dog who preferred to be at her master's side, but he was slow to accept this truth. He looked at her like a prize or toy, not as a handicapped puppy who was desperate to protect her master at any cost. And Choppy Water's way was foreign to her. She had only taken to him moderately, which perhaps led him to redouble his efforts to get on her good side. But she was not really interested in him other than he was part of their pack for this journey.

At each campsite she busied herself with exploring the grounds and chasing snakes away.

After the first day of 12 km down the Northeast Arm, Choppy Waters and Redbeard paddled 17km in the high winds to land on the southwest corner of Temagami Island on the third day. Since the winds had come from the southwest those 17km were coming upstream against the wind. In the morning of the fourth day, Choppy Waters explained to him after his morning dip about the local Anishinabek.

"Temagami' means "deep water by the shore, in Ojibwa," he said. He explained that the lake was the hub of a web of interconnected lakes and rivers covering 10,000 square kilometers. "The local *Temeeahgamaw*, or 'deep water people' - an Ojibwa people - have been here for more than 20,000 years, which

means they had survived the last flood. These mountains were so high that they were able to survive.” Choppy said that permeating throughout the forests and shoreline are over 1500kilometers of native trails that have been in use for the last 5000 years. “They call it the ‘*Nastagan*,” he said.

Choppy was a bit crazy when it came to Native history of Canada. He explained how Temagami was not spared during the Iroquois rampages in the 1650s, but they were expelled nonetheless.

“It is a mixture of Ojibwa, Cree and Algonquin here, the result of the Iroquois invasions during Champlain’s time and the subsequent displacement of tribes. Before the railway came through Temagami from North Bay in 1904, the Hudson’s Bay established a trading post on the south side of Bear Island.”

Now rested and eager to get to the south of the lake to see some pictographs, they left camp for the south past Chino Island through the channel at Narrows Island where they hugged the small island shores under a burning sun. The weather spurred them to power stroke all the way past McLean Peninsula to a campsite near a portage. They stucked a total 20km down the Southwest Arm to the southern tip of McLean Peninsula.

The water was smooth compared to the previous outing. The water was so clear one could see the rocky bottom 20 feet down 60 feet away. Having such a sound sleep with Schopenhauer at his side in his tent last night helped his body heal but after the fifth pipe of the day his shoulder pain had a manifold increase. Being a writer, Redbeard had what would be called an ‘academic build,’ so the shoulder expenditure was a good thing. Dormant muscles were being called to the fore, but it felt much more fundamental than that as if the very bone structure was being manhandled. But Redbeard was enjoying the canoeing.

The rest was good for both of them during the New Moon last night.

Yesterday’s paddling had been hairy. It had been windy when they started and windy when they finished, but this morning it was hairy for another reason: the canoe was riding high and to port. It had been packed differently. Once corrected the canoe glided effortlessly atop the calm surface. Redbeard had time to enjoy his canoeing despite his shoulder discomfort. A canoeist’s life is not for everyone, but for those who love canoeing are the fortunate few who have been blessed with world-class canoe routes in Ontario, with Temagami among the very best. Canoeing was stripping down to life’s bare essentials: the hustling and hawking of the cities faded away into the crosswinds leaving your mind free and your senses calmed and open to the natural sounds that surrounded you. Days were dictated by the weather. Ones sense of danger heightens and the healthy instincts of man were reborn. You lived

the Anishinabek way: closer to Mother Nature and guided by the Grandfather Spirits all around you who looked after you. Your ears adapted and began to listen for beavers flapping their tail or fish jumping. Gone were the manmade noises like engines and trucks and air conditioning and honking horns. It was a reach back in time where one could once again adapt to the natural flow of time. And with a loyal and well-trained dog at your side and you had a safe roving unit, with the dog taking security detail full time. Your 'house' was your tent that took five minutes to erect.

Quick erections were important when setting up camp with fading light.

Fire warmed the belly with hot food and tea, and a wool blanket and a sleeping bag warmed the body when the early morning chill hits. Your body grows lean, and the old signs of urban indulgence wane. Your face and hands bronze in the summer sun and your eyes brighten from the vitamin D. Lingering headaches soon sneak away in the night wind only noticed days later when the absence of pain has become the new state and you wonder what is missing.

Perhaps it was the pine needles in the massive white pines that grew throughout Temagami that caused the whistle in the winds. With strong winds and high rock with shorelines of trees one could enjoy a whole new sound experience. Thousands and millions of pine needles each with their vacuous sound in the wind multiplied created a crashing roar that almost overwhelmed. The pine trees stood tall, united and stronger from the winds here at the rooftop of Ontario on the oldest mountain in the world.

It was as if the wind had made the white pine and red pine bigger and more defiant, just like the rock standing defiant against the flowing waters.

But it was because of Choppy Waters that Redbeard was canoeing here. He had championed Lake Temagami and its old-growth forests for 25 years. Choppy Water was a legend in these parts, known to his fellow outdoorsmen as a risk-taker, a man passionate about his freedom. But did some find his ways risky? Not to Choppy; he regarded 'solid pulls' as par for the course - a black diamond run for a skier or a long par 5 with some water traps for a golfer.

For those who wanted to let up, Choppy would insist on pressing on, keeping the line and digging in for the far-off shore. Soon of course few of the relatively adventurous canoeists would hesitate a pull with Choppy. He always wanted to paddle into the headwind and reach the next camping vista as if there lay the panacea of all that irked him. But Choppy Waters knew more than what his fellow men saw of him for brewing within that stern brow and long bony nose lay a deep belief in the *qualia* of existence and the NOW of experience. For in Choppy lay a bottomless thirst for empirical data no matter how small. He knew he was the spiritual

offspring of Plato and secure in that knowledge, and had no need to convey this to others.

His philosophical strength was founded by what he had done in his life, those countless thousands of life miles with each mile a mini-harvest of data for his empirical piggy bank. Choppy grew fatter with the honey of knowledge with each passing day, but only he was aware of this hidden wealth. To his fellow outdoorsmen, with their Kevlar canoes and fancy gear, Choppy was a simple old-school traditionalist: a rebel against his militaristic canoe training at Camp Keewatin when he was a kid. He had had the proper instruction but at the point of graduation he chose to always follow a dictum to which he had never been unfaithful: *'don't let school get in the way of your education.'* In both academic and outdoor education, Choppy kept moving ahead with his own innovations and insights to evolve himself as both a philosopher and adventurer. He had, due to this dictum, come up with his own brand of existence on a canoe and an original philosophy of life.

So for Choppy, his biggest problem was finding a long enough block of time to get out of the city into the thick of Nature's bosom. Even when living in the city working full time, Choppy would pack up and walk the parks of the city, finding little nooks and crannies to build a fire and camp out. It was in his bones. Sleeping outside was normal to him; sleeping under a comforter with fluffy pillows was foreign and uncomfortable for him. Charlie Doyle had become a purist in Choppy Waters.

It had been exactly 20 years since Redbeard had seen him and yet those first principles that governed him during those days in Kingston at university still governed him today. Being self-sufficient was the most glaring characteristic one could extrapolate back then when knowing him. He was among the first to carry around a plastic coffee mug attached to his knapsack so he could save of Styrofoam cups. And he was the one who wore Birkenstocks with wool socks and shorts to class right up 'til the first snowfall.

In fact if one were hard pressed to define such a man as Choppy Waters, it would be as a poet. He could quote long passages from Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* among countless other verses from poets with a keen passion for the outdoors. Around the campfire at the drop of a hat, Choppy could recite poetry so that it blended with the sounds of the splashing waters and blowing leaves. He had the ability – exemplified by that calmness of voice – that clothed his words in honey.

That was one of his gifts: the gift of rhyme and storytelling.

And finally, he was also a man who preferred to be understated – a man who preferred to let his actions speak for themselves. So when it happened that he became an overnight celebrity 20 years ago at a demonstration at Queen's Park in

Toronto against logging old-growth forests, he was not surprised. It had been Choppy who was the one protester who was photographed up in a tree on the front lawn of the provincial government's headquarters at Queen's Park with a mobile phone in his hand calling Ontario premier David Peterson who, strangely, would not pick up the telephone. He became the spokesman of the *Save the Forest Campaign* in Temagami when his off-the-cuff comments about the blockade caused international news and new backing for the movement, which included Gordon Lightfoot, Farley Mowat, Cowboy Junkies, Margaret Atwood and the rock band Blue Rodeo. But being a quiet man by nature, Choppy simply continued guiding canoe trips and relishing his chosen way of life. Many of his friends, including Redbeard, lost touch with him. Even those involved with the blockade couldn't understand why Choppy – who had the national and international mantle to speak from – chose to turn his back on protesting and arrests for the unspoiled canopies of the northern bush.

Their campsite for the night turned out to be simple and clean. A small island protected it with trees appearing to grow right out of the Canadian Shield. Around the campfire they each worked at now their own self-assigned chores to prepare for the night in their tents. Once done they settled with a large mug of tea that they spiked with some whiskey.

"To be a canoer is to be rich and living in abundance," said Choppy. "Firewood is all you need for fuel, and birch bark for lighting the fire and matches to light the birch bark." Redbeard sat back and patted Schopenhauer under his arm. "Canoeing in Temagami is like becoming a 17th-century *les voyageur*: simple diet, good deerskins, able vessel, accurate maps, compass and a warm blanket." The wind had picked up again and hit against Redbeard's tent as if the breath of God was wearing boxing gloves.

"How many pipes did we do today? Eight?" Choppy Waters grunted.

"Maybe eight pipes, sure. Good mileage though. We're getting in tune with each other's stroke." Choppy Waters had the earned wisdom to know the days not to go forth despite the allure of a challenge. He spotted the sundog in the sky and prepared the tarps over the camp for rain. He tightened ropes and clustered the food bags under the tarps and chopped the firewood. He said he didn't much care to stop in to Camp Keewatin when they went north. Redbeard didn't ask but he could see it had something to do with moving on and being on his own. That's when he told Redbeard about his grandfather.

"You probably don't know about my grandfather?"

"No," he replied, sitting comfortably beside the fire with Schopenhauer.

“My grandfather, though well known in these parts, was a man shrouded in mystery,” said Choppy Waters, staring into the fire. “Some say he was a draft dodger and that his real surname was Schmidt. It was said he changed his name to Smith to deny his German heritage and escape the anti-German sentiment following the Great War. The truth is that Wilhelm Schmidt was one of Grey Owl’s favorite drinking companions at the Inn beside the train station in Temagami during the early years. There was a difference in ages but not in life perspective. Besides, the founders of the canoe company could drink with the best of them having grown up in the area and around the hard-working, hard-drinking miners in the Cobalt area. The two of them spent the years preceding the Great War together, right before Grey Owl was to go to war and survive as a sniper - an ability in part given to him by my grandfather.”

“Are you serious?” Redbeard was aware of his panache for hyperbole.

“From what I know through the family is that it was Grey Owl who he confided in about his conundrum about his German heritage and who, some believe, suggested the idea to Smith. But after Grey Owl returned from the war, they had both changed, especially Grey Owl. He wanted the solitude of the woods even more. He thirsted for his corner of wilderness void of the sound of bombs and the stink of the dead mixed with diesel. That was when he took off for southern Quebec with his woman and his two pet beavers and wrote his *Pilgrims of the Wild*. He lived off the land and was able to build his own cabin and function with his stock of foodstuffs. He could hunt freely and trap for pelts though his change of heart caused a severe problem in how he would earn an income. It was what caused him to embark on writing his book and the book tour that would make him famous and lead to his posthumous downfall. How can we dismiss such a man who lived like an Indian and was Canada’s first leader of conservationism?”

“What’s strange to think about is that he knew his crime the whole time and knew one day the truth would emerge. Imagine living with that?”

“Rightfully people felt deceived and tricked by this European in costume of an Indian. Perhaps what they did not know was the wilderness of Temagami and the characters here that had witnessed his adventures that spanned three decades. Here was this Englishman living the hard and beautiful Anishinabek life in the wild with his canoe. And he did it successfully - a man who had tested himself fit to live in the bush and learn the old ways. Archie Belaney was an accomplished man before Grey Owl was born. He had nursed the calm night waters and had explored during the full moons, earning the Spirit Name ‘*He Who Moves by Night*.’ Grey Owl, named by his adopted Ojibwa family on Bear Island near here, was an outdoorsman like my grandfather Wilhelm Schmidt/Bill Smith. The fundamental thrust was noble, which

was to share his knowledge with the public, to raise awareness and to protect the forests and beaver from becoming extinct. He used his empirical data to emphasize the need for immediate action. The forces put into play by Radisson and Grosseilliers during the 17th-century French fur trade had to be stopped. Three hundred years of trapping had taken its toll and it took a kid from London raised by aunts to sound the alarm.”

In the silence that followed, Redbeard thought how Choppy Waters had done the same thing 50 years later at Queen’s Park up in that tree speaking to the press. Getting the message out there was the imperative; getting arrested or being labeled a fraud after you were dead was a secondary consideration. Choppy’s arrest at the demonstration led to a whole series of undesired ripples throughout his life living in the city.

“It is more likely than not that Grey Owl would mind in the slightest what others called him,” said Redbeard. “Better to curtail trapping and save the industrious beaver than being called a fraud after you’re dead.”

“And that’s what he did.” The veteran canoeer leaned back in thought.

And that’s what Choppy Waters did trying to save the old-growth forest in Temagami.

Five

Once Were Rapids

Day Five

After all the fun and games and storytelling and the whiskey spiking of late night tea, Choppy Waters and Redbeard sipped coffee in the morning as the wet winds swooped down at will, pushing the bugs away for brief spurts. It was clear to Redbeard now that Choppy Waters wanted to remove himself from the Great Debate and focus his energies to find his peace in the windswept Southwest Arm of Lake Temagami. Little schoolboys in suits and ties debating items of discussion that have been on the agenda for millennia were not his fare. Choppy had debated enough to know where it all ended up: to more debating. *Talk! Talk! Keep talking all you rabble-rousers. My world is earth years away from the concrete world you inhabit! I prefer the white caps of the water to the heckling and verbal fisticuffs that mar the arena of parliament!*

In point of fact it could be said that Grey Owl and Choppy Waters were spiritual brothers by proxy through Grey Owl’s pre-war drinking buddy: Bill Smith.

They both had cut their teeth on the same water roads around the spider, the dark waters of the lake once struck fear into their hearts on a blustery day. White caps meant danger, but like a two-sided coin also had the lure of the thrill. To pitch a camp when you deserved it was the self-esteem that functioned as fuel for their journeys. It stirred that ancient calling forth for courage while staring in the teeth of mortal peril.

They had both learned to read the winds and the sky. The omnipresent winds from the southwest pushed the water into the middle of the spider where it hit the waters coming from the north so that the flow veered down the Northeast Arm where it was the fastest moving arm of the lake that fell into Rabbit Lake and then into the Ottawa River. They both knew the rules of the water road - that ancient way with the light step – minimalist and prepared with the right tools for the job: ax, saw, tarps, *wanegan*, waterproof duffle bags, a good knife. They both knew the proper kit from their years working as a guide at Camp Keewatin - the oldest canoe camp in North America. Their picture hung on the walls in the dining hall. No one knew the total number of miles Grey Owl had paddled and portaged around the most pristine of Canada's wildernesses, perhaps the same as the tens of thousands of miles Choppy had already done by the time he was 40.

He knew he had another few tens of thousands of water miles to go to match the master Grey Owl.

Redbeard thought and sipped his tea, watching the sun dry the dew from his tent and the squirrels leap from branch to branch. Despite having some gray in his beard, Redbeard still had the spark. Still lithe and fleet of foot, Redbeard harbored almost a mischievous passion for adventure that had perhaps brought him the gray hair early in his years, but he wore his colors with the pride of a warrior showing his battle scars. The streaks of gray down the middle of his head hung like a mane atop his silver temples and ginger-red beard. It was an adventurer's face: the scar above the eye from a surfboard on Manhattan Beach; the scar on the hand from sliding into an old wall made of seashells and concrete in China; and the wrinkles from squinting into the sun from the mountains he had climbed in India. There was occasionally a limp that crept up on him, perhaps during the damp days. And Choppy could find him gripping and re-gripping his hands as if exercising stiff arthritic fingers. But Redbeard never once let his duty as an oarsman become docile. Each stroke had some pepper. He was a canoeist's canoeist: someone who knew what they were doing who could hold his half of the bargain and who had the decency to leave the master in peace when it was choppy.

Redbeard too could hear the *Great Song of the Trees* and the language of the water. He experienced dreams at night that contained the sound of water. Living in

respect to the Anishinabek Way, he valued his dreams as visions showing the way forward and revealing hidden answers to life's problems. Redbeard had evolved to finally be able to live on *Indian Time* but he was new to it; Choppy Waters had always lived on Indian Time. Ever since he was a young child he would spend the summers with his grandfather at the Temagami Canoe Company. He did all the hard work at the canoe factory. Choppy's grandfather would allocate jobs as if he were handing out candy, but the worst for Choppy was inhaling the sawdust and the cedar glue. He regarded his own smoking habit as mild in comparison to the damage his lungs sustained from the factory's poor air ventilation. It didn't matter to Choppy's grandfather who seemed unaffected, or at least less affected than the beer when it began to flow.

But there was a method to his madness as beautiful cedar canoes were sold to people who came from all over the world.

It had only taken less than a week for Redbeard to see that when it came to dinner Choppy preferred chopping the wood and cooking a hot meal with vegetables and clean pots, but Redbeard was usually so ravenous that trail mix or a thrown together sandwich or salad usually did the trick. Choppy Waters was all about the process and ritual of making camp and breaking camp whereas Redbeard was all about time utilization. The quickest and highest yielding method proved the best solution for Redbeard - a man seasoned with his own travels in distant lands. Albeit it was different travel, one that only occasionally required an overnighter in a tent. If need be it was done in a sleeping bag under the stars.

Up here in the north, despite being summer, it cooled down at night, which became particularly important if it rained. They both employed the same wool vests and wool sweaters and wool socks, and a penchant for tea and numerous other items, such as their pipes. They had agreed to go forth on choppy waters in an over laden canoe. They had to work together when making dinner and pitching camp. Redbeard wanted more time to soak in the beauty of the scenery than it being spent washing dishes. For Choppy it was all about performing each task as if it were on a long checklist that finally yielded a highly productive fire with required kitchenware. For Choppy Waters the beauty lay in the doing of each task, the enjoyment coming from knowing that each step was the same step that Grey Owl himself would have done. He was participating in a tradition that gave Choppy a sense of brotherhood and a bond with the traditions of canoeing, important in such a solo life he lived since his divorce. Redbeard was a minimalist so he would be happy using his little propane stove to heat soup or pasta once in a while. Trail mix, bread, cheese, boiled eggs, tuna, dill pickles, honey, peanut butter and jam: this could suffice the minimalist who

lived on St Joseph's Island in the heart of the North Shore of the Great Lakes year round. He was a man who had chopped wood for years to heat his cabin on the island and enjoyed campfires all summer in his backyard.

"It is a job," he said, biting into his work at breaking camp.

It looked like Choppy didn't have a good sleep. He had the New Moon in his eyes, as if he were reliving his early years of having a falling out with Camp Keewatin. When they were both packing up, Redbeard was deliberate in his tasks, with each step being done with maximum utility. Choppy was fractured and off-center in his execution but was again going through the hundred Keewatin steps required to have a successful morning push off.

One pot remained unwashed.

"I've done all the pots and all the dishes this morning and yesterday and the day before, etcetera. I was just thinking you could do one." Choppy was quiet for a moment while Redbeard smoked, drank tea and looked out to the water. Choppy's pushiness – finally manifest – caused Redbeard to heat another pot of tea and then strip down and swim and wash. Only when Redbeard took the nail clippers out and gave them to Choppy did he take some time out from his hundred steps to trim his nails, which were dangerously long.

"It was the norm for us to wake at dawn and be off by six and paddle 'til six at night," he said to Redbeard, who was dried and dressed beside the fire. "Because we had a place to go to and a defined number of days to get there and comeback, sometimes, when the weather was bad, we would have to hoof it back to Keewatin. I once paddled 500 miles in two days."

"Fair dinkum." He sipped his tea.

"The thing about Camp Keewatin is that they have their way of doing things. There is a set way to set up a campsite and portage. It was paddling all day."

"It sounds quite gung ho."

"It's the way it's been done since it started in 1893."

"Same way Grey Owl did it."

"Yup. Same as Grey Owl."

Choppy and Redbeard left in the early afternoon and only had to paddle a half a pipe to their first portage. A small one, which they pulled off with ease. Muscles were firmer after almost a week. The trek was a pleasant 50-metre walk along a pine needle-covered trail with an extra 60-pound piece of baggage. For Redbeard, the tumplines proved effective though he quickly understood why the Anishinabek called them "burden straps." He felt like his head may cave in from the force of the leather straps against his forehead.

Choppy and Redbeard almost made it to Cross Lake after portaging at the neck of McLean Peninsula. From the south of the South Arm of Lake Temagami, and after a discussion they had on the water, they decided to ferry across to the string of islands to the east that would protect them from the prevailing north wind. It was a long cross, more difficult than Redbeard expected, but once they had paddled for the first hour they came to an island that gave them protection from open waters. Still the water was restless but Choppy steered the craft with the nose kept aligned with the oncoming waves from the north, so they sliced through the waves moving east but pointed northeast.

It was like paddling in molasses.

For almost the first hour, even as they reached the first island along Austin Bay, the shore remained comfortably close on the left. With their momentum they traversed an increasing number of small islands until they reached the entrance to Outlet Bay that led to Cross Lake. And as they came around the first corner, what appeared at a distance to be a thin rocky shore was a blur of small islands. All rocky and flat and small, it blended into the forest background that created an optical illusion. It was there, in that surreal corner of the world, they had a pipe in the canoe hidden by one of the smallest islands. But once they took the river road south they caught a tailwind.

Riding the current and funneled into a narrows tripled their pace.

They raced by the shoreline into the twisty narrows where they found their first campsite that was being used. Not deterred, they carried on in the fast flow with the entire shoreline flat and rockless. The three of them passed over where once were rapids. Due to the flooding from the dam the shoreline showed no rock. Instead it was a solid line of trees with front row stunted as new growth. Choppy thought the water levels had risen six feet higher here since the dam went in 50 years ago. But on a canoe going six miles per hour through a narrow bottleneck in Outlet Bay, the forest was like a jungle with foliage overflowing and touching the water all along the shore as far as they could see. When the narrowest part of the bottleneck came, the current whirled around a perfectly chiseled rock campsite still high enough to survive the extra six feet of water.

It faced due west. And with the sun starting to drop in the western sky, it had a magical quality that immediately struck Redbeard as an once-in-a-lifetime place to camp. After a discussion and consulting the map, Choppy wanted to keep going as there were supposed to be more campsites farther on. As they stood on the rock dock beside the swiftest part of the current where it took a corner at a 90-degree

angle, there was still more time for paddling but it would mean bypassing this truly exceptional campsite.

“Really Choppy, it is a special place.”

“Ah, I still have some paddling left in me.”

The current led the way down river past the eerie tree-laden shores where once were rapids. The waters pushed them downwards and around corners as if a natural waterslide. After days of only paddling upstream and against the winds, they had finally caught a waterway that worked in tandem with their paddles. The deeper they journeyed into the waters of Cross Lake, the faster they traveled. Just as it began to open up they found a camp on the east side so they could enjoy the sunset.

It was small and the tents had to be pitched close together, something that bothered Redbeard - someone who liked his privacy at night while sleeping. But they mostly loitered on the shore watching the sunset or were around the campfire. Schopenhauer scouted the area as they built camp. She couldn't stop running around, wagging her tail and giving every indication that she liked it. Choppy Waters began his ritual once again and set up camp the Keewatin way. Hunger was too fierce so a sandwich and trail mix were consumed with tea and spaghetti was put off for lunch the next day. They were both giggly after such a long paddle.

The stars were bright in the sky that were clearly reflected off the waters' surface. In the darkness the loons let out their loudest cries that echoed down the corridors of Temagami. Compared with the previous two nights, there was absolute silence here in this corner. No winds stirred outside the main body of the lake. Unlike the other campsites, this one didn't have a sense of history. It felt as if it had been cut out of the middle of the forest with a large pair of clippers. The small cedar trees make it feel like the shire in *The Hobbit*.

Six

Drawn to the Wild

Day Six

During the night of extreme southwest winds, Redbeard was awakened, not by Schopenhauer but by a great silence as the wind shifted to the north. The huge catcher's mitt of giant white pines had been catching the strong winds from the southwest since before nightfall until this profound break in the roar, when the next sound was a different octave of sound. The north winds were coming, and with it

winter. The silence lasted a minute or two, until the north winds had gained the upper hand, having body-checked the summer-wind monopoly of warm winds out of the way for the year.

Since trees and thick growth surrounded their campsite, Schopenhauer spent most of the night outside running around chasing squirrels and rabbits. He could tell she was after rabbit from the noises she made from her prancing. Schopenhauer was fond of the pouncing technique when chasing rabbits. In the morning she was all wide-eyed and bushy-tailed, but for Redbeard it was cold and sunless.

He could see that Choppy Waters was apprehensive about the 20th anniversary of the blockade just as it was clear he was less than enthusiastic about visiting Camp Keewatin. Choppy had his own tapes and his own unique history that ruminated through his brain up here in Temagami. There were skeletons in his closet that rattled more here because in many ways it was the scene of the crime. It was where he had abandoned a group of ten teenagers to retrieve his baggie of weed. Black mark on the camp's reputation as the best canoeing camp in the world. But at the same time the air had begun to act as a tonic for the troubled Choppy Waters. He was beginning to regain the looseness in his shoulders and the devil-may-care recklessness that gave him charm, which could be heard in the cadence of his laughter. Getting away from the trucks and the trains and the city sounds that suffocated the vitality of the soul, he was returning to his best self.

Redbeard could see it in his paddle stroke. It was slower, more thorough with a quicker end.

The Cross Lake tour took them up the east arm of the lake. Choppy and Redbeard had decided to do the small portage at the northernmost point in the lake. The old portage the Anishinabek used to take that was marked on their old Ojibwa map of camps and portages, was grown over with vegetation. The grown-over portage must have become worse after the dam went up. The whole bay was grassy and still, with many water spiders. Due to the dam, a marsh had sprung up in front of the old Nast wan portage that bore no marks whatsoever to indicate any portages have been done in a long time. It wasn't even worth getting closer in the grass that stuck out of the water, so they had a pipe and decided to return the way they had come but to cut across a small channel marked on Choppy's topographical map. The risk worked and the three of them skimmed over the thousands of buried trees in the water and snuck over to the main body of Cross Lake.

The shores were walls of treed rock so big that it felt as they weren't moving at all when in fact they were traveling at a good clip. And to spice it up the ride back, and at Redbeard's urging, they decided to "pull a Jerry Potts" and "trim the

moustache” of some of the dead trees still standing in the water along the shoreline. (Choppy Waters had told him of Jerry Potts when they were still onshore outfitting for their trip. He was Canada’s mountain man who had made a name for himself in the Wild West. The story goes that when he used to drink with his fellow barflies they would play ‘trim the moustache’ by shooting their guns so close at each other’s moustache to try to trim it).

The first tree they missed by two inches, which only made Choppy Waters more determined. The next set of trees to paddle between and *trim the moustache* took them over some hidden deadheads and they whacked the canoe roughly against the trunk.

“I thought you were going to steer!” Choppy yelled to him. He didn’t bother replying because he was laughing. With all the heavy luggage back at the camp, Redbeard felt fearless in the canoe. He even had more space in the bow because Schopenhauer was in the middle of the canoe. The third time they slalomed through the dead trees along the shore they hit hard again but both of them could be heard laughing under their breath.

Only the dog showed concern.

Moustache trimming was difficult. And the whole idea of it epitomized Redbeard. He was one of those men born for mischief and adventure - still a little boy with a white-streaked red beard and family yet with the same eye to maximize utility. According to Choppy, if the old Indian portage was grown over then he was sure to make it a little different on the way back. Choppy, who loved a challenge, especially involving a canoe, was simply unable to do anything but accept the challenge. Going through the trees still standing in the water was like threading a needle, enough to satisfy Redbeard, but trimming the moustache was the added flourish.

This flourish when perpetrated left more than a few scratches on the vessel.

They were a sight to the fishermen casting from their boats, and the families on the houseboats, when they paddled by, both wearing straw cowboy hats and shorts. Schopenhauer stood with her paws on the gunnels sniffing and trying to focus on the people in the other vessel with her good eye. Choppy Waters and Redbeard looked right out of the 19th century with their rhythmic paddling that never waned in its united motion. Both in their mid-forties and sporting beards, they could be mistaken for two outlaws trying to keep off the grid. It was Redbeard who, at times, wanted to tell these onlookers that Choppy Waters had Grey Owl pedigree, and that he was one of the very few who had been given a real Grey Owl education - that *he never let school get in the way of his education*. He was one of those fortunate few who knew what he wanted to do in life when he was young. He made the decision at

age 12 to become a master outdoorsman. After that his passion grew. He nurtured his time spent hearing the old ways of Keewatin traditions and his grandfather's stories. It was what fueled his sense of self and what gave him a sense of true worth. And it was the place where he felt the safest. He had that calling to the world that so few men get. And for him not to give it manifestation was to suffocate his person.

Like Grey Owl he was drawn to the wild.

However, Redbeard paddled past the fishermen without a word. Only the two of them knew this; only the two of them knew Choppy Waters had traveled over 10,000 miles on these waters. It was Choppy Waters who was the blue chip camper who had an answer to anything that came up. As far as Redbeard saw it, it was only the weather that could affect his designs.

To watch Choppy Waters paddle was a strange experience for Redbeard because it hardly looked like he was moving. Body still, chin up navigating at the stern, sunglasses and hat, wearing the thinnest, barest t-shirt Redbeard had ever seen anyone wear.

After they had trimmed a half-dozen moustaches, Choppy Waters spoke: "You, Redbeard, are like *Storm Fool - Pau-Puk-Keewis* - the mischief maker. Skilled was he in all games of skill and hazard."

"Who's this?"

"Storm Fool, you know: the merry mischief maker who dances at the wedding of Hiawatha and his bride Laughing Waters."

"Oh."

"What I'm saying is that you have the spirit of the mischief maker: He who is skilled in sports and pastimes, and in merry dance of snowshoes, and in the play of quoits and ball play. You even have the prankster line of silver hair." Earnest in his declaration. Profound in its truth as to who he was. A gift from him to Redbeard.

This man born of Grey Owl was not as young as he used to be. Sore knees and a sore shoulder inhibited his vigor in the mornings after a day or two of long paddling - old injuries caused by the overzealous requirements of guides encouraged to get the best out of their high-paying campers. Perhaps the arthritic knees carried some bitterness since they may have come from long forced hours on the water kneeling on the cedar in the old style for the benefits of these rich kids who came from the big cities in America who wanted the authentic canoeing experience. And later for the rich bankers who thirsted for real immersion in nature on the water. For Choppy who knew of the traditions, knees were never to be above the gunnels. Poor form was not tolerated. Instilled deeply with these practices, Choppy still heard the

voices of his early guides telling him to keep his knees down and telling him to hurry while packing up camp.

These were the reasons for his slow morning sleep-ins after a long previous day. He would rather sleep through the whipping and emerge after lunch when the decision was his to make whether to stay or move on.

And these were things that didn't affect Redbeard because he was a master at time utility. He could always find something to do.

Cross Lake was like nothing he had ever seen before. The dam had flooded the old waterway and left a graveyard of trees hidden beneath the surface of the water only seen by boaters through the clear waters. Even after 50 years the foliage in some parts was still visible under water.

So it was only on Cross Lake that one could *trim the moustache* of the trees.

They paddled beside two loons on the way back to camp. Side by side for 10 minutes, these large loons both ruffled their feather and then spread their wings in an effort to communicate. It was only when Choppy tried a loon call that they both dove under and emerged a half minute later 30 yards away. Heading back to camp in his excited state, Choppy was fearless with trimming the moustache off the water trees.

They took the rest of the day off because of the rain and cold weather. The tent proved to be dependable in the wet weather, and Schopenhauer proved compatible with tent. She considered it her safe zone. There was no campfire that evening and they each ate alone in their tents, but he was happy in his tent with Schopenhauer, hunkered down and mulling over what he had come to learn. Never had Redbeard realized why wind always played a part in nature storytelling, but now he saw from experience that wind was the most powerful force in the world while on the water. If the wind came from the north, cold weather was coming, but wind from the northwest meant good, clear skies. South winds could be the strongest during the summer months, whereas wind from the east always meant bad weather. Wind had the power to mold the water into chops and troughs, carving it up into different forms that either enhanced ones canoeing effort or deterred it. Wind could penetrate your clothing and give you a chill, or it could bite you with a well-armed blow down the neck. It could take a day from you and make that day hard, stranding any boater or water spider touched by its hand. It was a tug-of-war of winds, and in this ongoing drama lay the reading of the weather - the key to executing a good canoe travel plan.

Only from respecting the wind could insight be gained.

With a big pull planned for tomorrow taking them far north to High Rock, he hoped for favorable weather conditions. Redbeard could roll with any punches that came his way because he was in love with his girlfriend Charlotte - his long-sought-

and-finally-found woman. Redbeard thought of his most recent romantic rendezvous with Charlotte at French River where they had gone canoeing. Redbeard had brought some cold beer in his knapsack and a bottle of red wine, which they drank slowly under the sun and skinny-dipped in a secluded bay. Charlotte was still flushed from the black bear they saw right before they fell asleep side-by-side, naked on the rock drying in the sun after their swim. Schopenhauer was also found asleep when they awoke, choosing rest over standing guard. As they left their special spot nestled in the forest, a train rumbled by for a full ten minutes - one of the longest trains Redbeard had ever seen. They laughed and paddled slowly along the calm river into the sunset, chatting with cottagers and following a beaver until it dipped underwater and disappeared. They were still on the water until after nightfall, giggling when they landed on the dock and laughing when Redbeard was up ended from the canoe and fell into the water. She had lifted the canoe after she had climbed out, sending Redbeard head over heels. But she made sure he was warm when they returned to the hotel room. Redbeard had Charlotte to look forward to after the trip, but for Choppy Waters, he had a lonely winter ahead of him.

Seven

The Canoeing Monk

Day Seven

He didn't mention it to Choppy but frost had formed on Redbeard's tent last night. And it was only September. His sleeping bag was wet so it was Schopenhauer who kept him warm putting her body against his under the wool blanket that had managed to stay mostly dry. It was his wool vest and wool sweater and Gortex jacket and long wool scarf that proved most effective in surviving the night without incident. It was the cold that descended all around him in the darkness that pinned him down all night. Even in the old darkness he could see his breath. Redbeard's mistake was that he didn't wear his gloves and proper winter hat rather than his loose fitting Scottish Tam. The sudden drop in temperature was severe: only two days ago he was swimming and sun tanning. It had dropped 15 degrees Celsius in two days. Last night was a damp cold that had penetrated his bones.

There were no birds singing this morning. Only the north wind rustled the tall boughs paying homage to the dormant sun.

Around the campfire for morning tea, drying out after the rain, Choppy Waters spoke just as Redbeard was pondering the words: '*drier waters.*' The summer was now truly over and the cold axe of winter's punch rumbled-in, itchy and restless, but moved during darkness like a thief in the night. She knows she has the trump card now that the great flame of summer was waning. The tide was moving out to the onslaught of Old Man Winter.

"I remember my grandfather speaking of a secret place he and Grey Owl went during those drinking days before the war," said Choppy, sitting cross-legged very close to the fire. "They used to canoe there, trap and fish and drink and throw their knives at trees. And they used to have an ongoing competition as to who could throw their axe the farthest and hit a tree at the campsite."

"A couple of characters," he said. "So where is this place?"

"It could be anywhere northwest of Bear Island. We could head northwest of Bear Island and try to figure it out as we move north."

"We don't even know what we're looking for?"

"We've explored the south so let's go north and try to pick up Grey Owl's tracks."

"Looking for a cabin or an old birch bark canoe or something? How do we know?"

"Come to think of it, there's someone who may know. We'll go see him. He lives a few lakes over." Choppy shrugged his shoulders but his eyes were wide with possibilities. "I had heard about this but never thought to ask about it. Strange." Choppy stared at the fire in thought after a cold and wet night. He seemed impervious to the bite of the damp chill. Modern-day *le voyageur*.

It was a strange thing to go for an entire month canoeing and camping out in the bush with an old friend you haven't seen since university 20 years ago. Each was thrust into each other's lives. And each became privy to each other's idiosyncrasies and to each other's highs and lows, likes and dislikes, and mood swings. A fundamental normalcy of humanity soon emerged so that convention was born of instinct and manners by acceptability. Tolerances had to be raised in order to promote and protect harmony. Choppy Waters was a canoeing monk whose cathedral was the water. He was the water bishop who took his regular kit and ritual very seriously.

He was a man who asked forgiveness for disturbing the animals on his journeys.

“The water spiders had done both back legs of the Lake Temagami spider,” he said. “It’ll be a good stick from Cross Lake to High Rock right in the middle of the figure eight.”

“Time to go north. We’ll be able to see Temagami Island from there.”

After the heavy rainfall and the freezing temperatures at Cross Lake, they slowly and gently packed up their gear and loaded the canoe to return to Lake Temagami. Now with the goal of finding Grey Owl’s lost cabin as their goal, Choppy Waters and Redbeard paddled south in the north wind towards the narrows where the current was swift. The first pipe was easy because of the tailwind and for the first time in a few days it afforded them the chance to really warm up. They reached the neatly perched, cozy camp at the narrows. Redbeard was surprised to see the current slower than it was when they had paddled by days before. The north wind had changed the water movement so much that he hadn’t expected the wind and waves to be so strong.

All up Outlet Bay they battled the north wind and the waves, taking pipes under the protection of the few small islands along the shore. They stopped for a pipe halfway up Outlet Bay when Choppy steered the canoe to the right of a green buoy instead of the left. Redbeard was mid-sentence when they hit a submerged rock. The front end went up and then tilted. The first thing it did was knock Schopenhauer off the gunnels back in the boat towards Redbeard, but when it listed to port it was Choppy who seemed to lose his cool. Redbeard, a naturally detached observer, steadied the canoe with his paddle, lifted himself off his seat and pulled the vessel off the rock. He didn’t even hear what Choppy was saying because he wasn’t saying anything, only making noises with meaningless words.

Now off the hidden rock and floating freely again, Redbeard kept paddling cool as a cucumber.

“Nice one! I can’t take myself too seriously when I go to the left of a green buoy,” said Choppy. “I should really have my head examined.” Wanting to agree with him, Redbeard instead grunted and looked at his dog and smiled.

“Gooood doggie Schopenhauer.”

They had a pipe to fortify their spirits for the next stretch of water into the headwind. The waves were regular but not too big and they were able to cling to the shoreline that cut resistance of the wind by at least half. Slowly and methodically they paddled up the east shore of the South Arm up to the portage point into Portage Bay. It was here, while checking out the neighboring campsite, that Redbeard spotted a turtle.

“That looks like a turtle.” He pointed down to the shallow rocky bottom where there was a three-foot turtle. It appeared to be sunning itself under three feet of crystal clear water. “It *is* a turtle!” He corrected himself. “It’s massive!”

They approached slowly until it casually swam under their canoe.

The portage was barely 30 meters. Redbeard could see the water of the other shoreline in Portage Bay from the point of entry. After having a sandwich and a smoke, Choppy and Redbeard hit the hardest part of the journey so far. The north wind chopped up the water, and with no islands, they faced very unfriendly waters. The wind blasted his paddle as if it were balsa wood. Redbeard thought it wise to find a spot and have a break until the wind died down or to even pitch camp, but there were no campsites in the open bay because the rock-face shores were too steep. The water was deep and exposed. Caught in a cauldron of whitecaps, Choppy’s stroke shortened and he focused on steering the vessel so it was Redbeard who motored them upwind against the formidable north wind. Choppy, perhaps because of his old injuries or guilt at not paddling as hard and as powerful as the physically superior Redbeard, started to encourage Redbeard to paddle through the big waves.

“Power paddle through those big waves. Try to paddle hard when the big waves come.”

What was strange was he had been power paddling through the heavy waves since the first day of the journey.

“You’re doing well up there,” he said, “but try to really paddle through those big waves.” It was too rough on the water but Redbeard was just about to stop paddling and remind Choppy that he had been paddling since camp as a kid and that he lived on an island with a canoe and not in the city, but he bit his lip. It was if Choppy was becoming someone else right in front of his eyes.

“Really paddle hard through the wave.” Saliva spewed out of Choppy’s mouth as his half strokes steered the vessel. Redbeard was power paddling through the big waves in the bow but he didn’t put on a big dramatic display of grunting to make Choppy happy. Redbeard slowed his pace and looked back to watch Choppy eat out of his cup with one hand holding the cup to his mouth and the other dragging the paddle through the water.

Redbeard wasn’t anyone’s monkey.

He didn’t dance for anyone.

Redbeard merely took note of the Camp Keewatin scars of discipline coming out on dangerous waters going into the wind. Choppy had become a monster for a moment: the kind of tyrant Redbeard had dedicated his life to fight against. Choppy’s voice took on a different tone while his own paddling was still dedicated to steering

the vessel. Some unpleasant, repressed memory had hurled its way back into Choppy's mind and in the intensity of the ride came to life. Those early scars never go away.

In his favorite milieu, Choppy was losing his cool.

Redbeard ground on and kept them going forward, using his powerful arms and long paddling form to pull them through the worst of it. Many times waves crashed over the gunnels, Schopenhauer cowering at his feet as the waves soaked her and the cold wind chilled her. An hour of relentless winds, they pressed on without a word from Redbeard. He was all about content, not form. He was all about white muscle, not red muscle. He was all about action, and wanted his actions to speak for him. He knew what he did. He knew what he accomplished. And he was aware from the burning in his shoulders that he may have saved their lives.

Only after they had a pipe at Pelican Point did the wind die down and the paddling became easier. Why Choppy Waters, self-declared guide of the trip, didn't choose to have lunch at the campsite near the portage trail is uncertain other than it fed his manic obsession with danger on the water. Redbeard could accept a spill if it happened but it would be hard to accept if it could have been prevented. If they had tipped in the winds Schopenhauer would not have made it to the shore, and that bothered him deeply. He was coming to know of Choppy Waters' inclination for danger but was not prepared to let it become his folly as well, which was clearly a challenge on a canoe with two paddlers. The strange personality change when the wind was in full force, yelling like a mad guide determined to make his paddlers work for him, made for a spicy concoction when bad weather and Choppy Waters shook hands.

It spoke of past ghosts and perhaps past injustices that had never been righted, and this made Choppy Waters a danger to both himself and others today.

In a strange way, it was almost as if he were determined to kill Schopenhauer by his recklessness.

Now in calm winds and close to shore Redbeard was again able to enjoy the beauty all around him. The loud loon singing and the open waters here contrasted against the somewhat muted Cross Lake from where they had just come. In Cross Lake there was hardly any fowl around. It was as if the animals could sense the 50 years of death underneath the shores. It had been a casualty of environmental ignorance caused by the dam. But here, out on the open waters nearing Portage Bay at the camp near High Rock, it was alive with golden eagles and osprey flying overhead and turtles and beavers swimming under the canoe. Cross Lake seemed like the poor cousin over the ridge that had been given the short end of the straw.

Perhaps it was a stink of death; not the death of animals but the death of trees with thousands still frozen in their screams, preserved underwater. It was not a sexy coastline on Cross Lake; it was an unnatural shoreline, one that perhaps had bothered them both.

“I’m cross with Cross Lake,” said Redbeard at the fire pit at High Rock.

“And I’m cross with myself as guide,” replied Choppy. “I just didn’t know what it was like.”

It was quite an admission by a man who had tripped here for nearly 30 years.

When they had landed at the High Rock campsite, Redbeard was ecstatic at its beauty. Knowing Choppy was in a disagreeable mood, Redbeard said he liked the site, to which Choppy replied: “I don’t.” There they were standing on the world’s oldest rock overlooking the heart of Lake Temagami at the beginning of the sunset after canoeing five heavy pipes. Redbeard remained quiet as he hung his sleeping bag and wool blanket on the branches of white pine to dry and they busied themselves with pitching camp. Schopenhauer simply lay there looking at him wondering why he was doing all this silliness on dangerous waters.

Soon, under the fragrant canopy of pines, the Spirit of the Wind lay dormant, only serving to keep the sounds of animals within its rooftop. Not a sound could be heard except the hum of insects, like an invisible cloak emanating sounds of flying wings of the dragonflies, mosquitoes and other species from the insect family.

Around the campfire Choppy Waters chose to dip into a wee dram of Scotch. After a few hits, he loosened up.

“Last summer a friend lent me his canoe from the Toronto Sailing Club,” said Choppy. “He said that if I could break in and steal it during the night that I could use it as long as I want, so I went before dawn and was able to sneak the 17-footer out of the boathouse unseen, and then proceeded to canoe along the waterfront and camp at the mouth of the Don River. Right downtown at Queen’s Quay area is tough to find spots, but there are some down there.” He smiled. “There are some little patches of trees here and there, where I lit a fire and slept under my wool blanket. There are some good little spots.”

“A month? Camping in downtown Toronto?”

“Wherever water could take me. I outfitted for a month with a few bags and my tools. Finding firewood was difficult, but I was able to find some.”

“Why a month?”

“Left work, spent my last bit of money on food and supplies and took off. I had just divorced Gina so I needed to get away. I sort of lost it. I would have gone on longer but I couldn’t.”

“Why?”

“Well, during that month I would tie my canoe somewhere along the waterfront and walk to the *Sally Ann* and other thrift stores picking. I went everywhere and eventually had over 400 pounds of vintage clothing. Then I went to the *Sally Ann* at Jarvis and Bloor, stored my canoe and booty under the bridge there at Rosedale, but when I came back the canoe and loot was gone.”

“Someone stole your canoe? And 400 pounds of clothes?”

“And all my kit. Everything, I was left with only the shit on my back, the shoes on my feet and my go-to bag.”

“Who do you think snagged it all?”

“Kids. Who knows? But I do that sometimes: lose everything. But it’s all right because I begin picking again and find new stuff.”

“But the cost.”

“Yeah, maybe \$20,000 worth of clothes.” Redbeard knew that that was how much he put down as a down payment on his house.

“After that I would hang out at those film studios down along the water and the Don and ask for food from the caterers who would be feeding the film crews. Sometimes they were dicks and maybe give me a muffin, or maybe I’d get a whole lunch.” The image of that bothered Redbeard. Here was a university graduate and head prefect of one of Canada’s most prestigious boarding schools relying on handouts wearing his tattered clothes. There was something more to the story he still didn’t know about.

“You know, I always saw you as the guy who would fly to Africa and explore some new corner of the continent, get involved in some NGO and write a book for the benefit of the world,” said Redbeard, as a reflex to what he just heard. “But I suppose canoeing around downtown Toronto on a stolen canoe, collecting clothes and camping under bridges is sort of a parallel to that - in some way.” He regretted his words, and blamed them on the whiskey he was drinking. Choppy drew sullen so he retired with Schopenhauer for the night.

Eight

The Full Pull

Second Week

Redbeard must have got through to Choppy because when he awoke in the morning Choppy was leaning against a tree still in front of the fire with a stern, pensive look on his face. Choppy had kept the fire going all night so now they were in need of both firewood and birch bark. The bottle of Scotch lay askew near his feet. Choppy suggested they canoe to Loon Lodge where they could use the telephone to call his friend Bobby Too Good to see if they could see him on Bear Island. It was agreed so once packed up they took a two-pipe paddle to the lodge and drank a four-cup bottomless coffee and made the call.

High Rock was at the junction of Portage Bay and Lake Temagami, so the snack bar at Loon Lodge was a little north in the narrows near the marina.

"I left a message saying we'd be by Bear Island tomorrow," said Choppy. "That means we should check out High Rock lookout point on the way back. They were both in high spirits on the patio under the cloudless sky after so many coffees.

Some boaters arrived with a five-pound bass and had a five-year old hold it up as a trophy.

"Good job!" yelled Redbeard. Schopenhauer wagged her tail and appeared to smile at the boy.

"Thank you," came the loud reply from the child. The grandparents had a hardy laugh.

They left for High Rock where they met a group of seven paddlers. They all went up to the point and watched the sunset. Of the seven they met, there was a couple with their three daughters, and their two husbands, with one daughter still single. They told them that they had lost a tent in the high winds so all seven were sleeping in one tent.

Awkward.

Fortunately it was their last day on a seven-day trip.

From the vantage point of High Rock, Redbeard could see for miles down the corridors of rock that was carved out of the forests that rose hundreds of feet up the steep bedrock. From the vantage point on High Rock they could see how the waterways slinked around what looked like dots of forests that brightly reflected the sun's last rays. On the far horizon Choppy pointed out Maple Mountain: one of the highest points in Ontario.

"Right there is the watershed - or great divide - with all the waters northwest flowing into James Bay, and all waters east and south flowing to the St. Lawrence River. The water going west falls into Georgian Bay." There was a shroud around it so close to the few low-flying clouds miles away.

Choppy pointed. "That there with the big hump on it - like a bear - is Bear Island."

"Yes, I can see the side profile of a bear - the bear body type, as it were."

"It's about 40 kilometers away," said Choppy. "Does it look far?"

"It looks...distant," he replied indifferently. He took a deep breath and patted his dog as he studied his northern vista. "Look at the Northwest Arm." He waved his hand in its direction.

"Steep shores," replied Choppy. "A few days and you'll see it." Redbeard was itchy to begin moving north.

Back at camp Choppy was asleep and Redbeard watched Schopenhauer follow a frog on the rock, paw it half to death, try to catch it in her jaws until finally she caught it and chewed it down. She then urgently started to eat some grass, likely to rid herself of the taste of frog, and then promptly barfed it all up. He later heard that frogs emit a terrible chemical when in the throes of death that causes regurgitation. Very sheepish after that, she curled up close to Redbeard in the tent and slept.

The next morning Redbeard drank tea as he sat on the bare rock at the channel. Light wind from the southwest worked to their advantage to cross the main body of water south of the narrows. He was stronger now and his paddling technique was polished, so he reveled in the beauty of his surroundings and let the feeling of goodness and the thrill of adventure overwhelm him as the tea took hold of him, giving him the wings and optimism to hit the day with a light step.

They had planned to go to Bear Island and meet some of the Natives Choppy Waters knew so he had expected Choppy to be perhaps a bit apprehensive, given his recent history with abandoning the kids while on a canoe trip. It had been big news here with the police and the helicopter and the bad press. Redbeard was now also aware that over time during their canoe trip a situation might arise when Choppy Waters' mental illness would become manifest.

And that day was today.

As they had agreed, they left for the southwest corner of Temagami Island but with Choppy at the helm, instead of aiming for the southwest corner he aimed about a kilometer south of the agreed-upon corner, way out in the deepest, roughest, darkest open water. Redbeard started to laugh because he sensed that this ever-present over-compensation aspect of his personality was emerging, but since it directly threatened his life and that of his loyal doggie, he finally had to speak up.

"Um, shouldn't we be aiming for the red buoy there?" he said, when yet another wave crashed over the gunnels.

“Yes, but the current is at an angle that makes it difficult to go right to it.” He knew it was nonsense. Redbeard could see that 80 percent of the power of the canoe was coming from his stroke. Choppy, not thinking Redbeard could see him paddling in the stern, was only putting in half strokes, preferring to play the rudder man and protect his bad shoulder. For Redbeard it was clear that if they hugged the shoreline after the main crossing, the choppiness of the water would be a quarter of what it was in the middle of the lake. But Choppy insisted on paddling into the most dangerous waters on the lake with a prevailing southwest wind.

“Why don’t we move towards the shore, use that island as a buffer against the wind using the wind to our advantage – surfing the waves going north?”

“The angle.”

“But as we go north we steer gradually west.” There was silence for a moment. Redbeard started to laugh as another wave crashed in. Schopenhauer was soaked and was shaking like a leaf from fear with her head in his lap. “It’s okay Schopenhauer. *It’s okay.*”

Another series of big waves threatened to capsize the vessel.

“Yes, let’s move closer to shore.” The long silence that descended between them was Choppy re-adjusting himself to being called out on his hyperbolic navigation. This unnecessary risk was, for Redbeard, who was an accomplished canoeist in his own right, simply an unnecessary danger. It was true that when canoe tripping *the journey* was the destination because there was no destination when out paddling around a lake. And he knew that it was the art of the journey that caused Choppy Waters to - at times - push the boundaries. He wanted spice - some verve - in his paddling, even if it opened the door to danger. But for Redbeard, if they capsized he could swim to shore and he didn’t care if they lost their gear, but Schopenhauer would die. She would not be able to swim the distance to the shore.

And he knew that Choppy Waters was aware of this.

And this was what frustrated him.

Why would he want to kill his dog?

After ten minutes of paddling north, they were in safe waters and Schopenhauer stopped shaking. Redbeard, exasperated but calm, started to laugh again. It seemed to him as if Choppy had not made a mistake, rather he did it purposely to watch Redbeard sweat it out. He had shouted: “dig in that paddle!” Well, he was not Choppy’s monkey. But in this ongoing conflict of practicality over danger, there was a real danger of something going awry. Choppy Waters was becoming more and more manic so Redbeard from now on would have to keep an eye on him.

They hugged the shoreline and found a lee behind a small island where they had a pipe, gathered some firewood and both studied the long island chain that lay before them. A kilometer to the west and there were white caps.

“That’s where you were gunning for!” said Redbeard. “Choppy Waters indeed!”

“Yes, you were right,” he conceded sheepishly. “We should have hugged the shore.”

They passed on with full kit towards Bear Island Indian Reserve, protected from the serious waves along the western side of the lake by the small islands that dotted the eastern shore. They skimmed atop the water under an arched footbridge that connected two islands. The cottages were rustic and well positioned from the perspective of the water. A few times they exchanged niceties with the few cottagers beginning to pack up for the season, the autumn chill now entrenched in the air. Pretty rock shores splashed with water as the current took them swiftly past Temagami Island. There was another cross that would take them into the harbor of Bear Island.

Choppy again tacked way out into the choppy waters at great risk to the vessel instead of staying the course, slowly steering west so that the canoe could surf the waves at a slight angle when they turned towards the shore. It was definitely a fun thing to do because surfing was fun. No different than if one was in a canoe. But instead of doing this safely, Choppy chose to paddle directly into the waves at a 45-degree angle for optimal thrill. However, for Redbeard it was a pointless and unnecessary risk. Why not surf and have fun?

Getting with the flow of the water should be the Oakum’s Razor of canoeing.

But Redbeard was powerless in the canoe. It was Choppy Waters who was in charge. He couldn’t steer in the bow.

So once again Redbeard power paddled ahead, literally lifting the canoe off a wave and crashing into the trough of the next. Schopenhauer’s was at his feet, her head on his lap, shaking again. The wind devils shook the water into an angered rush that shoved the face of his paddle backwards and into the water. The farther the three of them went into a strange open-water currents, the more Redbeard ruminated about Choppy having been the victim of old Keewatin ghosts that were rattling around in his memory bank and had come to life, irked when the winds were high. Perhaps Choppy had once been whipped by an overbearing and overzealous guide that had hurt him from the physical strain and had left scar tissue. And in the strict protocols and traditions of a century-old canoe camp, if the guide didn’t like him, there would likely be group ridicule and psychological abuse that may have gone

unhealed and left festering for years. This past stinging injustice may have berated his sense of peace, and could manifest itself precisely in these situations.

These thoughts kept Redbeard's mind off the pain in his hands and knees and his shaking dog.

"Shouldn't we be surfing the waves in? We could hit Bear Island from here."

"I want to go out more so we can go directly with the waves. Trust me, it's the safer way."

"Well it's pretty choppy, but if we merge to the west slightly we'll hit the harbor."

"Nah, just a little further." Redbeard quickly looked back at Choppy Waters and he had his paddle half below the surface of the water. He knew he saw his own sub-optimum effort, while he could see that every stroke of Redbeard's was the full pull. The imbalance was embarrassing. He didn't look back again but he himself slowed his own paddling down a notch. Redbeard had been sailing, windsurfing and canoeing all his life; he simply couldn't buy into this *unnecessary voluntary danger seeking*.

Another wave crashed over the gunnels. If Redbeard had stopped paddling they would have capsized, but he was able to turn and look at the red church on Bear Island that was now in view. And that was when Choppy turned the vessel directly for Bear Island. In a few moments the waves were behind them. Each wave slowly coughed up the canoe as it rolled under them, faster than the vessel. Even during this time of harvest, Choppy had failed in his steering. If they had taken the waves at a slight angle, the surfing canoe would have plastered huge smiles on both their faces. Instead they let the waves push them slowly into safety.

Slowly they approached Bear Island from the open water, passing in front of the main buildings and the old Catholic church to the docks and the store. With great relief Redbeard touched the wood of the dock, got out and firmly tied her up. The first thing he did was kneel down and hug Schopenhauer. She had to be very confused as to why her master kept putting her into life-threatening situations. He tried his best to calm her. Soon her shaking stopped and she was happy to be on land, eager to explore her new surroundings. Walking along the dock to the land he read a large No Dogs sign that hung from the boathouse wall.

Nine

Bear Island

Second Week

Redbeard, who hated wasting time, was waiting for Choppy Waters to make some last-minute choices to add to their pile of food, so he approached the woman who was carrying boxes of water bottles out of the backroom and into the back of a pick-up truck.

"Would you like a hand with this stuff?" he asked the woman. "I'm free labor." He smiled at her. She seemed suspicious. "If I were you I'd say 'yes.'" The woman looked at Redbeard making sure he still had his marbles. "I've been canoeing for two weeks now so my shoulders are strong. I'm sure I can carry some boxes for you without hurting myself."

"That's good to hear then," she replied with an ironic grin.

"Here." He pulled up a case of water and then put a second case on top of it and followed her to the pick-up truck.

"I'm Roxanne Oulet. I'm the chief." Redbeard was surprised. She was his age. And a woman.

"Ah, well very happy to meet you."

"I became chief last month. There were some legal problems with the election but we had a ruling." She told him how the first election was rigged so there was a second election, which the old chief declared illegal, so it went to court. There would be a final election, and out of the 190 voting residents on the island, 165 voted. Roxanne had 101 votes, and the old chief had 62 with two votes spoiled. It's currently under appeal but she was the declared winner on July 30th.

"It's terrible," she said. "They spent 200,000 dollars on legal fees using the band's money and we've spent 100,000 dollars from money we've raised." Her heavy black hair blew out of her face and her cheekbones bronzed in the sun. Her blond son ran towards Schopenhauer by the canoe on the dock where Schopenhauer was leashed to a picnic table. Her mouth was strong and her body solid with muscle, able and coordinated. *Roxanne could carry a tumpline and look good doing it.* For a moment Redbeard thought she was thinking the same thing about him.

Choppy approached and inquired about Bobby Too Good.

"I think he's at his cabin up north," she replied. "If not, he'll be at the Changing-of-the-Seasons ceremony at Alex's on Obabika."

"How north is the cabin?"

"North north. I think his place is near *Aninaatig Wajiw*."

"Where?"

“Maple Mountain. *Aninaatig Wajiw.*” There may have been an awkward moment there for the chief of the Temagami First Nations. It was Redbeard who pulled out his map from nowhere and immediately pointed at Maple Mountain just west of Lady Evelyn Lake.

“Yes, I see.” Redbeard grinned: he had a thing for women who read maps well. “It’s near the portaging here.” Choppy Waters leaned in.

“Up the creek there?”

“I think so, if it leads to the portage on the way to the lookout tower. It may be hard to find though because it’s just a cabin on Temagami First Nation land, probably off the water. Might be hard for you to find.”

“And it won’t be like most of the cottages you see around here,” said Choppy.

“Exactly.” The smile that crossed her face electrified Redbeard. He flushed. The wind from the lake across from the spot where the Hudson’s Bay trading post used to be two centuries ago, could not take the burn from his cheeks.

“I wonder how many pipes that would be?” Choppy stroked his beard for a moment and studied the map. “Maybe 40 or 50 pipes. Hard to say. Depends on the weather. If we have a tailwind...the water current flows to the north.”

“Pipes?” Roxanne started to laugh.

Choppy looked at Redbeard.

“Yeah, a pipe. Every hour or so, or after a hard pull, you take a break to have a smoke, just like the canoers from centuries ago. They used to measure distance roughly by the pipe.” Her laughter caused them both to laugh.

“By the pipe. That’s great. Stop and have a pipe of tobacco. Makes sense, in an Anishinabek way.”

“Yeah, I hear you. I must be part Native.”

She studied him for a moment. “You have the cheekbones but they are hard to see through all that facial hair!”

It was only a matter of time before the subject of Grey Owl came up.

“Yes, he was here. He married a girl from Bear Island. My grandmother knew her.” She looked out at the water, squinting into the western sky. “Grey Owl, you know, is not really liked by the Anishinabek, maybe like he is not liked by the whites.”

“Hmmm... Perhaps.”

“But he was here, even after the war.”

“The Guppies?” Choppy Waters had previously mentioned that a family named Guppy adopted Grey Owl here on Bear Island after his time as a sniper in Europe.

"No, they have gone too, Ancestors of Big Jerome Guppy are over on Obabika Lake area." Choppy nodded. "So where are you staying tonight?"

"Over there." Choppy pointed at an island across the water.

"How far is that?"

"About a tenth of a pipe," replied Redbeard, "wouldn't you say Choppy?"

He nodded. "About that."

"So you're both big canoers?" Redbeard looked at Choppy.

"Choppy went to Camp Keewatin."

"Oh." Roxanne was impressed but also guarded. "That's an old camp. Grey Owl was there, wasn't he?"

"Yes. His name is on the plaques that hang on the walls in the main hall."

"He canoed to Hudson's Bay."

"Really?" She faced him.

"Down the Albany River once to Fort Albany and another down the Seal River. No portages on that one. The banks of the river were full of seals for the last two weeks of the journey." Nodding, she turned to Redbeard.

"I started canoeing about the same time as Choppy here, learning it camp, and the family had a canoe growing up. I have one at my place on St Joseph's Island."

"Really?" It was Choppy who was surprised.

"I guess I never mentioned it."

"No, you didn't." He shook his head and Redbeard winked at Roxanne. It was now her cheeks that were flushed. The ends of her mouth were up higher showing some laugh lines.

"A 17-footer, just like ours - an *Old Town* - but it's green." She started to laugh again.

"Been paddling together long?"

"About two weeks."

"Ah, so then you've been playing guide to an accomplished canoer?" It was Redbeard's turn to laugh.

"Well, you should be comfortable tonight. It's a good campsite. I've been to many parties there. And when the fire is on we'd go out skinny dipping under the moonlight and then dry off beside the fire and fall asleep."

"Nice one. Sounds good. A lot to be said about a good fire."

"Yes, and speaking of fire, I need to get dinner on."

"Ah! Well, you can come over to the campsite. I already know we're going to have eggs tonight." She turned back as she began her exit to her truck.

“Is that an invitation?”

“Yes. We’ll do the food and you bring the wine.” She raised her arm in the air and let out a whoop that turned into more laughter. She waved and then the chief of Temagami First Nations was gone.

With the store now closed and Roxanne gone, Redbeard took Schopenhauer for a walk through the one-loop town of Bear Island IR. The homes were small bungalows, well winterized with short driveways. The old church was on the higher part of the road so they climbed the stairs and entered through the unlocked front door. Inside it was modestly decorated, the original wood painted white. Most of the ornaments were red or brass colored so it made for a soothing ambiance. It was still conducting services and had that lived-in feeling.

“I wonder if Grey Owl ever came here?” he said to Schopenhauer, who trotted up and down the aisles and even behind the lectern. The bell in the bell tower was still operational - worked by pulling a long rope from a hole in the ceiling.

Outside they passed more homes on the shore where he found the band office. There were some woman smoking at the front door. Redbeard was in a chatty mood and they loved Schopenhauer. Talking for a while and asking if there was anything pamphlet or book about the history of Bear Island, it was only a matter of time before he brought up Grey Owl.

“It was a shame about what he did to his first wife Angelle,” said the taller woman, who was smoking another cigarette. “She was so happy to be married and took his name, as did her brother who died in the war.” Redbeard could tell they didn’t like him on Bear Island - the women at the band office didn’t have anything good to say about him. They only talked about the ramifications of his philandering and wild life.

“He lived in the wild like a savage – *le savage: man of the wild.*” The women laughed and Redbeard could only take a long drag from his smoke. Sure, he thought, their ancestors were living on one of the many islands on shoreline on the giant spider. Grey Owl, with a handful of others, many of them Anishinabek trappers, lived alone in the bush, living the truly wild life. Wasn’t there something noble in that? Wasn’t there something pure in his intentions?

“There was something noble in the way he lived though, don’t you think?” For a moment none of the women wanted to speak.

“Noble? Only if you call leaving your wife and child behind and going off somewhere into the world without them.” The woman finished her cigarette and started her ATV.

"You can come by the band office again tomorrow if you want, but we don't have any local histories except those books I mentioned." She turned the key and the engine turned on. He thanked her and left the band office and then went inland to the baseball diamond and an outdoor covered hockey rink. The high rock around it gave it a safe, cozy feeling. The road circled back to the dock where he found Choppy talking to a Native by the canoe, so he stopped at the World War One and Two memorial and scanned the thirty or forty names from the two world wars. One name he saw under the fallen in World War Two was Benjamin Belaney, same spelling as Archie's surname.

"Curious," he said into the wind. "Very curious."

Down at the dock he brought it up.

"Could have been a son," said Choppy.

"If he was here in 1910, the son would have been 29 at the start of the war."

"Put it this way, it is very unlikely that it was his brother or a coincidence."

"He didn't have a brother," said Marty the Indian. A small man with a big stomach, he had the marked face of an outdoorsman.

"Exactly," said Choppy.

"Could have been Grey Owl's son."

"One of his illegitimate sons where the mother took Archie's name," said Marty.

"What are the chances of there being another Belaney from Bear Island?"

"And fighting in a world war."

"Wondered what happened to him?" Redbeard wondered.

"He died."

"What I mean is, what happened at his death. Was he killed in an act of bravery trying to save his dying comrade? Or was he killed in hand-to-hand combat behind enemy lines?"

"Who would know?"

"God. He would know."

"Yes, he would know." Choppy, Redbeard and Marty the Indian sat at the picnic table wondering who this Benjamin Belaney was until Redbeard remembered what the woman had just said about Grey Owl's first wife's brother who died in the war. He kept it to himself because Marty was now saying his piece about Grey Owl.

"One of the stories I heard from my grandmother about Grey Owl was when he was found hiding in the old barn beside the baseball field on his wedding day. They had to pry him out to get him to his own wedding. Poor Angelle, I wouldn't be surprised if she never forgave him." Redbeard, Marty and Choppy didn't mention it by

its proper name, but it was a large black mark against Grey Owl. It was said that he knocked up Angelle née Friday and thus had a shotgun wedding, but after he returned from the war he met and fell in love with another woman and ended up marrying her. The problem was he was still married to Angelle Belaney née Friday, who was still tucked away on Bear Island.

And the people here were not forgetful of such a disrespectful act.

Redbeard and Choppy left Bear Island for the campsite on the nearby island after Redbeard made a telephone call to Charlotte and his lawyer. He needed to call him again about the new tenants that were moving in to one of his rental units before mid-September. He told Choppy it was imperative so he promised to get Redbeard to a phone before the Temagami reunion at Alex's on September 17th. (It was the 20th anniversary of the Temagami demonstrations in Toronto that made national headlines across Canada that Choppy wanted to go to). Redbeard didn't mind going since it was taking place close by in Temagami. Besides, Alex was an Ojibwa chief and he wanted to meet a real Indian chief.

At their small island campsite the sound of hammering could be heard in the distance as cottagers were hammering in their storm windows for their winter departures, but many still lingered in the Indian summer that had befallen them. No one wanted to leave without having a bit more of summer.

For Redbeard he could sense that ancient spirits hovered over this epicenter of Temagami Lake. Bear Island was blessed with grandfather spirits that watched over their new families on these rocky shores. There was magic here. There was history under these waters and totem spirits everywhere. Even the animals must sense the difference. This space was alive with sustainability forever: freshwater and fish and wildlife and fowl. And it was this ease and confidence that emanated from the land into ones center. Nature lures one into slumber, easy and safe. And in this way time was different here. Slower, more in tune with nature. Easy like a poplar branch swaying in a breeze, soft like green moss on smooth rock, and warm under the sun and in the shade.

There was equilibrium here that influenced the health of mind.

Choppy Waters took another tipple from the bottle and poured it into his tea. Redbeard smoked and stared at the fire listening. That's when another version came out about his time at Camp Keewatin.

"When the police picked me up in the helicopter and took me to North Bay, I wouldn't tell them my name," said Choppy, as he sat hunched over in an exhausted stupor after taking a dip and putting on his clothes again, and had wrapped himself in his favorite Hudson's Bay wool blanket. "I wasn't charged with anything but I don't

think the police or Keewatin were very impressed with my behavior.” Choppy related the story of his departure from the camp after abandoning his group while out on a three-week canoe trip. When the group returned to the camp safely and his fellow guide Constantine told the story to the camp director, the police were called. The next day he was found. Belligerent with the police, Keewatin refused to deal with him so he was taken to North Bay and unceremoniously dumped. Any personal items he had at the camp were never returned. It was as though his 14 years at Camp Keewatin evaporated overnight. Abandoning your group for tobacco or drugs was not what Camp Keewatin was all about. In fact it was anathema to its principles and traditions.

“I have this, I don’t know what you call it, disorder. It’s why I’m a picker of vintage clothing. I get it from my mother. She’s a hoarder. She collects everything. So much stuff. I collect like her but I need to get rid of it all too. I have a locker at a steam house in downtown Toronto on Spadina - or bathhouse I guess you would call it. So I pick but am always trying to sell the stuff I pick. It’s hard when you find some things you want to keep yourself but I have trained myself not to be like my mother and hoard the stuff I find.” This explained why he gave Redbeard the waterproof map bag, the waterproof canoe bag, the wool blankets and the Hap Wilson Temagami book. And perhaps it explained his need to always spend his money, whether \$25 on two hamburgers or \$40 for a block of cheese only to watch it all go bad with mold.

Choppy told him he lived in the main room of a bathhouse with over 30 other men sleeping on cots. After his divorce from Gina he became a hard-core minimalist, almost an ascetic, who was prone to go out on long journeys around Toronto finding little treed areas where he could sleep for the night. That was the life he lived. Even more, since he didn’t have a car he was forced to carry all his pounds of vintage clothing in a large hockey bag that he tied up in a tumpline and trudged 20 miles from the clothing warehouse to the clothing stores on Queen Street via bus and subway and finally street car. He was that eccentric guy wearing tattered clothes people see on the subway carrying huge bags of clothes. He was, he hated to admit, a bum. But here in the leafy environs of Temagami he was an expert cane tripper with world-class skills yet still hindered by demons that could - on a given day - cause a life-threatening issue.

Ten

The Night Paddle

Second Week

Redbeard was sad to leave camp Grey Owl beside Bear Island. The soothing sounds of water that had come at him as he lay in his tent from three different angles merged into the current moving north. And it was this current that now pushed them along the great rock-faced corridor of the North Arm. Paddling the dark waters, Redbeard could sense the depth, mysterious and ancient, here since the beginning of time. But it was a day of friendly waters and their speed was assured by the warm southwest wind. They cruised under the hot sun down the middle of the massive lake until they veered west, reaching an island that hugged the west shoreline. The Precambrian rock face on the east rose 400 feet with relentless pines growing from the thin soil on top of the rock. The canoe-surfing was glorious up the North Arm to Keewatin.

Choppy Waters was finally able to witness how much Redbeard and Schopenhauer enjoyed the canoe-surfing atop the rolling waves on their way to Montreal River. The vessel moved swiftly but because the shoreline rock was so steep, it felt they moved like snails down a huge gorge towards the center of the earth.

"It's like the belly of the beast in here," said Redbeard. Loons were all over in groups fishing and diving deep into these waters, hunting in packs like ravaging Huns. Despite their speed, he felt his paddle had no pull as he was paddling through molasses.

It was an hour before they stopped for their first pipe. Protected in a small bay, Choppy collected some beaver-chewed firewood and Schopenhauer stretched her legs. Redbeard brought his knees up and stretched his lower back but remained in the canoe. The current took them briskly down the rock corridor when they crossed some big water at Camp Wabun, the offshoot camp from Camp Keewatin. Some guides broke away from Keewatin back in the nineteenth century and started their own camp five miles downriver from Keewatin.

"Impressive," was what Redbeard said, knowing words could only fail to describe how the camp was laid out, symmetrical and charming and functional and safe from the winds. From a protected beach stretched a long dock with a tower at the end of it and a flag. The body of the camp lay partially hidden from their view along the western side of the water. They passed Stinking Island, where the Temagami fought against the Iroquois in the 1650s during the time of the great agitation of the Five Nation Iroquois. They took another pipe on an island that was

thin enough to have a view of both sides only a few feet of rock above the surface. The corridor narrowed after Seal Point. This was when Choppy Waters saw Granny Island and Camp Keewatin. He became enlivened at the impending visit to the camp after nearly a decade of absence.

Neither of them knew who would be at the dock to greet them.

Camp Keewatin, on Devil's Island, is like an oasis on an island of trees, hidden by the natural vegetation and old trees that protected the buildings from the prevailing winds. Choppy and Redbeard approached the dock that had thick wood slabs coming out of the water at 45-degrees, an effective buffer against the winter storms. It was built like a fortress in the water repelling attacks from the wind devils. They took the canoe right up to the rocky beach for a smooth stop. For Choppy, it was a step back in time to when he first came here in 1979 when he was 11 years old.

In the main lodge, over the huge stone fireplace that ran the height of the wall, was the large head of a moose flanked on either side with a huge Union Jack on the east side and a huge Star Spangled Banner on the west side. There were wooden plaques lining the weathered walls that listed the names of the campers and guides of each summer class. In the middle of the lodge were canoes stored for the winter in neat rows, covering all available floor space except for the stage and piano. More flags and banners hung from the old wooden balcony that stored dozens of stored wanegans and other equipment. There were school crests adorning the walls, with one that said Lancaster School, 1853.

The first thing Redbeard did was try to find Grey Owl's name listed as a guide some time before the Great War. Choppy found his name listed as a guide on the Camp of 1910 plaque, where it read Archie Belaney. Also, next to it, Grey Owl appears again as a guide by the name of A. Belaney in 1911.

"Well, there's your empirical data," said Redbeard. "Archie Belaney, 1910, 1911. There." History from books coming alive.

"A lot of history in here." Redbeard surveyed the century-old meeting hall. "If these walls could speak."

"They'd speak of times of youthful vigor before the hand of time marred their hope - once vital and urgent but later neglected and cast aside." He glanced at Choppy but he moved on to the other corner. "What's that?" He pointed to a long list of white names printed on blackened wood.

"That's the Keewatin Honor Roll. My name should be up there." Redbeard wasn't sure if Choppy was being serious so he stickhandled his way through the 50 green canoes to get to the list of names on the far wall.

“I should be about the third piece of board up from the bottom.” Redbeard scanned the names and found his name listed as ‘Charlie Boyle.’

“Nice one Charlie. Honor roll. Hanging on the same wall as Grey Owl. Showing some solid beefcake, no?”

Outside they walked around.

“There’s no one around.”

“Maybe it’s only the caretaker here,” said Choppy, walking towards the caretaker’s residence. Redbeard couldn’t help himself: he went exploring. He found the cabins for the campers, each one with its name carved into the face of an old paddle without its arm. Each were named after a water route: Mattawa, Abitibi, Gowganda, Metachewan, Moosenee and Algonquin. Each cabin had four bunk beds and four canoes stored in each one for winter. He found the old post office and director’s office, just like they were when Grey Owl was here.

Even the director’s chair was the original antique.

He found Choppy who took him to the dining hall that had another massive moose head above its doors. Under the moose head was a long stock of driftwood with an engraving carved into it. It read: *Ruler thou shall be henceforward of the Northwest Wind Keewatin.*

Inside the walls were covered with pieces of arts and crafts from countless places around Canada with names of the canoers who brought back the booty to the camp.

Choppy pointed at hide stretched by strings to a large piece of wood.

“We brought that back from Hudson’s Bay in ‘89. I think it was me who brought it.” On the hide was an image of polar bears and moose. All sorts of old memorabilia adorned the walls and two old cedar canoes sat on the rafter above the dining tables and benches.

Beside the dining hall there was a large wooden building that had a sign saying “Outfitting” in green. It was the largest building in the camp. Beside it was the original stone wood stove.

“I have to show you something.” Behind the stone fire pit Choppy led him and Schopenhauer along a trail to a baseball field that had a simple wooden frame as a diamond.

“There are mostly Americans that come here, and so over the years a tradition developed between the Keewatin canoers and the various Anishinabek tribes along the river system in northern Ontario. When we reach an Indian village they almost always challenge us to a game of baseball. It’s never lacrosse or soccer, because the Americans have always preferred to play baseball. Organize a game of

soccer and hardly anyone will show up. Organize a baseball game and it's a different story."

They climbed for a minute along the trail and came to a level of grass and rock.

"This is the plateau. This is where we come to mellow out and have fires at night." Surrounded by trees, it felt like an ancient Indian meeting place or a Celtic holy place with its five or six stone campfires interspersed around the edges of the clearing.

"Neat vibe here."

"Highest point of Devil's Island." Choppy found good dried-out cedar by one of the fire pits and picked some up. Redbeard didn't take the rest because he knew they already had more than enough firewood and didn't feel right about taking anything from a Camp Keewatin - a shrine to everything holy about the canoer's life - a life that lay at the heart of exploration of Canada.

They left Keewatin without seeing a soul, and paddled around Devil's Island to the east side and then nipped around towards Kokoko Bay where they found a rock campsite facing west. It didn't take them long to pitch the tents and get the fire going. The two water spiders were now shooting for Maple Mountain to find Bobby Too Good at his cabin near the mouth of the portage, down the creek from Lady Evelyn Lake, way to the north – perhaps 30 pipes away.

With such a long journey before them, they were slow to arise the next morning.

Stiff knees and a sore shoulder made Choppy Waters sleep under the stars under his blankets instead of pitching his tent. He only had enough energy to eat some raisins and make the fire before lying down, so Redbeard made dinner in the dark and served him an undercooked tuna melt when he was under his blankets against a tree. Choppy always insisted the bug didn't bother him. He had to take him at his word.

After dinner all three of them fell immediately to sleep.

Redbeard and Schopenhauer were the ones who slept late the next morning. Choppy was up earlier, eager for a change of routine. Drinking tea around the fire, they couldn't stand looking at such placid water without any ripples. It was as calm as they had seen it and a hot and cloudless day. Redbeard was a tad guilty at his long sleep so to make amends he suggested a night paddle.

"Good idea. With the full moon it's almost a no-brainer." Redbeard had never done a night paddle but it had been something he had wanted to for many years.

"It would be my first night paddle."

“Let’s go to Devil’s Lookout to see our path and then leave after the sun sets.”

They both spent the next hour studying their maps. Most of the food was still unpacked from the night before so packing up the campsite didn’t take long. Most of the gear packed, they left for a ten-minute paddle south to Devil’s Point where they took the steep trail up the rock from the campsite across the water. The trail was hazardous from the beginning and remained that way until the summit, but tree roofs and well-positioned rocks made for an easier ascent near the top. Up on Devil’s Lookout Redbeard and Choppy Waters saw the river road laid out in front of them: Mother Nature’s natural road system.

“Once a robust current before the dam,” said Choppy. Now a lazy arm in this fresh water repository. The sky was already darkening but there was no wind. Even the warm temperatures held.

Back down the trail the three of them returned to the canoe and left for the cooler waters of the north. Around Ferguson Bay to the Northwest Arm, they paddled silently on the glass water, only their oars making any sound. They fell immediately in tune and picked-up momentum that, due to their weight, was easy to maintain. The trees on the shoreline slid by quickly in the moonlight. The hunting moon rose in the east and climbed over the stern, shining its light on the contours of the waters and shoreline. The stars were shining but the full moon stole their light. Not one wind devil made its presence on the water; instead the still water was like a dipping pond for the paddler. It was ideal night-paddling conditions. Redbeard, who couldn’t find his eyeglasses, took the bow without any prescription eyewear.

Schopenhauer kept leaning over the gunnels sniffing the water.

With no boats and no lights, it was like a trip back in time into the ancient quiet, only interrupted occasionally by a beaver tail splashing against the water surface. The trees were dark and the shoreline forest like a coniferous wall scented with pine and spruce. The water was calm and black and true and kept its peace, allowing the water spiders the opportunity to skim lightly atop its lazy top, hearing the sound of the water splitting against the point of the bow. That sound of white water trickled up Redbeard’s legs and caused him to make more of an effort to make his paddling virtually silent. Hearing the water against the bow became his focus for long periods of time, tilting his head slightly towards his left paddling side and listening to the trickle. He doubted Choppy could hear it as clearly as he could. And the sound lulled Schopenhauer to sleep, curling up at his feet safe and dry.

She was as relaxed as if on land. Total trust of her master.

Choppy suggested the first pipe after an hour. They simply stopped paddling and lit their smokes and stretched their legs. The quiet really deepened after the

pipe. Shuffling in the underbrush somewhere in the forest made Redbeard turn his head but he couldn't make anything out through the moonlit wall of green.

Onwards they gently paddled with three-quarter, wide-faced strokes staying shallow to ensure the craft remained high on the water, keeping it simple and compacted. The canoe moved at top speed in these conditions. They passed by the old portage route that would take them west towards Lake Obabika, and instead entered their final assault on the Diamond Lake portage. The narrows were eerie and shallow. Lily pads and seaweed indicated the shallow waters. They skimmed over rocks until they rode up on one, waking up Schopenhauer. Redbeard pushed them off and then they bumped off about a dozen or so rocks through the narrows.

Both remained quiet as the dog began to shake.

The narrows came to about 40 feet across at its narrowest, and that was where the shallows stopped. They immediately had a pipe and some hot coffee from their thermos, drifting northwest along the connecting channel. There, with the shores so close, they listened to more noises coming from the local beavers. One beaver made it known it wasn't happy with their intrusion.

Through the narrows and around another shallow rocky patch, they picked up speed on their final push for the Sharp Rock portage to Diamond Lake. The water opened up into a big stretch of water. They glided over the water surface along the western shore passing the dark trees in the tree wall, their boughs beginning to rustle in the changing temperature. The moon shone over them now as they weaved through the three small islands and approached the end of Lake Temagami's Northwest Arm. Even after five pipes and six hours of smooth paddling, their pace with the three-quarter, wide shallow stroke was still robust and effective.

For most of the night the loons and beavers and the sound of their *Old Town* fiberglass canoe skimming along the evening's waveless calm was all that gave color to the moonlit night.

"There's a campsite near the mouth of where the portage is according to my map," said Choppy Waters. Redbeard didn't need to look at his map with the flashlight; he knew where it was on the map and could see it in his mind's eye. He looked for the campsite in front of him despite the darkness as they quietly entered another narrows, finally away from the vast openness of the long water. Soon they entered the funneling to the portage and Diamond Lake.

"You know, it may not be such a good idea to portage 200 yards on sharp rock at night with a thousand pounds of gear," said Redbeard, hoping Choppy wouldn't insist on an unnecessary path of danger in the moonlight.

"This portage is a pretty steep trail actually."

“200 yards. That’s two football fields.”

The shores were more jagged in the narrows to the portage with more fallen trees and more gaps in the dark green wall. The rocks reached out but they kept in the middle and threaded the needle.

“That may be it on the left.” Choppy spotted the campsite on the south shore on a high, flat rock. Just then a beaver thwacked its tail on the starboard side, and then a moment later they both saw a giant beaver swim in front of the canoe and pause before going under and letting us have another big whack with its tail.

“That’s our welcoming.” Dry. Canadian humor.

They pulled up to section of smooth rock and docked the canoe to check the campsite out. It was just big enough to house two tents, and it happened to be right beside the beaver dam that glistened under the moonlight. Still there was no breeze, so the narrow channel was quiet. Soon Choppy started a fire. They pitched their tents and after coffee and a handful of crackers, they retired for the rest of the night. They had traveled almost 20 kilometer under the full moon.

Eleven

The Keewatin Cap

Third Week

Choppy slept outside under the night sky as usual and was already up at seven when Redbeard had a pee. He was looking like he was ready to go. Ever since the visit to Keewatin - his alma mater - he had been full of get-up-and-go but Redbeard, who was still sleepy, went back to sleep until nine. Even Schopenhauer was still tired and stayed in the tent sleeping at his side.

The fire Choppy started at seven was out by the time they had awakened for the day. But the pot of tea was heated nicely by the coals.

Exploring the campsite Choppy and Schopenhauer discovered they were on an island with to other campsites connected by trails.

“Old Indian camp,” he said. “These trails are old.” They went to all of them after they had drank tea and coffee and had a morning smoke. Choppy was enthusiastic at the great rhythm they had had last night and wanted to press on over the portage at Sharp Rock Inlet to the gateway of Diamond Lake, and then down Diamond aiming for the small portage into Lady Evelyn Lake. If they could sustain a good pace they might be able to reach the main body of the lake by nightfall. It was a tall order but Redbeard, as Choppy was finding out, was not the kind of man who

was likely to say no, so a paddle and portage from Temagami to Lady Evelyn Provincial Park was in the cards.

As they packed camp the beaver came back, stopped in front of the rock shore, looked at them for a moment and then slapped its tail against the flat surface as it dove into the water and disappeared.

“Did you see a lot of the beaver last night?” Choppy shook his head.

“Only heard them working.” So he *did* sleep under the stars then.

“Probably doing their chores.”

On the water with the sun overhead, they left camp at noon and were only ten minutes on the lake before the portage. Redbeard could see Diamond Lake down the portage trail at the end of the inlet. At first he thought it would be an easy portage because he could see the water on the other side but after the first load he was thankful they didn't attempt it last night. It was an old channel that had been closed because of an old logging road so the terrain was all sharp rock. Jumping from jagged rock to jagged rock with 150 pounds on his back in the middle of night over two football fields' worth of footwork would have been foolish. But they did the portage in three loads each and had a pipe on an old broken-down dock on Diamond Lake, dangling their feet in the water.

“If the wind holds we should be able to cross it.”

Using a tumpline with the heaviest pack was new to Redbeard, but it proved effective in the doing. The leather strap around the forehead took most of the weight because it was too heavy for the shoulders only. Leaning slightly forward, some of the weight could be shifted more that eased the stress of the leather against his hairline. If the trail had been smooth, the Sharp Rock portage would have been easier; jumping between the sharp rocks with the gear on his back was the challenge.

Still there was no wind, with occasional light breezes from the north, so their speed was constant. They entered Diamond Lake down a narrow southeastern part, past many beaver lodges that lined the rocky shores. On the starboard side they paddled past a long oasis of birch trees that stretched for as far as the eye could see. And since Redbeard favored birch the most of all trees, he kept his eyes gazing on end rows of the white tree. In his birch-tree fervor he could sense a similarity between birch and palm trees - distant cousins perhaps. Regardless, it was a place he wanted to stay in. Diamond Lake was different from the majestic Temagami, smaller but very friendly shores that seemed to promise a labyrinth of old Native hunting trails.

They stopped for a pipe beside another beaver lodge.

“According to my map, the portage is at the end of this bay.”

“Many chains?”

“Say it’s 12 chains, or 240 feet. We’ll see when we get there. The water’s high this year.”

Back on the water they followed the sounds of loons north where they reached a very narrow part where the water hit rocks and fell into Lady Evelyn Lake.

“Do you think we can make it?” Redbeard didn’t know what he was thinking. The bottleneck was about 15 feet across and there were rocks that ran right along the neck. They edged closer and then Choppy stood up in the stern and paddled like he was a guide in a Venice canal.

“Ease up.” Redbeard stopped paddling and steered them to the smooth rock at the side. “Let’s get out and see what the deal is.”

They pulled the canoe partially onto the rock and surveyed the narrows. Choppy went right out onto some of the exposed rocks and put his hands on his hips, and Redbeard started to laugh. The dog was drawn into the shallow waters but was caught in the swift current and was nearly swooped down into Lady Evelyn. Schopenhauer made it to shore and shook off the water.

“She’s a pretty durable doggie that one,” said Choppy. *Durable indeed.*

“I think I can take it,” Choppy surmised. “Easier with one.” Redbeard nodded and was ready to witness the tipping and destruction of the vessel. Choppy pulled out and paddled Venetian style standing up. When the bow caught the swift current it pulled him around and he lost his balance. He jumped out of the canoe instead of taking the entire load with him, and landed on his feet. He grabbed hold of the gunnels at the stern and guided it to the right side of the narrows and then at the last second re-angled the canoe as it was swept down the once great waterfall. Choppy followed it over to the rocks and into the deep eddies, guiding it calmly to the worn smooth Canadian Shield.

“Nice one.”

“That just saved about an hour’s worth of portaging 20 feet.” He wiped his forehead and then wrung out his shorts.

“What do you call that kind of portage?”

“That’s a *lift-over*.”

“Well it was something. Well done.” They sat on the rock and had a pipe before dipping their toes in Lady Evelyn Lake.

“Before the dam this was a waterfall with a 20-foot drop.”

“Come this way with Keewatin?”

“Yeah, but never when it’s been this high.”

“So you’re never executed a lift-over here before?” He thought for a moment.

“No, I don’t believe I have, not here.” He wasn’t sure what it was that crossed Choppy’s face just then, but the frown that had narrowed his brow since their recent Keewatin visit seemed to relax.

He smoked his pipe and began singing some old canoeing song.

Out on the water, Lady Evelyn was dramatic. The shorelines were high with mature trees that seemed to come at you from every angle. It was a maze of small islands hemmed in by two very high shores. With his arms and legs waning in strength, and with the size of the surrounding trees, the canoe felt for Redbeard like it was moving slowly. Sluggishly. Choppy became disoriented and took a wrong turn that took them into a neat swampy area where there were several Kingfishers diving for fish. Back on track they paddled north along the long narrows to where finally they found a campsite.

“I don’t like this one. Let’s go to the one at the end of the island.” When they reached the site at the northern tip of the island it was worth the extra effort. It was an island designed to be a campsite by the *Gitchee Manitou* Himself.

Redbeard had come to know many of Choppy Waters’ idiosyncrasies during the trip but he had never felt alarm – until now. Prevalent today was a new insistence to preserve every grain of food at whatever the cost. Redbeard had noticed this thriftiness before but now it was becoming more pronounced. It was a hoarding instinct that was manifesting itself. Redbeard had hardly had two meals a day for two weeks and he was growing lean, but the hunger brought more assertiveness from Redbeard. He was becoming ravenous, and needed more than just a few handfuls of trail mix for sustenance, which seemed like it was now kept under lock and key. In a way, Redbeard’s food was at ransom in the wanegan that was controlled by Choppy Waters with an iron hand.

He could see the wear the trip was having on Choppy. His meager intake of food and his non-stop smoking of his rolled cigarettes from his tobacco tin had had a rather remarkable effect on him. The lines in his face had dried like the bark on a tree wrinkling under the sun. His hands shook more than they had when they had started the journey, and his coughing fits hit him more frequently. And because he had insisted on sleeping outside without his tent, he hadn’t been getting the same quality sleep as Redbeard, who had been sleeping deeply, safely protected in his two-man tent. He even had a mesh window on his ceiling so he could stare at the stars at night but without the sand flies and no-see-ums that kept Choppy waking up throughout the night. The miles on the water and the hardships to his body, including the pain of his ‘canoe shoulder’ all conspired to slow him down. Yet he pressed on at

the cost to his flesh and mental balance. The man seemed to live on spices alone and he didn't get enough good protein in his body.

He was rotting away from the inside.

He remembered Charlie Boyle was student at university who never did his readings and yet was always able to get an 'A' on his term papers. He would spend nights at the long table in Wallace Hall into the wee hours of the morning with a thermos of coffee, who never got lost in the half-dozen books spread out and marked up in front of him that had nothing to do with his courses. The young Charlie Boyle was a man who participated in everything from the varsity rugby team to the theatre group. It was only when they were outfitting in Temagami that he learned that Choppy had never graduated with his degree. Redbeard on the other hand, despite his unassuming ways, had graduated from philosophy and gone on to take a master's degree and publish. But Redbeard had done the schoolwork and had studied the footnotes, put in his time and made his time at university count.

Ironically, in the wilderness on a canoe, what Redbeard learned from those endless hours of reading philosophy at university were still with him, here, in the sound of the water and the overwhelming sense of balance in nature. Redbeard could attune himself to nature and become centered by recalling the wisdom he learned as an undergraduate. Choppy didn't have that mental apparatus. The titanic, unmovable intellectual foundational was not there. He had not put in the effort to foster and fortify. So in its place was the martial music of Keewatin, its ceremonies in front of the stone chimney and the stage and the hard-won wisdom of his trips to Hudson's Bay. An ancient education, instruction from weathered men who had seen life from the front row - real explorers in the tradition of *les voyageurs* of the New World. The problem was that this wasn't the Hudson's Bay; it was a summer vacation in Temagami. Yet it was becoming dangerous. At the beginning of the trip Choppy was 160 pounds, ten pounds underweight. He said he hadn't been eating well since his divorce with Gina. Redbeard weighed in at 190 pounds, 15 pounds overweight. Now, at the nineteenth day mark of the trip Choppy had lost maybe ten pounds and Redbeard had easily dropped 15 pounds.

Choppy even had earned a new crease beside his mouth but his eyes still burned with the intensity of the sun.

Now two days after Keewatin, Choppy was wearing a green Keewatin cap that looked new.

"Ah, Keewatin," Redbeard said, pointing at his cap.

"Yeah, I just took it out of my bag. Thought I'd wear it." It was strange because before they left while they were outfitting at John's, Choppy had spread

every item he had on the grass to begin packing the wanagan, but he hadn't seen this new Keewatin cap. Chances were that Choppy had found it at the camp and assumed ownership of it. But, to Redbeard, there was something unholy about it. How could he wear stolen goods, especially since they had been trespassing? Redbeard thought the firewood was enough, but they could have been charged with theft, particularly since Choppy had been declared *persona non grata* at Keewatin for life and stripped of his membership.

If they had been caught with the cap, Redbeard could have been charged with theft since they were there together.

Choppy's name hung in shame after the debacle in 2001 when he abandoned his group for a bag of weed. His life seemed full of these fissures. Even his wedding to his wife Gina shared the same flaw. They went to city hall to marry but couldn't find two witnesses as it was near closing time. They pronounced themselves married after knowing each other for 11 days and went out to celebrate. They maintained the lie of being a married couple for six years until she finally left him, leaving him shattered, and him leaving her with an immense credit card debt.

He understood and appreciated that his return to Keewatin was an attempt to have closure with the camp and the authorities. He figured Choppy was hoping the director was there attending to last-minute details about the closing of the camp for winter so he could ask forgiveness. There had to be closure with the camp before he could move on. The trauma was perhaps more profound and personal than Redbeard had realized, but how could there be true peace and honor when a theft like this occurred?

How pure was the man?

The question now for Redbeard was how far would this man go? What would he do to maximize his time in the bush at the expense of his health and to Redbeard's health? And Schopenhauer's?

How strong was his passion for the canoeing life and how sincere was his disdain of returning to his city life?

"It looks like we have lots of food to last us," said Redbeard, knowing Choppy was thinking about the food situation.

"We're going to be tight. The reunion is in two weeks and it lasts four days and there will be a trip after that to return to Temagami, and we may have to outfit other boats paddling back with us."

"Outfit other boats?" Redbeard opened the trail mix and ate a handful, his stomach pinned to his backbone, rumbling.

"So that's three more weeks."

“Three weeks!” He remembered when Choppy had first said: ‘It would be nice if we could make it to the blockade reunion on the 17th. Then it was ‘Let’s go to Wakimika Lake for the reunion but we don’t have to stay for four days.’ Now their two-week mid-August canoe trip was going to be extending their food supply into October? Redbeard became aware of how far he and Schopenhauer were from civilization at that moment.

Twelve

The Vibe of the Wild

Third Week

Camped out on Lady Evelyn Lake with Maple Mountain on the horizon two-day paddle away, they were closing in on Bobby Too Good’s camp at the foot of the mountain. A group of over 40 loons casually paddled by their campsite, their dark heads against the pure white neck made for a memorable sight. A loon call truly is a beautiful experience during the quiet nights, especially when there was another loon call way down the chain of lakes. Redbeard was in the heart of the communication network of loons as they called each other from across the waters throughout the water spider of Lake Temagami. This country was dominated by loons. They swam and dove among groups of a dozen or more and communicate through short and long loon calls. Lying on his sleeping mat he could always hear a distant loon that seemed to come from beyond the horizon.

Choppy stripped naked and - ever the woodsman - dove off the rock into the lake causing the group of loons to begin a ripple of alarmist noises.

But just as quickly faded away when he climbed out of the water.

Choppy was in a foul mood all day so there wasn’t much talking. And there wasn’t much paddling on Choppy’s part either.

Redbeard tried to satisfy his hunger with a cheese sandwich he ate with Choppy Waters on the rock peninsula drinking tea and coffee all day discussing a night paddle. Redbeard and Schopenhauer explored the old Indian trails that reached far down the shores through the forest that held a smorgasbord of wildlife. This was moose country but with Schopenhauer with him, he felt safe. There were deer and foxes, porcupines and raccoons, and the countless smaller mammals that shuffled in the underbrush. The sun was hot despite the cool breeze that kept the bugs away so that the wilderness was theirs to explore. Small spruce pushed upwards from under the dominant white pines and patches of red pine that emitted their perfume scent

giving the oxygen-rich air allure. Redbeard followed Schopenhauer. Tree roots crisscrossed the pine needle, foot-wide trail through the broken pieces of wood and scattered pinecones. Past the birch and jack pine and Maple and being brushed by new cedars, Schopenhauer bounced up the rock moving over the bright green moss that felt like a carpet.

Back at the campsite, Choppy had collected all the available firewood as per his guiding instinct and training told him to do. It made Redbeard wonder about the martial discipline taught at Keewatin – the West Point of canoeing schools. It was good to push for excellence but not at the cost of the more subtle aspects of living in nature. Choppy would collect firewood and then lie down whereas Redbeard almost immediately explored, always with a glint in his eye. He took the trails down as far as they would go, check the suitability of different spots to pitch the tent and then value its position relative to the sunset. Choppy would assess a site based on the fire pit and protection from the wind. The fire was everything to Choppy, but for Redbeard it was of secondary importance. He had the mobile propane stove to heat water or fry eggs. One could say he wasn't as old school as Choppy in his methods.

And he put that down to the old school training he received and taught at Camp Keewatin.

Choppy had been canoeing in Temagami for over 30 years, but during that period the hole in the ozone layer had grown and with it the harmful UV rays. Choppy however, in his stubborn way, had refused to adapt to the now burning effects of the sun. During the last several weeks Choppy had paddled in his shorts and hat, exposing a large amount of skin to the sun. And to hydrate, instead of water he drank coffee. His face wrinkled in dehydration and his cheeks sunken against the bone. His lips were cracked and chapped so Redbeard offered is bubble gum-flavored Chapstick but he said his lips were all right.

In bringing Schopenhauer on the canoe trip there was only one rule for Choppy: don't feed the dog. Choppy had immediately taken to Schopenhauer, and for days was feeding her in Temagami – something a dog owner would never do to another dog without the permission of its master. He had already asked Choppy to stop feeding her before they had left Temagami.

"It's the only rule I have," he had said to his old university friend. He agreed not to but for the next week or so Schopenhauer was still sitting at his arm waiting for food. Redbeard put out the dog food and she wouldn't touch it. When asked if he was feeding the dog last week he said he wasn't. A few days later, when Schopenhauer had started to eat again he thanked Choppy for not feeding her, and the very next moment he took the pot of pasta and gave it to her right in front of him. Redbeard

took it as a momentary mistake and laughed instead of calling him on it. Then again last night he went to bed and Choppy who always slept close to the fire, stayed with the food. Since Redbeard was the only one feeding her, he knew she would be starving this morning. Sure enough, when he went to eat the leftovers for breakfast, they were gone.

“Did you feed the dog the leftovers last night?” Choppy was on his back on his beloved wool blankets.

“No.”

“Strange because she hasn’t eaten her dog food.”

“Did you put out the kibbles?”

“Yes.”

“Maybe the squirrels ate it.” Redbeard didn’t bother replying because he always poured the dog food back into the bag to prevent squirrels from ransacking.

It irked Redbeard that something so simple was not adhered to and then lied about. How can one have trust with such a man?

Just before they were about to push off, Redbeard tore open a new bag of trail mix. With no coffee or breakfast, he was starving. He filled Choppy’s cup with some but instead of taking five minutes to eat it he brought it into the canoe. The first pipe was a long one across open waters and Choppy Waters didn’t paddle. Every ten or so feeble half strokes he would leave his paddle dangling in the water, slowing the boat, eating the trail mix. He thought it may go on for a few minutes but it went on for the entire pipe. The canoe felt sluggish in the water, driven only by Redbeard’s paddle. Even when he had two hands on the paddle there was no effort. Choppy had mentioned that he didn’t care for Lady Evelyn because of the unpredictability of the winds here, but Redbeard figured it had something to do with his trip here with Gina. Perhaps it was conjuring up memories.

Redbeard, stoic and unruffled, kept paddling and soon Choppy had a rhythm albeit with a weak pull. Choppy Waters stayed with the half volley, spending his time steering because Redbeard was more than 80 percent of the power. The first pipe was tough over the open waters, going slowly and out of rhythm. Once they reached the first island and had a pipe, they could see the north point of the south section of the lake where they would go west down the narrows towards Hobart Lake near Maple Mountain. The cold tea and the smoke spurred Redbeard to get off the big waters for the easier narrows, sheltered from the winds. Even Choppy picked it up, likely also feeling the exposure to a sudden north wind devil.

There were a few old cottages in the lake built before the lake was declared a provincial park, so it explained how Bobby Too Good could have a cabin in a

provincial park. But they all appeared to be vacant and there was no boat traffic except for a few fishermen from Mowat's Landing.

They reached the northern point and turned the corner, now away from the temperamental open waters of Lady Evelyn, and moved west along the narrowing channel. There was an island in the middle of the narrows with perfectly flat rock angled at about ten degrees. It was symmetrical looking so Redbeard proposed a pipe. They pulled over on the north side of the island and had a smoke.

"There, someone left something," said Choppy. He motioned towards the shore where canoes departed from.

"I see it."

"You want to expand your wardrobe? No?" Redbeard was going to say no but the last jibe made him say yes.

"Sure, I'm in." They drew in the canoe and Redbeard swung the bow around right to the smooth rock where the piece of clothing was. He reached out with his paddle and scooped the textile on the second attempt. It was a new pullover with a hood made of high-tech warm material.

"Whaddya know, it fits."

"The world is an open free shop."

They kept moving west down the glasslike surface past the narrowing corridor of forests, until they hit an elbow. A shallow crossing, they began to see dead trees along the shoreline reminiscent of Cross Lake. However, there was no trimming of the moustache today. The silence and Choppy's elementary effort were enough for Redbeard to know not to suggest it.

Once the elbow was taken, the water narrowed significantly. On the east side a chain of rock islands spread south for a mile or more, flat with clusters of small trees, all a lighter shade of rock with moss and lichen. It was a dramatic sight, the old, defiant rock, little slivers that were each big enough to be a campsite. On Redbeard's map it said there were seven campsites in the one island chain. Redbeard wanted to stop but they kept moving. With the only sounds other than Choppy's splashing, lazy paddling, was Redbeard's murmuring to his dog, who was showing signs of anxiety beside the dramatic rock.

They hit a river that became very shallow.

"I don't know if we can get through here," he said.

"It was an old Indian portage route, but after the dam was built the water may be high enough to get through," replied Choppy. Immediately Redbeard saw the rocks and grass in the water below them, and then lily pads.

"It's getting shallow." The sun reflected off the water's surface so Redbeard couldn't clearly see what was coming, but to the port side he could see the bottom only six inches under them. Then, there was a bump. The grinding of the sharp rock tore the red paint off the bottom of the canoe. Redbeard pushed them off. They paddled gently and almost sideways through the shallows, bumping off rocks and skimming over fallen trees. Redbeard glanced down and saw the bottom four inches down.

"It's *really* shallow, man." He spotted an oncoming rock and did the reverse draw to save injury to the bow. Choppy only grunted. Redbeard started to laugh. *Why not paddle another ten minutes and go around the island and save the canoe?* For Redbeard it was a no-brainer but it was Choppy's instinct to go for it to the end.

Choppy was standing up in the stern Venetian style, guiding the boat with a bird's eye view. Another serious hit shook the canoe and then pushed it to the side. Choppy's weight nearly followed it over the side. Redbeard leaned to the starboard for a second or two, righted it, and then used his paddle and momentum and pushed them off the rock.

"It's not looking good up here," he finally had to say.

"Yeah, it looks too shallow. Let's turn around."

Going back was just as hairy. Twice Redbeard was able to dodge two dangerous rocks, saving the canoe from worse damage.

They went around the island and through a shallow neck with rocks and came out on Sucker Gut Lake. It was different here. The trees were more numerous and with Maple Mountain so close in the west, it felt small and barren. Marshes and grasses dotted some of the bays and the forest edged to the lip of the water. They came to an island between the two parts of Sucker Gut Lake where there was a rocky narrow and a small campsite on the island.

There they had a pipe.

"We go down the creek to near Hobart Lake. Keep your eyes open for a campsite and a cabin."

At the campsite nestled in the northeast corner of the lake at the foot of Maple Mountain, Choppy camped out on the rock by the canoe beside the water so he could hear and see in the waning sun and watch the Canada Geese flying south in huge formations over the water. That was when Choppy mentioned casually that the reunion was not taking place until September 21st and that he hoped the food would last until a week after that. When he said it a creeping sensation went down Redbeard's spine. *The man was mad.*

He went on talking as if Redbeard hadn't noticed the lie.

“It was my understanding that the reunion was on the 17th?”

“No, it’s the 21st.” For the first time he honestly felt Choppy’s lying was a threat to his safety. And to Schopenhauer’s. The forest was his make believe world and his paradise. He didn’t want to return to the city. Choppy intended on remaining up here until he was half-starved and sick. Their two-week trip was now going to be over six weeks.

Redbeard had just eaten a Chinese, readymade noodle soup, peanut butter on ten crackers and a handful of trail mix, but had just paddled 20km on the water. Something was out of whack. This was an unsustainable situation. And the danger signs were now clear to him.

“You can always fly back,” said Choppy, as if reading his thoughts. “From the reunion. Lots of people will be flying out. There might be space.”

“I’m not going to fly out,” he replied. “My car is in Temagami.” A man who tells lies can never be sure footed. Or trusted. Or relied on. This was the fundamental difference between them. And something in Redbeard’s heart changed. Choppy was no longer a canoe companion. Since they were four day’s paddling away from civilization, he was now a possible threat to his life. The sun had buried itself in Redbeard’s heart; he spoke in the tone of fire. His voice was strong like the *giiwedin* - the north wind - cool as ice that magnified the sun to make fire.

“Okay then,” was all Redbeard could say. He feared provoking this unstable and unpredictable man.

Choppy Waters poked the fire at his feet. His skin was like brown leather, like a well-used saddle hide, with creases like a seasoned baseball mitt. When he spoke he looked out to the water with his arm outstretched from under his Black Watch tartan Pendleton shirt, holding a rolled cigarette, fingers stained with nicotine. He was wearing his pilfered Keewatin cap. Perhaps something came out when that cap was on; perhaps a dormant panther awakened and his sharpened instincts enlivened and the chief struggle within him became how long could he stay in the wilderness and feed off the vibe of the wild, with the loons and the beavers and the Kingfishers. Even today, at the sight of his beloved Kingfishers, he was unable to pull his weight in the canoe - a breach of rowing etiquette if there ever was one.

Choppy had a locker at a steam bath to go back to but Redbeard had a home, a girlfriend and bills to return to. And he had a new tenant moving into to his rental property that had to be dealt with, such as getting the deposit and giving the tenant their keys. He had already been out for a month rather than the planned two weeks, but something in Redbeard - something stubborn like Scotland - wanted to

play Choppy's game, take his irrationality as rational, and keep in line with the challenge to see how far it would go.

How far could Choppy push him?

"Let's look for Bobby Too Good's cabin tomorrow and climb the mountain while we're here," said Choppy. The squawking of Canadian Geese captured Choppy's attention as another massive swarm flew in a long arrow, a thousand birds long on both lines. They all followed the first bird south.

"Feels like the north winds are coming," he said.

"Winter is coming. The geese are telling us that," said Choppy. "Not in five days from now, but *today*. Maybe some bad weather two days hence." He tipped his Keewatin cap and spat in the water.

"I'm hoping someone at the reunion can re-outfit us a bit more so we have more supplies."

"I guess we're going to have to wait and see."

Redbeard patted his canine companion Schopenhauer as she lay beside him at the campfire, the chill in the air now crisp and demanding. Then he shivered, the dog now asleep warm beside the fire. He needed another layer of clothing - perhaps the new hoody he found on the island today?

"I'm going to sit here and watch the ducks," Choppy said when Redbeard was leaving to his tent for the night, choosing not to wake the dog. The summer was ending and the mortal winter winds were afoot.

Thirteen

Place Where the Soul Spirit Dwells

Fourth Week

In the morning Choppy was still there. He was again in a foul mood. Redbeard filled his cup with last night's tea from the cold teapot and sat down beside him on the rock. The water was perfectly still.

"Get any firewood last night?" He had heard Choppy slip out under the moonlight some night during the night when he was in his tent. He had heard him scrounging along the shoreline.

"Firewood?"

"Yeah, last night. Didn't you go out for some firewood?"

"No, I just went out for a paddle." It was then that it dawned on Redbeard.

"You didn't take my dog did you?" *He couldn't have.*

"Yes, Schopenhauer came along."

“What? You took my dog out in the canoe last night?”

“So?”

“No, please don’t take my dog anywhere without my permission.”

“Why?”

“Because I prefer that you don’t. She’s my dog. She’s part of my family. You wouldn’t take someone’s child out on a night canoe ride at night would you? No, don’t take my dog without me knowing.”

“Why?”

“I would prefer if you would not take my dog. Is that clear?” Choppy stood up with his coffee cup in one hand and raised his other hand high in the air.

“Yes sir!” He stormed back to the fire pit.

“In fact, stay away from my dog.” There was a pause.

“*Yes sir!*” Redbeard was still sore about the lies and half-truths that were exposed last night. His promise - *his word* - was rice paper. This dishonesty bothered Redbeard but it also bothered Choppy, who was somehow trying to put the blame of the lie on him.

“All right, thank you.” He sipped his tea and felt better. Choppy had been feeding the dog, man handling her and generally being overly affectionate to Schopenhauer. He was treating her as *his* dog. All dog owners knew that there was a fine line between being polite and affectionate to a friend’s dog, and being downright lovey-dovey, as if trying to lure the dog away from its master, or to drive a wedge between them. This *offside*, as Redbeard saw it, had been going on since the first day in Temagami. He thought it would be good for Choppy to have a friend and an outlet to be silly with to help heal him of his afflictions, but he had pushed it too far out of bounds for too long. Calling him on it was necessary, like a referee calling a penalty. It felt right. Redbeard had, after almost a month on the water, removed the thorn in his paw. He felt immediately better as he patted Schopenhauer, who seemed sheepish.

“Yes sir!” Choppy stewed by the unlit fire.

“Yes, you can call me *sir*.” He smiled at the playfulness in his voice.

“What’s your problem?”

“What’s *your* problem, man?” Redbeard’s voice was stronger. He had chosen to be happy-go-lucky but being lied to, being toyed with out on the water, and the offside with the dog made him realize he had to speak up or be at risk of more of this disrespectful hierarchical behavior. He had to challenge his alpha male role in the group of two. Choppy was really dropping the ball and being cavalier about it.

Redbeard wasn't impressed; Choppy was acting like an 11 year old kid. His maturity had never evolved, so Redbeard would now regard him like a child. A man-baby.

"Is this some sort of challenge?" Choppy's voice was ugly. Red flag danger. Choppy was capable of evil. And he was at Choppy's mercy being so far in the bush and far away from the police and good people.

"Relax man, everything's groovy. Just wanted to say my piece about the dog." He must have picked Schopenhauer up and placed her in his canoe. *Bastard.*

Choppy hopped up on the rock beside Redbeard as he was sipping his tea, and faced him square on. Choppy wanted to make a big thing out of it but Redbeard didn't take the bait because he was painfully aware of the danger he was in.

"Take it easy *Archimedes.*" Hearing that word quieted Choppy. He knew he wasn't going to get a rise out of Redbeard. So they left for the mountain with Choppy quiet and pouting, but not Redbeard. He had the ability to phase out the turbulence and enjoy his surroundings. He loved the paddle. Beside the camp was a creek that was grassy, leaving only a narrow gap for canoes and kayaks. He could see the soft bottom and pancake rocks. The air was thick with life: frogs, insects, beavers, otters, turtles, water spiders and more. From the bow he did a quick draw stroke to save a collision with a boulder an inch below the surface. Around a corner and past a beaver lodge, they skimmed over the branches of a fallen tree until they came to a beaver dam. Choppy hit two or three hard strokes and landed right on top of it, leaving Redbeard to leap out on the dam and usher the canoe over. Then he hopped in the middle of the canoe and walked down to the bow to resume paddling. The beaver dam was ineffective so the water levels were the same but the sticks and branches still obstructed the river road. But the next beaver dam they hit was a construction that worked. The water level in Tupper Lake was two feet higher. For this one they only kissed the dam, enough for Redbeard to step onto the dam, pull the canoe up and over, and then walk across the top of the beaver dam and hop in the canoe.

Tupper Lake was eerie. Almost every corner was grassy and the water murky but the mountain was gigantic. The fire tower at the top of the mountain looked too far to walk to, with a large forest between the lake and the top of the massive rock face. Water lilies and long grass slowed them. It was quiet. Choppy wouldn't talk. He was in a snit.

When they found the trail up Maple Mountain, there was another canoe pulled up on land. The place seemed so far removed from anywhere that it was a surprise for Redbeard.

"Ah, another canoe." Choppy didn't say a word for the entire hour and a half climb. All efforts and questions were ignored by Choppy. He took his snits very

seriously. An Olympic snit - childlike and determined. It wasn't until they reached the top that his tense face changed.

The view really was breathtaking. Lakes and forest and sky as far as the eye could see with no signs of mankind whatsoever. The local Temagami call it Ghost Mountain; it is a place to have a vision quest. Young men used it to fast and seek their totem spirits on this summit.

Once replenished with water, Redbeard found Choppy climbing the fire tower. He was halfway up.

"Nice one. You're about halfway." At first Redbeard didn't even consider climbing the 100 feet up a flimsy metal tower on top of the world's oldest 2000-foot mountain of pure granite, but after a smoke and some tea, he threw caution to the wind and rose to Choppy's unsaid challenge. He gripped the metal rungs and started climbing, telling Schopenhauer to stay.

Redbeard prided himself on having very few fears, but the most severe of his fears was of heights. Focusing on his hands on the steel girders, he lifted one foot at a time, keeping the same repetition of movement like paddling. Slowly, Redbeard ascended the ladder in the gusting winds until he reached the wooden box at the pinnacle. Like a dog house perched on top of a long metal stick.

"I can't believe you made it," said Choppy, now out of his pout. "You're conquering your fears. Right on. Here, this is for you." He poured some hot coffee with cinnamon from his thermos. It tasted like a song on his tongue, as he reached for something to hold onto.

Redbeard didn't see an 'Archie Belaney' carved into the wood up in the tower since it was built in 1931, but the feeling that he was up here to scout and to get a bird's eye view, he could feel. It had a history this mountaintop. Like Machu Pichu, it was the apex of the world's oldest mountain range, some two billion years old. The Anishinabek call it *Chee-bay-shing*, or the 'place where the soul spirit dwells.' From the summit one could see the lakes that fed Georgian Bay, Hudson's Bay and the mighty St. Lawrence River. It was its own continental divide of Ontario and perhaps the world's oldest rock.

Maple Mountain embraced the sky with cold dignity. They could see the lakes and the connecting tissue that weaved through the green forests and worn mountain ridges, and the labyrinth of river roads that made Temagami one of the canoeing capitals of the world. Nothing manmade could be seen as far as the eye could see. So vast was this expanse of land, so far away from any roads or towns, it was its own separate world interlinked with waterways and old portage trails in use for thousands of years, with campsites worn with history. Redbeard could sense the spirits that

loomed over the expanse of trees, and even sense the lives lost in the Temagami waters over the centuries. A murder of crows encircled something below the ridge, flying around squawking at an animal about to be eaten, then an osprey appeared and scattered the crows away from the ridge. The southern tip of the rocky edge jutted out like a peninsula rising above a sea of pine growth, like a place of offering and sacrifice, a rock-worn pew to kneel before the power of the sun.

Fourteen

The Golden Staircase

Fourth Week

The European wonders why the Native Americans lived the way they did in the forests balanced with nature, but it was only when the European lived in the Canadian forests can they began to understand why.

There was so much abundance here, food and fuel, and the raw materials for tools and abodes. There were fewer people living in North America than in Europe, so with less people and such natural abundance, there was very little need to build refrigerators or cars or airplanes. They had their own answers to the challenges of such a life immersed in the wilderness. They had ground willow bark for pain, which became aspirin to the world. They had tobacco, which is now in all corners of the world. They had canoes and toboggans and snowshoes; they had moccasins and deerskin leggings and leather shirts; they had bows and arrows and tomahawks and war clubs; they had sweat lodges and council of chiefs and longhouses; and they had humor and morality and deep spiritual beliefs. Their knowledge of plants and wild game was encyclopedic in comparison with the average European. Their physical fitness, born from their active way of life, enhanced their lives, freeing them from injury and disease, and freeing the mind for music and painting and crafts. There were numerous descriptions of the Natives that the Europeans encountered when reaching the shores of North America as physically superior to the white man - their height and strength and ruddy complexion contrasted sharply with the weak and sickly Europeans. With so much wild game to hunt all around them and life-giving plants, there was no reason for agriculture. They were like the Vikings of the New World: hardy, self-sufficient, self-reliant doers, who had the abilities to hunt, make war, sing and survive. Both valued bravery in battle and an afterlife among their brethren and family. Both had a distinct style through their dress and weaponry and vessel, but both were deadly serious about survival, protecting their family and

conducting trade. Huron traders used to canoe 12000km from Trois Rivieres east of Montreal to Midland in Georgian Bay in 30 days. That's an average of 30km a day including the portages and trade goods they had bartered with the French for furs. With their exploits as high caliber as the Vikings, only by living in the environment of the Anishinabek could the European have some idea of the peace and tranquility that went hand and hand with the way they lived. And Grey Owl was the classic example of this. He had seen the magic of this life balanced in nature and he had adopted it as his own. That was the message that was lost when people today spoke of Grey Owl.

They only remember his lie.

These were Redbeard's thoughts on the way back from the mountain.

They cruised around the small Tupper Lake and found a cabin at the mouth of the creek just south of the campsite, but the cabin was closed.

Back at the campsite Choppy sat beside the food and smoked. He was quiet again. Redbeard sat quietly and tried to ignore his hunger, his stomach sticking to his backbone. But it was around this time that Redbeard realized that Choppy, who had spoken of his 'condition' and 'disorder' numerous times, was likely unaware of his own increasing insanity. His hoarding of the food and insistence they remain in the wild as long as they could, scared him because reason had left his mind. There in the dark corner of Hobart Lake, Redbeard was caught with this schizoid man four or five days from civilization. After climbing the mountain all day and the paddling, Redbeard managed to extract a Chinese noodle soup and some trail mix. He began to fear for his health due to the lack of protein and calories but chose to endure the hunger in fear of upsetting Choppy and being stranded days from the nearest road or telephone. He wanted to make it back to Temagami without rocking the boat.

He had no idea Choppy's illness would worsen during his self-imposed starvation and being outside all day in the hot sun.

Redbeard brought up his need to get to a telephone before the 15th.

"Let's go south to the waterfalls first," replied Choppy. "We'll get there before the 21st." The dire importance of his business call didn't appear to register on Choppy's mind. So instead of going to Alex's on Obabika Lake to make the call they were now traveling south towards a waterfall way off course.

And this piece was accompanied by two long portages.

"You'll like the Golden Staircase," Choppy Waters assured him. "There's a great campsite." Redbeard was always open to seeing something majestic in nature so he agreed on the route south to Chris Willis Lake through a very long, narrow and shallow creek. It was mostly all grass but for the canoeing passage, at some points

as narrow as 12 feet. There were no rocks - only grass and fallen logs. His paddle blade was virtually horizontal in the water because of the six inches of water. Several times Redbeard wanted to say they weren't going to make it but somehow they maneuvered past the logs and the patches of earth that winked at the surface and rubbed against their underbelly. Redbeard was busy at the bow with Schopenhauer watching it all sitting between his legs. Several quick draws to both wings were required but they managed to sneak through the few kilometers of the grassy creek. Then, right at the end of the creek, they hit a log and lodged on it. They both pushed off with their paddles but at one point the vessel was at a tipping angle. They held it and then delicately pushed off the log into Chris Willis Lake.

There was a party of five fishing on the lake. As a fly-in fishing lake, they had three boats and a cabin and the entire lake to themselves where northern pike were biting. They watched one of them reel in a huge fish as he was talking to Choppy and Redbeard when they passed in the middle of the lake.

"This one's giving a fight," said the fisherman reeling in the fish. They stopped paddling once level with the boat and saw the pike that had to be two feet in length.

"This is my first fish," he said smiling at them in the canoe.

"Nice one," said Redbeard. The fisherman nodded and instead of pulling up the fish into the boat he pulled the fish back and forth in front of him, allowing the fish to break free and swim to freedom.

The look on the fisherman's face was terrible to see.

"I don't have a net," he said, trying to hide his disappointment.

"Ah, well, we'll tell the boys down the lake that you caught one," said Choppy.

"Okay. Tell them I caught a two-footer." Choppy laughed and they started paddling south for the portage to the North Channel of Lady Evelyn River. A vertical rock face lined the west shore across from the fishermen's cabin, all part of the package deal including the fly-in. But it was the end of the lake that was the gem. Eskers stuck out like fingers from the south shore with prehistoric skin in the form of mosses and lichens and crooked jack pines. The rock was as old as rock could be.

"Let's stop for a pipe," he suggested.

"Just as I was thinking." Choppy steered them to a soft docking above the slippery rock. Just then the other fishing party came over in their boat with rods in the water.

"Your buddy caught one up there," said Redbeard. "About a two-footer."

"But it got away," added Choppy.

"No he didn't," one of them said.

"We're witnesses."

“Nothing’s biting here.” They both looked dejected. “Been out long?”

“About three or four weeks. Wait, what day is it?” The fishermen chuckled.

“What day is it? That’s funny!” These guys looked like bankers from New York.

“What is it? Monday?”

“*It’s Thursday.*” Both were still laughing under their breath. There’s Choppy with his emaciated face hidden by a brown and white beard, nearly bald, standing on an esker in cut-off shorts and sunglasses behind a packed canoe. And then there was Redbeard in his straw cowboy hat and his prescription sunglasses and his ripped army shorts and Birkenstocks with a border collie beside him. They looked haggard but were as fit and cut as a man could be.

They were both having a smoke.

“You know where the portage is?”

“No, I’ve been here once before. I can’t remember.”

“It’s to the left, beside an old rusted boat.”

The fishermen left and Redbeard and Choppy hit the portage. It took three loads hauling a total of 350 pounds each nearly half a kilometer up steep inclines and over sharp rocks. Taking one of the heaviest packs on his last load using the tump line, Redbeard discovered firsthand the physical toughness required to execute a full portage totaling three kilometers over every type of terrain. At the end of the portage trail were big rocks so it was with great effort for Redbeard to find his footing and place the tumped, double-bag load. His neck had strained enough and his skull had flexed enough.

A long portage over dicey terrain was not a desirable thing.

Once on the North Channel of Lady Evelyn River, the entire scene changed. The shores were steep and the water narrow with twists and turns until they could hear a waterfall. They docked their canoe and only took a day pack in case someone was there. Even with the daypacks on, the portage trail was all rock climbing up to the waterfall. They walked almost a kilometer to reach the falls. Immediately he could see why Choppy wanted to come here. It was a loud waterfall with lots of rocks and various arms along the top. The water collected in a long narrow pond of the smoothest rock Redbeard had ever seen, worn smooth by falling water over millennia. The campsite had a natural veranda, one with a bed of pine needles and one of green grass. Just because Redbeard needed to make a phone call, Choppy wasn’t going to interrupt his vacation.

Even with the longer and more excruciating portage, the falls were, in their own way, special.

The falls were loud and let off a misty spray that nourished the lush foliage around it. The old Precambrian rock was slowly and constantly berated from the falling waters, taking a hit each day, wearing away the edges to make it like a bathtub at its base. A long narrow esker split the downstream river to another set of falls and on it went to Lady Evelyn Lake to the Montreal River and finally to the Ottawa River where it flowed into the St. Lawrence River and eventually the Atlantic Ocean. It all started here. A private place, good for a couple to spend a night in the mist of sound, splashing water filling your dreams and old Indian trails to explore.

As an attraction for canoers in the region, it was very likely Grey Owl slept here with his wife.

The Golden Staircase carried its roar to the moose living in the woods that had a drinking hole nearby. It was a balm for the spirit, a washing and cleansing of the fetter that collected in the corners of the soul. Purged into a sluice of smooth bedrock, the Ojibwa Water God cleaned and purified, letting the debris fall away into the cleansing waters. The sluice was separated by a long thin esker, the first of a dozen that followed the shore in the middle of the river. Even at the elbow the esker turned. The rocks, the jack pines, the lichen and moss were old. Everything is ancient. Archaic. It was a Hobbit's world where there was always a path to take and where the water led to different adventures. Everything around the corner was and still, covered in a green hue, branches grey and dead for years, undergrowth fresh and bursting forth with hope. Heraclitus walked big up here. No two trails were the same. Magical Eden. How few had been here to experience this unspoiled place of frozen beauty.

Deep in thought, Redbeard looked at the falls mesmerized. The falling waters and the mist had made him lightheaded.

Fifteen

Scar Tissue

Fourth Week

Choppy, playing the guide for the trip, decided they would stay at the waterfall for the day. Disgruntled at the idea of adding another day to their three-day trip just to reach a telephone, Redbeard went for a walk alone with Schopenhauer. He had three days to get to a phone to make his call. By taking this extra day they were cutting it to the last minute.

Redbeard and Schopenhauer went upstream, above the waterfall and away from Choppy Waters. The trail was steep and rocky but he climbed with grace in his Birkenstock Arizona sandals and a small bag over his shoulder. To portage this with a hundred-pound tumped pack was ludicrous, unless there was a driving cause. They could go upstream and then down the next lake over, but that would take a few extra days and be very tough with all their gear.

The two of them found a rock patio beside a large cedar tree at the tip of the falls out of the mist and with only half the splashing sound. Below the falls where the camp lay, it was tough to hear what the other said. He couldn't understand a word of what Choppy said at the campsite last night. The sound of the water splashing the rocks was more a lullaby for an exhausted canoer, now paddling in the bush for a month. Sleeping at the falls felt like he was in a cocoon - safe beside the wall of rock and the half-mile portage to get there. So many of the campsites were profoundly quiet, but this one had the roar of Niagara Falls that sounded like rustling poplar trees in a high wind - a wind that wasn't there.

It was an isolated old place with mature spruce sticking above the cedars and white pines and tamarack, skinny like pointed spears and mostly dried and grey, except for the very tip. There were rapids before the waterfall with too many rocks to get a canoe through, and narrow - ten feet wide at its narrowest - as if put there by God to keep only the truly dedicated through. And it was a bit spooky around the shores. This was old Indian territory; not many white men over the centuries had climbed this north channel of Lady Evelyn River. Portaging skills - and muster - were most definitely required.

Redbeard had smuggled out a bag of trail mix from the cache pack last night and was now devouring it by the handful. The protein from it would sustain him for the next few days. The meager sandwiches and tea were leaving his body ravaged. Redbeard's waistline had shrunk five notches in his belt and was now on the last one. He had probably dropped 15 to 20 pounds but had strengthened his upper body and stomach from the several hundreds of miles they had canoed. The alcohol intake had been virtually non-existent for weeks so his beer gut had disappeared. But he knew that losing too much too soon was hazardous, especially when camping on Canadian Shield rock during cold nights exposed to the elements. One needed the nutrition from food to ward off illness and exhaustion; without it one's engine was in danger. And that was exactly what was happening during the last portage: there was nothing left but fumes left in the tank. Redbeard had been fortunate to have completed the last load from the canoe stashed below the portage trail.

Temagami was a world unto itself nestled deep in the true Canadian wilderness untainted by industry and the hand of man. The movement to stop logging was a force that had produced results up here. The Kapaskasing clear cut would soon reach Temagami's shores that approached from the northwest but would be considered a 'soft clear cut,' meaning they had to leave the immature trees for 30 years before returning to the same land. To preserve the untouched splendor of its natural beauty was the goal of the 'soft cut' while maintaining its self-sufficient ecosystem. But it was more than that to the diehards like Choppy Waters. The spirits here spoke to him, like the wind whistling through the pine needles and the shuffling in the woods, and the sounds of the water splashing against the cold rock and in the flapping of the beaver's tail – all for him a clear sign of communication from the animal spirits that permeate deeply in this land. The trapping Grey Owl hadn't caused extinction of the beaver in these parts; Redbeard had lost track of how many beaver lodges he'd seen, and they had crossed over a half-dozen beaver dams on the canoe. But it was the intimacy he had with the wildlife in their natural habitat that created a participation in the 'powerful play' of life, with the loons and the beavers and the Kingfishers and the turtles sunning themselves on the rock by the shore in the crystalline waters leading the charge. Canoeing in Temagami was a personal experience, a direct journey inside the wild that could only be achieved through effort, sweat and canoeing. For the most part it could not be described with words. History whispered between the pines along an old Native portage trails that had been in continuous use among the Anishinabek for more than 5000 years. There was both insurmountable joy and pained hardship, accomplishment and death in the old campsites and sacred cliffs of this part of the Canadian forests. It was a living thing, and those otters and fowl had shared that history in their antecedents, as did the *People of the Deep Waters* on Bear Island and all over Temagami. When the fire was lit, ancestral grandfather spirits gravitated to the orange flame like a portal, dancing with the flame looking back at you knowing if you are just or not, and whether you respect Mother Earth - treating her as you would like others to treat you. The urgency of life was awakened and the necessities were whittled down leaving the raw qualia of experience.

Back at camp, he could see Choppy again hadn't slept many hours last night, choosing to sleep on the grass in front of the Golden Staircase.

"Hardly slept a wink," he said. "I don't know why." He looked tired and dazed, and he kept that dazed look all day. At dinnertime he was listless and doing head-bobs. He couldn't focus despite his Olympic efforts. It didn't bode well for departure tomorrow. It looked like he was losing his wind - and perhaps his will.

“The falls didn’t keep you up last night?”

“No, in fact it lulled me to sleep right off the bat,” Redbeard replied, his cheeks ruddy and tanned, new wrinkles formed around his eyes.

“It didn’t bother you?” He blinked and rubbed his eyes, and reached for his coffee cup with shaking hands.

“No, good vibe here. Lots of history. Were you thinking about Gina? About the last time you were here?” Choppy stroked his chin briskly.

“No, well yeah. I can’t help think about her here. This was our spot. But no, not especially.” The palsy returned when he drank more from his thermos.

“Get some closure...”

“I have closure, for the most part. But yeah, here would be good place to do that.”

“Heal.” Choppy suddenly lied down on his Hudson’s Bay blanket.

“Mmm.” He lay there under the sun for the next four hours while Redbeard and Schopenhauer went fishing, though, despite a good lure, didn’t catch any in the shallow waters.

As he fished he thought more about Choppy. He reckoned that Choppy Waters had been using Redbeard as a helper and catalyst to return to Temagami and to heal from his divorce from Gina all along. It was his idea to go to the waterfall and then take a day to think things through. He wanted to go to these places he and Gina had visited when they had been here nearly ten years ago. Choppy all along had planned to drop off Redbeard and Schopenhauer after two weeks and attend the reunion without him. That was why he had purchased so many supplies - to make it to the end of September. Redbeard had been scheduled back at work on August 21st after a two-week canoe trip in Temagami, but Choppy had postponed the trip for a week, and then two. That’s when Redbeard had a romantic rendezvous with Charlotte in French River and squeezed in some canoeing. Redbeard lost his job over it but it was only about a month’s worth of work and the canoe trip in Temagami with the canoeing master Choppy Waters on his home turf of Grey Owl country had become a must-seize opportunity that was not to be missed. And since he now had the pure block of time he needed for a memorable journey, he said yes to the full trip, a month long if need be.

“Let’s explore the lakes,” he had said. “I’m in” he had replied.

At this point Redbeard had only heard secondhand stories of his old university friend’s strange behavior since graduating from university through mutual friends. He had heard stories of bad business dealings and arrests for drug possession to camping in parks in Toronto to living in a steam bathhouse in the

seedy area downtown, but he had dismissed it as Choppy Waters' eccentricity and hyperbole. He had always been a little nutty, but that's one of the reasons why he thought Choppy was interesting. Besides, they would be visiting in Choppy's favorite milieu. But Choppy's fundamental allegiance to his own agenda and his inability to play it straight was leading to what he now had to call a breakdown. Holding the food hostage after the longest pulls was behavior Redbeard could not have foreseen. The notion of Choppy not pulling his own weight for a day or two - or ten - of touch paddling through dangerous waters would have defied logic before they left. He would have thought Choppy would have been at the forefront of the paddling through the hard stuff because that was the marrow of the trip - the why and the how of canoeing. But now he was putting Redbeard's real estate career in jeopardy over getting to a telephone was the one that required action on his part. He had just purchased a duplex and had speak to his lawyer about the mortgage and confirm the new tenant. The man, he had come to learn, could not be trusted, and would continue to break promises and tell half-truths until the final return to Temagami village.

But he needed Choppy to return to civilization. He could not paddle with his dog back on his own with all the gear. Nor could he piss this man off and run the risk of being abandoned.

Redbeard didn't know the exact word - schizoid? - for Choppy's condition, but it could be characterized by extreme mood swings, following a routine obsessively, lying, immaturity, and obsessive spending of money when he had it. His extreme body odor too had something to do with his illness, as did with the way he dressed - as if it was done to shock others. His ups and downs had Redbeard thinking Choppy was bipolar. The manic phases followed by long periods of despair without speaking, was plain for him to see during their trip. He also wasn't sure if it was physiological or emotional. His dramatic split from Gina and ripping apart of his heart - because he truly loved her - suggested emotional healing was required. Choppy still visited her once a week despite the fact she had been in a relationship with another man for four years. Perhaps he still harbored hope for reconciliation and maybe that was why his emotional body was wrecked and mangled and was thus still injured. He talked about Gina a lot and sometimes verbally told himself to shut up because he didn't think Redbeard wanted to hear it, but every time Redbeard had insisted he talk to get it out so he could move along the path to healing.

The two portages it took to get to the waterfall were not for Redbeard but for Choppy, to be there on the same patch of grass to relive those romantic moments

with his ex-wife, were monumental and necessary. This trip was his attempt to heal his heart with the love of his life. One simply could not flourish with a broken heart.

Redbeard had underestimated Choppy's love for Gina and his subsequent devastation. He was now a victim of the ramifications of the break up. Choppy's injury had affected his ability to enjoy and perform the art of canoe tripping. He had always figured he could help Choppy Waters excise his emotional turbulence and have closure with his past, so that his level-headedness would return. It took two to paddle a canoe, and the idea of being left stranded four days from civilization was too much even to consider. But he did consider it now as a possibility. Redbeard had seen Choppy's madness in his eyes. Maybe he was too far-gone to retrieve himself back to the world of rational men. There was hope this time for healing, but it could also backfire, instead turning him angrier and bitterer. Things were precarious for Redbeard. Choppy could go either way.

Sixteen

Change of Route

Fourth Week

The roar of the Golden Staircase waterfall was still roaring in the misty morning when Redbeard and Schopenhauer stepped out of the tent. Choppy was already up and packing.

"Had a good sleep last night," he said, sounding chipper.

"Good dreams?"

"Yes. There were a bunch of young girls and they all had moustaches. It was a bit strange. Some sort of game show." He shook his head.

"Was Gina in it?"

"Yes, she was there, watching. She was one of the judges."

"Closure?"

"Who knows?"

"Was she wanting what she gave up seven years ago?"

"*Exactly.*" He nodded and went back to packing up the gear. Redbeard followed suit and soon they portaged back to their canoe and were in a heavy sweat before they stepped into the boat.

Down the North Channel they paddled to the next set of falls where another portage was required.

“Frank’s Falls. Wonder what the original Ojibwa name is? I mean ‘Frank’s Falls’ has no meaning.”

“Wish I knew. Check the map.” Redbeard did that but there was no name given for the falls.

They had planned to move up the North Channel to Willow Island Lake and then do two half-kilometer portages over to the south end of Lady Evelyn Lake and then down Diamond Lake, retracing some of their steps, but at least they would be back in the south, only a day or two from the closest telephone and close to the location of the Temagami reunion. They paddled swiftly, well-rested after the day off at the Golden Staircase Falls, and nipped over to the channel of Willow Island Lake where they again cruised swiftly after taking a pipe.

So in tune were they now that they were moving a mile every ten minutes, crossing the open waters of Willow Island Lake without hardly a word. Redbeard’s paddling technique was honed and his upper body strengthened from 30 days in the bush. Soon another pipe was in order so they stopped on a peninsula and had a bite to eat.

“You know, we’re close to the portage – down there past the next point on the left, but we have another choice,” said Choppy. “We could keep going south here and hit the long portage straight to Diamond.” Redbeard knew it was a very long portage, but the other portage looked longer on the map. But right now he just wanted to continue paddling. This gliding atop the surface was what it was all about!

“How long is the portage to Diamond?”

“It’s long. The portage is down this ancient gorge where the water used to connect with Diamond Lake.”

“How long?” They had just passed the spot to take the portage.

“I think it’s 188 chains.”

“And what is that in feet or meters?”

“It’s four kilometers.”

“Wait, the portage is four kilometers long?”

“Yep, one way. So each load would be eight kilometers. Three loads each, it adds up, but it could save some time.” The idea of carrying 800 pounds over 24 kilometers of hilly, uneven rock did not sound inviting. He looked over his shoulder at the entrance to the shorter portage.

“Two and a half loads, that’s, what? Over 20 kilometers of carrying heavy loads?”

“It’s a museum back in time in there. Famous long portage, old and one that the hard-core boys do.” He knew his last words were said to entice.

“We’re paddling fast today.” Choppy moved his arm around, wincing in pain from his ‘canoe shoulder.’

“You’re stronger and can carry the heaviest packs now.” It was true. His shirt was off in the hot sun and his upper body had reformed and fortified, but climbing sharp rocks for 20km with a hundred pounds on your back was different than going for a 20km hike.

“What if we can’t get through? I’m assuming it’s not used a lot because it’s so long.”

“It’s used.”

“But what if it’s overgrown or too boggy and we simply are unable to get through to Diamond?”

“The only way to know is to go.” He was confident and appeared serious. They smoked a pipe and studied their luggage.

“Do you think we could do it in three loads?”

“You know what we should do, we should repack some of the bags to make them heavier so we have less loose stuff to worry about.” Redbeard thought it a good idea since there was more space in the food bags. So they emptied the canoe, repacked the big bags and counted them, dividing each into a load. Each bag was now heavier.

“We could get there before sundown and take a load and return to the campsite at the mouth of the trail.” There was no campsite at the other end according to the map.

“Sneak in one load and recce the portage piece,” said Redbeard.

“We could do the other two loads tomorrow. Make a day of it. And then get to the west end of Diamond Lake where there’s an old cabin. You have to see it.”

Despite the mileage they had put in paddling on the water, Redbeard’s left hand was tender and still establishing calluses where the wood bit. Blisters were only a day away. Besides, he had been pulling most of the weight in the canoe that his hand was actually bruised. Surprisingly, Redbeard found himself considering the portage.

“A trip back in time you say?” The poet in him was indeed enticed.

“It’s all old gorge where the water used to rush through. The rock face there is wild.” Choppy’s enthusiasm was back, and that seemed more important than going against his navigational advice. Maybe a challenging portage was what Choppy needed to satisfy his urge for spice, whether on the water or carrying a canoe on his shoulders through the woods.

“The old timers call it ‘*the two-and-a-half miler.*’” When he said that he knew that Grey Owl must have taken this path in the past.

“It would be a feather in your cap at the reunion,” said Redbeard. “Oh, Choppy Waters, what have you been doing? Canoeing much?” ‘Yes, actually. Just did a month around Temagami, north and south, and took on the two-and-a-half miler portage from the South Channel of Lady Evelyn River to Diamond.’ You’ll arrive in style with some recent mileage.” Choppy enjoyed that.

“Might be tight squeezing in a load tonight,” he said. “Maybe a full day hit tomorrow. It’s nearly five and we’re two pipes away.”

“Maybe, but it would be an accomplishment if we did it.” Again, there was that unstated challenge.

“Okay then, let’s get going.”

Back on the water they resumed their swift pace, skimming atop the surface on calm waters past the open waters of Willow Island Lake. They came to the turn off to their planned route.

“Well, what do you think?”

“Let’s keep going,” replied Redbeard. And down they went, through the narrows at the end of Willow Island Lake and into the South Channel. The rock walls made the cruising sexy down to the elbow where the river turned west, facing the setting sun. But they faced two setting suns: the sun in the sky and the sun shining off the water. Momentarily blinded, Redbeard paddled topless deeper into the channel, quiet and daunting, once a fast river but now slightly flooded and slow. There was no shade going due west at the most southern end of the South Channel. They passed some choice sites to camp but determined it wise to camp at the crappy campsite at the mouth of the two-and-a-half miler. And sure enough, as Choppy said, it was a small, crappy campsite, but the trail had allure, as if it were a path into the center of the earth.

Seventeen

The Two-and-a-Half Miler

Fourth Week

Redbeard awoke early, eager to get the portage going but Choppy again was in bad spirits. His slouched shoulders, extreme body odor and his slow movements bespoke pain in both body and mind. Redbeard poured himself last night’s cold tea.

“There’s still tea in the kettle,” he said to Choppy. Redbeard thought it might be another episode of his illness. Instead of tea, he went up to Schopenhauer and began patting her behind a tree. He casually glanced over and he was patting her haunches. He had told Choppy that Schopenhauer was going into heat and let her be. But yesterday, when the dog ran ahead and met Choppy at the canoe, Redbeard saw him feeding her pepperoni. He didn’t say anything then because he was afraid he would become upset and not want to continue south, but he knew why the dog hadn’t touched her dog food. But there, just behind the trees, Choppy was bending down and being downright inappropriate with his dog. It was embarrassing.

“Umm, you may be being a little over affectionate, don’t you think?” Choppy was scratching her ass with some gusto.

“What? I can’t pat her?” It was such an obvious offside, Redbeard didn’t want to put it into words.

Then Choppy Waters walked back to his tent, sat on a fallen log and smoked. Redbeard sipped his tea and began packing up. As usual in the morning, when they’re packing up their tent, they don’t say much, instead focusing on the journey at hand. When his tent was packed, Redbeard packed his big army knapsack and tied it up. He was ready to get an early start on the 24 kilometers that lay before him.

“That one’s done,” he said. Choppy was smoking and staring at the water. He wasn’t ready to go. Redbeard was soon all packed up and ready but Choppy was still pouting at the edge of the campsite.

“I think I’m going to go ahead.” There was no reply. So he and Schopenhauer started down the trail.

“You should clean the pots!” yelled Choppy. Redbeard stopped on the trail.

“Pots?”

“It’s not nice to leave the dishes!”

“Ah, I was thinking we could eat that spaghetti after the first load, so no need for the dishes yet.” If Choppy wanted to be in a snit then he would let him be in a snit. He was going to conquer this portage without being hampered by Choppy’s fragile mental state. He resumed his way through the first and easiest phase of the two-and-a-half miler.

Down the well-worn trail of soil and moss between the tall pines and ragged spruce, some undergrowth obstructed the trail but otherwise the first of the four phases of the portage wasn’t difficult. The bent straps of the army knapsack dug into his shoulders, more so because of the other 50-pound knapsack hanging from his right shoulder. Redbeard was also carrying the bag of firewood in his left hand.

“Not as difficult as the one to the falls, is it?” he said to Schopenhauer. Then he hit the muddy area. Deep, soft puddles of black muck marred the trail. There were some side trails to walk around the mud but mostly Redbeard had to walk right through it. The tricky thing he learned quickly was the sharp, uneven rocks that lay hidden. When the hard rubber sole of his boot snagged an edge of a rock on a steep angle, it could be painful and dangerous because the second step came so fast. And if the second step was uneven, then the third step determined whether you fell over or not.

Without a lot of rain over the last three weeks of summer, the mud was passable, especially as the muckier it became, the more side-trail detours there were. At the end of the second phase of the portage, it was dangerous: hopping from rock to rock over deep black peaty mud. Once he had negotiated that he stepped onto four birch trunks and rolled over the final leap to the high bedrock, into the third phase of the portage.

Redbeard then climbed the steep hill of rock and pine needles over tree roots and awkward rock spacing to a mellow part of the trail. Here he switched the pack to the left shoulder and left the 50-pounder on his back. Climbing higher and at an angle, he passed through an ancient forest of sky-kissing white pines with massive trunks. It became narrow at a bend that took him to a boggy marsh, and the beginning of the final phase to the water's edge.

Redbeard had never portaged in a bog before so he wisely followed the faint tracks of other portagers, but his first step into it took his foot down ten inches. It was watery under the peat moss and grass. Each step had to be on safe ground. The sweat dripped off his eyebrows and his shirt was soaked with sweat but he could see the lake. That's when he became careless. He took a shorter path over some peat bog and sank up to his kneecaps followed by a quick second step. The momentum with the hundred pounds on his back hurled him forward. Then he stood up and began to sink. He leaned back, flung the firewood and knapsack behind him and then removed the stiff World War Two knapsack. Still, he was sinking. He grabbed grass behind him and lifted his left foot upwards but the suction wouldn't allow him to lift his foot. The water and mud seeped into his boots, he tried again and then his right foot but he was stuck. He leaned back and pulled at his left boot with his hands yanking the heel up to break the suction. It came higher but his fingertips slipped off the top of the slippery leather boot because of the mud. He wiped his hands, took a good grip and pulled high enough that air snuck in under the heel. Another few pulls and his left foot was out, which only deepened his right foot. He tried the same technique but it was so deep it took a half-dozen tries to finally break free.

Redbeard started to laugh.

“Bloody quicksand!” Schopenhauer was there wagging her tail, interested in the proceedings. He just sat on the warm grass and breathed hard trying to see the humor of the occasion.

“I wonder how many have died stuck in a bog,” he said to Schopenhauer. She looked at him curiously.

Covered in mud, he slogged the packs onto his back and gently stepped through the sinking mush below his feet back towards the safety of terra firma, then hopped from log to rock and rock to rock to avoid the black muck. When he reached the bedrock at its mouth, he started to hurry causing his wet feet to slip. The final hundred meters were perhaps the toughest. Through encroaching foliage, small rocks at awkward upward angles were interspersed too tight to manage well, but the step to the second stone was a bit too far. Stubbing his toe, he lunged forward but was able to make it to the open rock on the shore where there was a docking area and fire pit.

“Made it little puppy dog,” he said, looking at his watch. It had taken them an hour and a half. They relaxed for 20 minutes and drank water from Diamond Lake before they returned for the second load.

On the way back Choppy was sitting off the trail in the rocky hill section having a smoke. His two packs were on the trail.

“Oh! Choppy! I didn’t see you.” He stared at Redbeard with venom in his eyes and said nothing.

“How’s it going?” Still, no answer so they kept going north. Then, about a kilometer down the trail, Redbeard saw their canoe leaning against two trees.

“Ah, that looks like our canoe,” he said to his dog. Just then he heard someone behind him. It was Choppy Waters.

“Oh man!” Redbeard was startled. “I didn’t hear you.” Choppy only stared at the canoe, so Redbeard and Schopenhauer kept going. Past the boggy area, he was close to the campsite when he heard footsteps behind him.

“Choppy!” The same angry look was in his eyes, so the three of them arrived at camp together.

“Do you want some of this spaghetti?” Instead of answering like a normal person, he gave Redbeard the thumbs up. Redbeard laughed. “Okay.” He served himself and could hardly eat it because of the heavy salmon sauce, a Choppy favorite. He hated the taste of salmon. He gave most of it to his dog. Choppy took his portion so Redbeard washed the pots and placed them beside the wanegan so Choppy could pack it his preferred and special way.

Choppy had left him the heavy 180-pound load as the last one. No problem, he thought, I can take each bag separately, and so he untied the tumpline and took Choppy's big green pack on his shoulders.

"Could you tie the tumpline on this bag for me?" Again the blazing eyes of the sun were silent so Redbeard and his dog left for their second load.

After reaching Diamond Lake again, he doubled back for his last load, finding Choppy on the way sitting and smoking beside the canoe.

"I would recommend taking the left route down there in the bog." The silent treatment continued so off he and his dog went. At the campsite Choppy hadn't tied the tumpline so he was forced to carry both bags: one bag on his back and the other held in his arms.

"This last one is going to be murder," he said. Schopenhauer wagged her tail. Off they went for the last load, arriving just ahead of Choppy Waters.

Sitting near each other on Diamond Lake, Choppy stared mutely at the water. After all the work, Redbeard could only grab some trail mix at the end of the day. Choppy smoked and then it occurred to Redbeard that Choppy wasn't just sulking about being caught with the dog; he was going through marijuana withdrawal. That was the reason for the madness in his eyes. He had been smoking weed for so long that the physiological dependency was substantial. A slight inkling of fear hit Redbeard upon remembering that Choppy had once been institutionalized for marijuana addiction. He hadn't been clear about the incident that had precipitated his parents and Gina forcing him into drug rehab for a month. The unpredictability of Choppy's behavior, and the look he had in his eye like he was about to snap, was beginning to make Redbeard very uncomfortable. The simple truth was that Redbeard didn't know how to handle another's mental instability.

Perhaps it would have been easier if Redbeard didn't care for his friend, but he did. Genuinely. He had always respected him and had considered him a kindred spirit. Choppy had been a very instrumental figure in his life. During his senior year at university, as a fellow philosophy student, it had been Choppy Waters who had given him a Hermann Hesse novel to read. *Narcissus and Goldmund* changed Redbeard's path in life, and had inspired him to choose an authentic life. For this reason alone Charlie Boyle always had importance to his life. He was the one who gave him that book that showed him the Goldmund way. But if he were to be completely honest, the two of them didn't know each other that well since then. They had kept in touch through a mutual friend and had always talked of a canoe trip in Temagami. It had taken 20 years to materialize, but finally it had. But it also had its risks: Redbeard had heard of his brushes with the law, his sleeping in city parks by choice, his divorce and

his stint in rehab, so to suddenly throw themselves together for over a month in the deep bush with strenuous portages and severe food rationing and unaddressed drug addiction, was potentially a deadly situation. If there was an eruption, Redbeard and Schopenhauer could be in dire straits and abandoned. Choppy had already been arrested once by the police for abandoning his canoe group; he had put the lives of the teenage kids in danger. No that he was out of his marijuana supply, which he always said he used to manage his mental illness, would he abandon Redbeard? Only time would tell.

Eighteen

Alex

Fifth Week

Choppy was now talking but was flat on his back on the bedrock peninsula.

“My back. That portage wrecked me.” He groaned in pain as Redbeard sipped tea and smoked a cigarette, squinting into the sun. Redbeard was being very careful not to cause his friend to react badly, using finesse and grace.

“Yes, that was quite a piece. *Serial empirical data.*”

“I think I pinched my sciatic nerve. I just-“ He stopped and gingerly stretched. “I just have to lie here for a little while. The portage really took a lot out of me.” He let him be and began to pack. He came out later where Choppy was still prone on his back. He thought he may have just the thing. He pulled out the last of his own stash of marijuana and rolled a joint.

“This is the last of it,” he said.

“Cheers,” he replied. In a moment the old Choppy was back, talking of past exploits and gawking at the hundreds of Canada Geese flying south overhead. Soon they were packed and were off down the lake to the narrows where they undertook another portage. It proved very difficult over boulders and tight passageways. It was only half a kilometer but Redbeard had to work hard to get through it in one piece. The 100-pound pack had a momentum that was dangerous when his footing still wasn't firm. Nonetheless, at the other end was Pencil Lake – a small lake with no creeks: just a large pond surrounded by 100-foot-high rock faces.

The paddle to the next portage was three minutes.

“This one should be easier,” said Choppy, favoring his bad hip.

“Hope so. That last one was harsh.” The second half-kilometer portage was straight forward, and put them on the northern tip of Wakimika Lake. They paddled

through the narrows until they reached a very thin bottleneck. It was there where the sandy beach was and where the arrests at the blockade 20 years ago took place.

"I wonder if anyone is at this campsite?" They both stopped paddling, hoping to hear voices. Redbeard heard a voice.

"I heard someone," he said. "It was a woman." They coasted through a ten-foot wide channel to the open waters when a voice from the campsite said:

"Choppy?"

A woman had recognized him from the unique Templeton plaid he always wore.

"Catherine?"

"No, Tory."

"Tory!" They turned their canoe and headed for the shore of the beach. A man walked down from the tent towards the vessel.

"Choppy Waters!"

"Constantine! Kway. Kway. What are the chances?" It was the guide he had been with when he had been arrested at Camp Keewatin years ago.

They rolled up on shore and stepped onto the beach. Constantine and his girlfriend Tory were happy to see an old face and invited them to stay at their campsite on the beach. It was after dinner when they learned the site of the reunion had been moved.

"They changed it. The reunion is at Alex's place." They looked at each other.

"Lucky we bumped into you," they both said, laughing.

"We're on our way there now because he has to make a telephone call."

"An important call."

"Well there are already some people there," said Constantine.

"It was a last-minute change," said Tory. "You've been out in the forest too long." After dinner they sat around the campfire. Redbeard recalled Choppy saying that Constantine was one of his best friends, so it was strange when Constantine asked how many years it had been since they had last spoken.

There was no mention of the incident involving the canoe trip gone awry.

Each partnership has spent the day paddling hard so the socializing around the campfire wasn't full of beer and singing and whatnot. It was more a direct exchange of canoeing information. They were most interested in the 'two-and-a-half miler they had conquered, Constantine knowing the rigors involved. He was a big man with reddish-blond hair, arms like tree trunks, and a face stained with a canoer's life - wrinkles enlivened when he smiled and laughed. Tory was quiet and strong, just like her husband. She took a liking to Schopenhauer who knew she was

a fellow female. Aware that there was an unspoken history between the two protagonists of the region, Redbeard focused on eating as much as he could from the food they had available, a hunger he had seldom experienced ever before. They shared some of their wine but it only served to make him sleepy, soon retiring for the night, enjoying the sounds of the water striking the shallow sandy beach they were on.

In the morning they woke early and left the beautiful beach for Wakimika River, but on the way Choppy suggested they stop on an island that was said to have petroglyphs. The wind devils were back on the open waters on Wakimika, so Choppy went way out into the choppiest waters in the middle of the lake where the white caps splashed over the gunnels and soaked Redbeard and Schopenhauer. Sensing immediate danger, the dog sought refuge by putting her head on his lap. This made his robust paddling more difficult. Constantine, also an ex-Keewatin guide, paddled with Tory along the shoreline, straight for the island, where there were no white caps. The couple paddled nonchalantly, looking over at their canoe way out in dangerous waters. Redbeard huffed it, stroking each giant wave, wondering when Choppy was going to tack.

They were far off course.

“Can you draw to the left,” he yelled up to Redbeard. He put the draw stroke in and turned the bow so that they were now hitting the waves at an angle, and surfing towards Constantine. The waves still pummeled them near the center of the lake. Redbeard was grinning at Choppy’s dramatic canoeing hyperbole, and when he found the other canoe again looking at them he saw wonderment and surprise on their faces.

Schopenhauer held firm and didn’t shake, taking the waves splashing onto her back in stride. She had adapted nicely to the canoeing life. He paddled strong and clean, fighting the wind with the face of his paddle, keeping it digging into the troughs until they had escaped the white caps. They were going faster than Constantine’s canoe and had thrice the weight.

They soon slipped behind the other boat and docked on the island and began looking for petroglyphs that were discovered only a few years ago in 2004. Redbeard was expecting them to be on the waterside but Constantine found the petroglyphs facing the island. There were rock carvings of a moose, a baby moose, a man running, an eagle, a turtle, a bird and perhaps a canoe and lake. They were chiseled with perhaps a diamond tip against the granite. Diamonds were common here. There was a local saying in Temagami: ‘If you find a yellow birch, dig behind it for a diamond.’

“What do you think it means?” asked Constantine, who was seeing them for the first time.

“I don’t know. I was just wondering the same thing.” He pointed in front of him. “If that man, here, running, represents a boy, and here, in front of him, if that’s a canoe and this chiseled line above it is water, then this baby moose here is his first kill, signifying his graduation to manhood. And this big moose represents the pinnacle of hunting prowess and courage, then this thing here...” He pointed at the eagle. “I think it may be an eagle or a thunderbird, signifying his graduation to the spirit world.”

“Yes, I can see that.” He took off his sunglasses. “You think this is a canoe?”

“Could be.”

“Or it could be part of the decay of the bedrock.”

“But it has the same pounded marks, as if it was done by the same hand as the others.”

“Yes.” Choppy and Tory sat side by side on the rock as Redbeard and Constantine studied possible meanings of the petroglyphs.

“And what about this one here?” He pointed at the image above the running man.

“Could be a turtle, or a well hung man.” They shared a laugh and said their good-byes and went separate ways.

Choppy again chose to paddle as far as possible into the white caps so that Redbeard assumed the mouth of the river was on the south shore rather than the east shore. Choppy Water’s steered the canoe and once again the waves threatened to tip the vessel. Redbeard dug in for his and his dog’s life, and paddled hard to overcome the resistance.

“The mouth of the river is on the south shore?”

“No, it’s to the left. I’m taking the waves at an angle.” It was the same thing as before. But suddenly Choppy steered east, letting the west wind push them to shore. He could have avoided all the dramatics and risks if he had surfed it in earlier. Aware that now the weed was gone and Choppy was going through withdrawal, he was again extra careful when they interacted.

Redbeard was finally able to enjoy the waves pushing them to the east shore to the tiny mouth of the Wakimika River. Reaching the calm, narrow river was like entering a new world. The wind disappeared and a ten-foot wide stream strewn with fallen trees and beaver lodges and deadheads wound through a dense, lush jungle of cedars and pine and scraggly spruce. Grass and bushes hung over the water’s edge and the water was still and soupy, and littered with water spiders.

Redbeard drew and counter-drew to avoid the debris of nature's effuse and nudge through the overgrown foliage.

"There must be moose in here."

"Yes, and bears," said Choppy. Drinking holes and animal footprints in the mud spoke of a rich wildlife population, like Africa early last century.

The Wakimika River meandered through like a river-road maze, all heading east. Birds flew out to the water from the mud shores and dragonflies followed them, wondering what kind of animal they were. Then they hit a beaver dam. It was constructed between an old bridge that had been taken down.

"They blew the bridge but the beaver built it back," said Choppy.

"Look at the difference in water levels."

"We might be able to get over."

"Let's take a closer look." They paddled right up to the edge.

"We're going to go over," said Redbeard, alarmed.

"No we won't." They bumped into the wood and mud dam. "We can do a lift-over if we both do it, but we need to let Schopenhauer out of the boat first." They paddled to the shore and she jumped off, then they stepped onto the beaver dam and swung the stern back and the bow forward. Slowly they lifted it over the wood sticks until the tipping point when it plunged five feet. The bow bounced off the water and the canoe flew down the chute of sticks. Choppy Waters held on and slid over the dam, losing his footing and raising a hand high in the air. His feet slid but he was able to land on some sticks and keep hold of the canoe with one hand. Amazing physical strength and coordination. Truly a master.

"Trooper," said Redbeard, who traversed along the mud and slippery piles of wood sticks along the top of the dam, and stepped into the canoe with his dog on the other side.

Down the river they soon reached a large pond surrounded by high golden grass, secluded and safe, where they had a much-needed pipe. Farther down river the meandering waterway widened and became grassier as they approached Obabika Lake. Suddenly they entered a field of long green reeds growing out of the water opening up to a far rocky shore and deep blue water. They had reached Obabika Lake. Just around the corner they landed on Alex's beach. Redbeard had made it back to within reach of civilization.

And within reach of his phone call.

Choppy approached the house as Redbeard tied up Schopenhauer to a tree, knowing some Natives didn't like dogs off-leash. He could see Choppy speaking to Alex through the window.

Redbeard immediately felt respect for Alex. He had character on his face. With a full head of hair back in a ponytail under a black Mountie hat, he looked like a chief. His face, as if chiseled by the local diamond, had the lines of experience that bespoke of a substantial history.

Redbeard could tell that Alex regarded Choppy not with respect but with an amused suspicion, as if in possession of his half-truths and the discord he had sown over the last eight years. It was as if Alex Mathias could see the demons in the man, especially at his home and on his own land. Alex was kind enough, inviting them both into his home. Choppy caught upon the last eight years he had missed and learned many things, but many names Redbeard had heard Choppy speak of in unpleasant terms, would be at Alex's place for the reunion in the next day or so. He gave Choppy and Redbeard permission to camp for the night on his beach but that they should go to the neighboring campsite to make sure no one goes there who isn't part of the reunion. But to Redbeard, he could see Choppy's subtle reaction, realizing that he was not going to be among those invited to stay on Alex's property. Too many past wrongs had sullied the waters between them and wrecked any trust any rational person could have for him. Even when he met Alex, the head of the Masabi clan and custodian of the Masabi land, Choppy didn't even offer him tobacco. The first thing Redbeard did was nod respectfully as he shook his hand and then offered him one of his very last cigarettes.

It did not go unnoticed.

"Hap Wilson wrote a book," he said to Choppy. Hap was his ex-business partner. Alex handed a book to Choppy pointing at his portrait in headdress that took the whole page.

"That's a beautiful portrait," he said truthfully. Alex looked at him in the eye.

"It's painting that he got into the book." Alex Mathias was decked out in eagle headdress and full regalia looking timeless and majestic.

"It's a classic," he said looking at the powerful eyes under the heavy eyebrows. "And timeless." He nodded and then handed the open page to Choppy. He only glanced at it and began flipping the pages and removed his black Mountie hat.

"A few years back." Choppy studied the cover. His eyes narrowed.

"That's me!" He pointed at the canoe on the river where a huge forest fire raged. "That's me there." But rather than excitement there was a cold edge to his voice. Redbeard sensed it and looked at Alex. He sensed it too.

"You're in the stern?" asked Redbeard to deflect.

“Yes! Of course.” He held it out as if it were his portrait, hoping for some praise. “It was on our Hudson’s Bay trip.” Choppy shook his head at the memory. “The fire. It was so hot.” Choppy Waters had completely forgotten about Alex Mathias’ portrait as he handed the book back to Alex, closed. In the silence that followed, the game show on the television could be heard.

Schopenhauer was barking on the beach.

“Your dog?”

“Yes. She’s tied up. I hope that’s okay.”

“What kind of dog is it?”

“Border collie,” he answered. “And she’s in heat.” Alex laughed from the gut.

“She’s come to the right place. All males here and only one cut.” Alex and Redbeard laughed and readjusted their hats at the same time, and then both looked at Choppy who wasn’t laughing. The dog barked again.

“I should go check on her.” Alex nodded and he left. Choppy and Alex needed their own time together. They had to talk business.

Schopenhauer was wild. Jumping and all tied up in her leash, panting with a wild look on her face. Perhaps some separation anxiety, her one eye was ablaze at the potent whiff of six huskies. She pawed him in fright and arousal, reassured Redbeard was back. Schopenhauer was affected by the spirits here. The beach was a couple hundred meters long, big enough with clear water protected from the prevailing winds by a peninsula. Surrounded by pines and huge birch trees, the log cabin was winterized with a woodstove and second floor loft. A smaller cabin was close by and a third was being built for his pregnant daughter. The four big dogs were kept away from the log cabin by the entrance of the road. An old black husky named Cujo, was the sole guard of Alex’s log cabin, slow in his movements but still a force with a keen eye. And then there was Bud, who was the only one off a leash – the smart one, gentle and careful and observant. It was Bud who approached Schopenhauer, slowly and fairly. She growled and then snarled at Bud, who nimbly withdrew from her. Schopenhauer was frantic.

Redbeard calmed her down and returned to the log cabin. They had had their talk. Choppy’s cheeks were flushed. Just then some friends of Alex’s dropped by. The dogs barked at the arrival of the vehicles.

“Friends,” he said, getting up.

“I’m hungry bud,” said Choppy. “I think we’re going to put on some vittles and pitch camp.” They went outside and they all chatted for a while until Choppy and Redbeard set up their tents and the very end of the sand beach. But before

Redbeard really got started, he took some papers from his waterproof kit and went back to the cabin.

“Want to use the phone now?”

“Yes, please, if I can.” He put down his beer and took Redbeard inside.

“It takes a second for the number to go through, but it works.”

“Thanks Alex.” He typed in the number, found out the good news and was more than satisfied. The real estate deal was finally done. And furthermore, the lawyer would take care of handing the keys to the new tenant.

“Back on the beach Redbeard enjoyed his relief and savored his elation but his buzz was wrecked a little because Choppy had become silent again.

“So how many nights are we staying here?” Redbeard was surveying a spot south of the fire pit.

“One night.”

“One night?”

“Tomorrow we’re going to the campsite where the ceremony takes place about half a pipe away to make sure others won’t camp on it before people begin to arrive.”

“Didn’t Alex say something about helping him with firewood?”

“No, he’s going to do that so we need to go to the site.” Choppy was intense and still flushed. Redbeard thought about dinner as he pitched his tent, but when it came to cooking, Choppy said he wasn’t hungry. That was when he realized Choppy was sliding into another downward funk.

They had been talking about having a big stew with rice thrown in and all sorts of other things. “Well, I’m going to have a soup.” He licked his lips. “Er, do you want to split it?” It was dark.

“Okay.” So that’s how Redbeard had half a soup for dinner, his first substantial meal in a fortnight.

Nineteen

Offside

Fifth Week

There were powerful spirits in play here on Obabika Lake. The native presence and their history were etched into the bedrock. The winds were active in the corridor of water, tickling the birch leaves and the poplars that lined the beach. Alex’s malamutes barked throughout the night, with one of the dogs losing his

barking voice by morning. Could they sense bad energy? Could they sense an unworthy interloper hampered by past mistakes with a heart of lies?

Choppy and Redbeard hung out during the day, chopped wood and built a picnic table instead of going to the campsite. Redbeard was able to meet the early birds who also pitched tents on the beach, though he still remained at the very end of the stretch of sand. Redbeard felt apart from it all; he was a third wheel but that didn't stop him from meeting some interesting and hardcore dudes. There was Bill from West Virginia, who was a Vietnam vet; Bryan who was a canoe outfitter in Woodstock; Dave from Wasaga Beach who bought and sold rare coins; and Ed, who had a PhD in chemistry and had just finished mapping some of remote areas in northeast of Ontario near James Bay. They all shared one thing in common: a passion for canoeing.

They were staying at Alex's for the Changing of the Seasons ceremony that was once an annual Native ceremony of Alex's Ojibwa ancestors that he had restarted seven years ago. It had grown into something important. Preparations for the ceremony kept them busy. Choppy wanted to get into Alex's good books so he labored over the firewood and tried to keep busy making himself valuable - and visible. His aim was to be invited to stay and work on the new cabin that was to be built before the snow expected next month. Choppy Waters was now speaking of living here at Alex's for a further month. He made sure Alex heard him when he spoke of his desire to help with the cabin but the invitation did not materialize. It only caused Choppy to redouble his efforts and to play the conscientious helper in front of all the guests, but it only lasted a few hours and he was soon drinking someone else's beer and smoking someone else's smokes.

In the morning, Choppy Waters was a sight gently walking down the beach with a somewhat rigid stride clutching toilet paper.

It wasn't until the afternoon of the second day that Choppy Waters snapped. Redbeard has expected it since he was without his marijuana, which he used as his medication to help with his moods. He knew Choppy was on a knife's edge. And the week-long ceremony was a powder keg because most of those attending knew Choppy and his dubious, immoral and uncool exploits. They admired his skills but not his character. But did they know of his underlying mental illness? Regardless, Alex had just asked him to leave for the island a half pipe away across the water that morning, so he had stamped back to his tent fuming.

"So what's happening with the camp?"

"We have to break camp." He could hear it in his voice. It was Redbeard who was going to be the target of his anger. "If you want to order anything, the time is

now.” Some of the guys were going to drive into town and get supplies, namely beer. He thought for a moment.

“Nah, we have enough food to get back. I think I’m all right.”

“You don’t want anything?”

“No. Nothing.” He stood there thinking.

“Is that money still available? Can I borrow ten bucks?”

“Sure,” he answered. He glared at Redbeard as if he had said ‘no.’ Just then Alex came onto the beach and strode up to Choppy.

“Why haven’t you left already?” said Alex, clearly upset at Choppy’s guile. “What’s wrong with you? You said you were going to help out but you sit on your ass. You don’t do anything. I asked you to leave yesterday. You sit around. I see you. You think I’m stupid?” Choppy got off his ass and was livid. He bowed his head to the chief and packed the remainder of the gear in the canoe. Alex stormed off with Bill, who looked at Choppy now as if he had crossed a line. He wasn’t welcome anymore, and Redbeard didn’t blame him. For some reason Choppy thought he could just waltz into Alex’s life again and interrupt a reunion with Alex’s personal friends before everyone arrived the next day. This was his blind spot – an inability to see clearly, clouded judgment born of impaired vision due to internal pain. His hoarding nature manifested itself by sponging off others, just as he had Redbeard. He drank beer that wasn’t his, which had been brought up for Alex. A blatant offside. Redbeard desperately wanted to quench his raging thirst with a cold beer but had purposely abstained from asking for that exact reason: not to offend the host. Etiquette. He knew Alex liked his beer and that it was a rare commodity in the bush, so out of respect he went without. But Choppy drank Alex’s beer, watched Alex work, came across as everyone’s buddy yet he had only met many of these accomplished paddlers, and then went into Alex’s dining room uninvited and stayed until the end, not giving the old friends their privacy to carouse. Redbeard had been invited inside by Dave to view some photos and promptly left when John, the hired hand, left, giving the drinking friends their own space.

Choppy had over-stayed his welcome, which was unannounced after eight years of silence.

Poor form all around from Choppy.

Adding to it was the fact that Alex had become very close with Hap Wilson, Choppy’s old business partner, who had been burned by Choppy’s inherent dishonesty. Fundamentally Choppy Waters was afflicted with a subjective guile that inevitably affected others because when there is dishonesty with the self, there can only be discord with others. Choppy Waters existed on shifting ground, like a water

spider on choppy waters: it defined his universe and world view. And people, once bitten by dishonesty, are very slow to forget. Alex had not forgotten. He remembered the rotten apple at its core. Despite the obvious charm, he knew what he was up to, just like Redbeard knew what he was doing with Schopenhauer. Until Choppy acknowledged this aspect of himself, he could only remain fractured. And a gooey figure.

To someone as objective as Redbeard, it was fascinating to witness.

Over at the campsite across the lake from Alex's cabin, he sat quietly with his head down not talking. He looked deflated and even embarrassed by being called on his offside by Alex, and Redbeard could only hope that he was becoming aware of his own shortcomings. He expected the pouting to continue for the day so he and Schopenhauer went on a long hike up the mountain to Spirit Rock. It was the only way to let him be alone in his own space and pout. The eleven-year-old boy was back. And all his medicine was gone.

Twenty

Changing of the Seasons

Fifth Week

People began to arrive at the campsite throughout the day. Redbeard and Choppy helped build the sweat lodge with thin, live birch branches and twine. It was a pleasant change to have people around. Choppy was quiet again but enjoyed the distractions of keeping the fire and doing some camp tasks. He put on a brave face despite his down mood under the new moon energy.

Alex approached Redbeard to say he would give him a spirit name during the ceremony, a surprise since he didn't ask him directly. Redbeard had only asked if he had ever given anyone a spirit name, which he had answered affirmatively. He said to ask him about it after three days. He figured that Alex had had a dream or vision or insightful thought into his spirit and thus had an idea of what his spirit was already. This was a good thing.

Very good.

"Great," he said, surprised. Alex was much friendlier now, having had some time to process things. He was a smart man and knew he was caught in the middle of something that had been festering for years. Redbeard had no idea what to think, but he felt centered and clear-headed - and most of strong. And he found tremendous strength from his very well-behaved dog Schopenhauer. Everyone loved

her. And she loved all the attention. Lots of smiling and tail-wagging. She kept looking at Redbeard full of glee.

The camp looked good for more arrivals expected tomorrow. Other than the select group of Alex's friends, there were now six here at the campsite: Choppy, Redbeard, Lawrence Mills the retired international banker and canoeing enthusiast, and Mel the architect with his two daughters. His nickname was Otter because of his long neck.

The weather had turned cold, but this had been expected. The cool winter weather and high winds ushered in the new season and the end of the year. Redbeard was able to break free to hike up to Spirit Rock where vision quests and fasts took place. It took him and Schopenhauer an hour to climb but it was worth it. The rock face and boulders with the hidden lake seemed like it was from another world. Truly it was a dreamer's rock - ideal for vision quests.

The first truly laidback, social day, despite the hunger in his belly, was the day before the actual ceremony around the sacred fire. Everyone was happy to be here, everyone except Choppy who felt left out. Choppy continued to pout throughout the day, which was noticed by most of the big players, such as Alex, Lawrence and Mel. By the end of the day there were over 30 people at Alex's, most of whom were friends and acquaintances of Choppy's. Clearly it must have been very tough on the guy watching all his old fellow canoers and camp friends sitting around the sacred fire on Alex's land a half pipe away while he camped at the campsite across the lake. To make matters worse, he had run out of cigarettes. Running out of weed was one thing but no nicotine spelled trouble. He was in a bad way. To deal with it he ate. All the best food he devoured without the knowledge of Redbeard: the beef jerky, the trail mix, the raisins were all decimated by his hunger. He wolfed them down in anger, breaking his martial fast and betraying the unwritten agreement between them to forego hunger in order to maximize their time in the wild.

But his temperament – his sullen gait – was more noticeable today, which left people suspicious of him. How can he be angry during such a time of celebration in such a place of beauty? It was Redbeard, and not Choppy, who was invited to the wedding at Alex's. But he wasn't sure how he was going to get there without Choppy. But ticked off and hungry as he was, Redbeard's heart felt for the guy. How awful and humiliating was this for him? Really. Each eruption of laughter across the lake was regarded as spiteful ridicule of old Charlie Boyle - reckless and ruthless, seeping with cunning and guile. Not to be trusted. Only to be admired from afar.

Redbeard tried to put it out of his mind because never had he ever seen such a group of doers. Joined by the common denominator of adventure, there appeared

accomplished canoeists from Ontario and Quebec that all saw a cause to fight for. Here, at Alex's, were men and women of action who knew the hardships of portaging and the ache of mileage in the face of prevailing winds. All had endured in some degree to be there, and these diehards who had shown their mettle in an understated way only witnessed by themselves and the eye of God. The only thing they carried with them now was demonstrative in their gait of unsung accomplishment. All knew the little things that were required to even show up. He could see it in their weathered faces – and hear it in their laughter. The guttural balls-to-Monty raucous that emitted from their bellies was of a cadence that only true outdoorsmen know. Beards, frayed edges and scratched canoes gathered on the tent-covered beachfront of Alex's. How many Hemingways could one expect at one gathering in the middle of the canoeing capital of the world?

Redbeard, who was an understated adventurer himself of many years unsung, never thought he would ever be in a group of fellow solo-adventurers, sitting on a beach around a campfire cooled by the southwest wind, connected and warmed by others who had also canoed the river roads of Temagami, portaged its connecting tissue and seen its petroglyphs. But it was all revolved around one man: the man who acted instead of talked: Alex Mathias. He, being the most understated of them all, commanded the most respect. He was the central point from whence all revolved. He exemplified that understated look of experience and true character that attracted the best of the lot – men who had canoed across Canada; men who go out into the wilderness to rediscover old *Nastawagan* trails to cut new portages; and men who cut new paths to help map areas of Canadian forests hither not mapped before.

They were pathfinders, and innovators.

These few solo men and women broke new ground by thinking outside the box.

These were the people who encircled the sacred fire, nonchalantly and modestly letting slip out their common belief that there was magic up here where the loons live - that the loon and the beaver and the otter are part of a community here that accepted these intrepid travelers just as a sailor is part of the community of the sea and its fish. After all canoers were essentially sailors: navigating by sexton and the night sky, following the North Star knowing they can never truly be lost. But the people here had more than tools; they had the proven instincts of *les courier be bois* because they lived that life and knew what it took to live and travel on the canoe.

Twenty-one

Manic

Sixth Week

The ceremony went well and most of the people there spent time in the sweat lodge and really got involved in it. Each was respectful of the Native drumming and the ceremony that took place to thank the Great Spirit for the fruits of summer and to ask for protection for the hardships of winter, with the promise of a new season poised to come into being after the end of winter. Redbeard did not understand the Ojibwa words Alex said as he held the burning sage above each person's head to cleanse the negative energies from their person to usher in this new era. Regardless of whether the warm season had brought harvest or not, each had survived and was now ending the year by washing away any negativity or bad energy. It was a cleansing ceremony and a new beginning.

There were quite a number of people who left the day after the ceremony, perhaps only interested in the ceremony itself, or maybe had other things to do such as return to work. But for Redbeard he was completely immersed in the scene, digging the vibe of these modern-day explorers who had arthritic hands and portage knees, tendonitis and hardened blisters. He had been accepted by them for his sunburn and new lines around his eyes from his six weeks in the bush, svelte and tanned and showing all the signs of being a fellow doer. He had been admitted into the small, exclusive clique that was closed to all soft-skinned, flabby ass talkers who only knew posturing and broken promises.

He spoke the language of action.

He had become accustomed to the hunger and was content to be with his dog and soak in canoeing culture in this surreal landscape of sandy beaches, bare granite and the smell of freshwater.

Choppy too had downshifted and had moved on from his pouting, turning a page and trying to get along with his lost friends from the past, but when one of the guys smoked a joint with him, things took a turn for the worse. When it was passed around, Choppy indulged. That's when the personality change happened. The insanity – the queer voice, the high-strung laugh, the jittery smile, the fervent effort to always talk – this insane man blustered his way to overstay his welcome at Alex's and insisted that he be the last to leave. He even adamantly remained after Alex had left. Redbeard lingered and loitered, patiently waiting for Choppy to pack up so they could leave for Temagami and end their six-weeks in the woods. To ensure he was the very last person at Alex's, he flirted with Alex's pregnant daughter. And for Redbeard, it was painfully embarrassing to witness. Some of the last men there had noticed too. They sympathized with Redbeard's plight, shaking their heads behind Choppy Waters' back.

Choppy had nothing to return to, but Redbeard did.

Now Choppy, in his mania, was making an effort to inherit Alex's land.

Natasha was flattered. She was only 21 and Choppy was 44. He even squatted in front of her so that his head was inches from her bosom in an obvious move to create sexual tension. She blushed but unbelievably showed interest. He was shameless. Alex would never allow any union with Choppy because he knew his was a false man.

On the beach, after the handyman John left the property, he sat close beside her with his legs spread open. The giggling on his part revealed a giddiness – a sparkling insanity – that spilled over into nervous ticks and non-stop talking. He tried to lure her through a smoky baritone whisper. Crass and cunning, he only sought to get on her good side to ensure he would be invited to return the following year. He was shameless, but it was brought on by this strange chemical reaction he had with marijuana.

When finally confronted by Redbeard, Choppy blurted out that he was not feeling well and that he would stay the night.

"I'm not going to stay here if Alex isn't here," said Redbeard. "It's just not right."

"I'm not leaving."

"If you're not feeling well sit in the bow and I'll paddle. We can go to the first campsite if you want. It's close by - maybe a pipe or two." It was late afternoon.

"No. But go on then. Take the canoe if you want." Redbeard realized immediately that this was what he wanted more than anything. He could paddle back to Temagami on his own with Schopenhauer. Choppy could get a lift with Alex when he returned. There was road access to Alex's. They could meet in Temagami.

"That's not a bad idea. I can leave you some food." Redbeard didn't even bother asking him if it was okay. It was the only way he could stop the physical decay of his body and the mental anguish caused by Choppy's ups and downs.

It had been 40 days and 40 nights in the bush.

And so it was that Redbeard paddled alone in the canoe across Obabika Lake to the portage where he took five loads over the kilometer trail. He moved along the meandering river until it opened up into Temagami Lake at the tip of the Northwest Arm. The sun set quickly but he was able to find a campsite just after dark where he slept with Schopenhauer for the night. He was for the first time at peace. Not bickering. No empty stomach. Just him and his dog.

When he awoke in the morning he drank his tea and could not move past an inner debate: should he return to Alex's to see if Choppy wanted to paddle back with

him. It seemed a shame to separate so near to the end. He could probably reach Temagami in one day if he really paddled, but for some reason this felt like a hollow ending to the trip. He knew in his gut he would return for his companion. It was just the way he was.

But he decided to leave half the gear at the campsite, slightly hidden in the brush just in case someone else camped there though he and Choppy were literally the very last of the season's canoers still on the water.

So he and Schopenhauer paddled back to Alex's sand beach, hugging the shoreline to avoid the direct wind. The beach was deserted and he doubted Choppy was still there so he yelled for him: "Choppy! Chop chop!" Schopenhauer seemed to know they were looking for the third member of the pack and ran up to the house, causing the husky to bark. Just as he was about to call for his dog, Choppy stepped out onto the beach, his gear on his back.

"You did, didn't you? You came back. I swear, I thought you would." He smiled and seemed genuinely happy to see him. Something about what he said comforted him - as if his old friend truly knew the core of his character.

"You ready *padre*?"

"I am indeed my brother!" And that was it. They packed up and assumed their positions: Choppy in the stern and Redbeard and Schopenhauer in the bow and pushed off across Lake Obabika to the portage where they both sat exhausted on the rock, eating the very last scraps of food in their wanagan. For the portage they only had their packs and the canoe on their shoulders. Schopenhauer walked beside them wagging her tail. Then when they settled once again into the canoe they paddled along the small river that fed into the western belly of Lake Temagami at the beginning of the Northwest Arm.

Once at the campsite, Redbeard immediately felt a heavy sadness because he knew it would be their final night camping. So much had happened and there was so much to celebrate, but each of them - including Schopenhauer - were exhausted. Limbs were weary and blisters had hardened and with the drastic calorie deficiency in their diet, they didn't have the gumption to party. Neither of them had the words. Flat and falling into a food coma eating the soured and somewhat moldy leftovers at the bottom of the barrel, there was too much that would be left unsaid, and for Redbeard that was all right. They both knew what they had accomplished.

They could reminisce when they met at the pub in the years to come.

Lulled and somewhat drugged by the orange flame of the ancient fire, Redbeard and Schopenhauer fell asleep where they were beside the fire, until Redbeard got up and fell down asleep in his tent, gravity finally winning the battle. He

fell into a deep sleep. His sleep was heavy but dreams soon took over, until he saw a vivid image of Schopenhauer looking at him in the eyes, her face smiling, her soul emitting pure joy. She looked at him deeply, earnestly, as if she was telling him she loved him like no other, and that she was truly happy. The image was so striking that Redbeard woke up. Eyes wide open, he was alarmed. He immediately felt something was wrong. He couldn't quite put his finger on what it was, so he went out to the burnt out campfire but Schopenhauer wasn't there.

Nor was Choppy.

He walked to the water's edge and it dawned on him that Choppy might have taken his dog again out in the canoe. Sleepy but alarmed, he couldn't understand the powerful image of Schopenhauer he had just seen in his dream. Her face was so clear.

Judging from the moonlight, it was somewhere in the middle of the night, several hours since he laid down.

"Choppy!" he yelled out to the water. He listened. Then he heard a splash.

"I'm here," he said, rather close to the shore, down where there was a sheer rock face.

"What are you- Do you have the dog?"

"I did have her," he replied. "But she jumped out of the canoe when there was a rustling in the woods near the tent. She swam back to the island."

Redbeard squinted in the darkness but could hardly see anything, so he retrieved his flashlight from his tent and looked for his dog.

"Schopenhauer, come!" He looked all around the camp, and then into the woods but he could hardly get through the underbrush.

"Where did she land?"

"That's what I'm doing out here right now: I'm trying to figure out where she landed." That was when something in his stomach dropped. His nerves turned to shards of glass on fire, melting into his core and burning something white hot deep down.

"You *fuck!*"

"She swam to the shore and I heard her whimpering and then she stopped. I paddled over there to the rock face but couldn't find her."

A terrible new reality was descending all around him, the scent of death and finality all around him crushing his thinking abilities.

"Schopenhauer!" he yelled loudly. "Schopenhauer! Come!" Nothing. Not a sound. If she was within 500 meters she would have heard it. He stopped moving and listened for sounds of a canine moving through the underbrush.

Nothing.

“What have you done?”

Again no sounds from the forest.

So he walked into the water and moved slowly towards the rock face, looking closely at the surface of the water.

For a floating dog.

The adrenaline that coursed through his veins muted the cold water, his senses alert and keen to find anything in the water. The time ticked by with each passing second hammering home the truth that his beloved companion was dead.

Dead.

But he had just seen her face smiling at him.

She was so happy.

He stopped and let his ears do the work, trying to locate her through sound in the darkness.

Nothing.

He kept moving closer to the vertical rock face, the water now up to his shoulders. He couldn't hear her but he could smell bear shit.

Once one has smelled the potent odor of bear shit, one can never not know what it was again.

“Bear shit,” he said to Choppy.

“Oh man, that's what it was. She heard a bear. And she jumped out to protect you. But-.” He couldn't say it. Neither of them could say it. It was too gross for words.

She drowned!

But she was just in his dream, so happy. What-. Then he knew. He figured out what it was. She had come to him in his dream when she had suffocated in the water. She had come to him in the afterlife. She had come to tell him that she loved him and that she was okay. She was so full of joy. She was smiling! Her lips were full and black and her little bottom teeth could be seen as she smiled. Her eyes full of love. How could this have happened?

How could she have come into his dreams just at that moment?

He couldn't walk anymore in the water because of the depth. And he was shivering. He returned to the camp and stood there wordless and motionless, trying to think what he could do. Choppy landed in the canoe sheepish, hunched over, guilt-ridden. But for some reason Redbeard didn't yell at him. He was now obsessed with how she had come to him as he slept. *In the afterlife.*

Where was she?

He wondered how long she had struggled, how long she had clawed at the rock trying to save him from the bear.

“Why-“ he said but stopped. He couldn’t berate Choppy Waters. He was a flawed, needy man who hadn’t intended for the dog to jump out of the canoe. His anger turned to sadness in an instant, tears stinging his eyes, the salt striking his senses, which made him shiver more. His torso trembled in quiet crying, his teeth clenched and his eyes still searching for his dog. The tears warmed his cheeks, and felt good in his pain - a balm that would not keep him warm. He lost himself in his shuddering chest as Choppy stood there not saying a thing, watching Redbeard cry silently and with dignity. But the image of Schopenhauer so happy and full of joy awakened something within him, momentarily brightening the darkness in his heart, a sliver of hope that squashed the rancid emotions of death.

Finally, when he opened his eyes from the salty tears he saw the horizon lightening, the new day dawning and rays of hope soon to strike, removing the dread and danger of the dark. Then the crying stopped. And again the image in his mind’s eye grew in stature and clarity, her shining face still hovering, still exuding emotion. Love. Gratitude. Joy. Reassuring him that she was safe. *And that she loved him.*

Something more was born in him at that moment; something profound; something life-altering. It was a moment that could not be forgotten for what it meant, to him and for the rest of his life. She had come to him upon the moment of her death as a spirit without her earthly body, proving to him that there had to be life after death. She had given him the gift of life - the gift of knowing that there was an afterlife. Redbeard didn’t know it then but this one piece of knowledge would change his life forever. It would change the way he treated people - beginning with the way he treated Choppy. It began with him forgiving his eccentric friend of his shortcomings, and for this terrible event - an accident of circumstance. This alignment of forces. This absurd combination of ingredients that produced her death - or her return to the afterlife.

Epilogue

Redbeard never forgot this last evening canoeing with Choppy. He was simply never able to forget these events and seeing Schopenhauer in his dreams so vividly after she had drowned. He would also never repeat the extremism both physically and mentally of that six-week canoe trip again. He would only see his buddy Choppy Waters once after their Temagami trip, before his untimely death at

age 50. He was found dead under a bridge in the Humber Valley near the lakeshore in west Toronto beaten to death. It would be ruled a mugging gone wrong. It had been a violent death, his neck broken and his hands fractured. However he did not see Choppy Water's face clearly and vividly in his dream around the time of his death, but he could still recall his smile bright and mischievous and his ruddy complexion vibrant with laugh lines. And how he dove deeply into the cold waters of Lake Temagami after each full day of paddling without fail, defying reason and dedicated to the art of the canoer's life. He was happy that he had forgiven him for his offside with his doggie Schopenhauer, and somehow had faith that once he himself had finished his earthly walk they would once again meet, perhaps with his beloved Schopenhauer.

But seeing Schopenhauer that night illustrated the hidden power of love: by giving love you receive love, even in the afterlife. That smile; that happiness; that joy - lives on forever in an infinite moment of colorful clarity unhindered by gravity or negativity. And that was why he never bothered to ask Choppy why he took his dog out in the canoe that final night because in his heart he knew why: because he wanted love. He wanted that unconditional puppy love to heal his battered and bruised heart. He was injured and sought solace in the company of a dog with a friendly and beautiful soul. It was an act of desperation and an act of humanity rolled into one. It was one last doggie hug before he returned to the loveless concrete city. He was part of the pack of three so his offside was a minor one but that had major consequences for them both. He was satisfied he had never berated an injured man who had bared his soul in front of him for six challenging weeks in the wilds who displayed world-class canoeing skills and outdoor acumen that would belittle any urbanite and rank among the canoeing greats, such as Grey Owl himself. Choppy was a remarkable man, flawed and brilliant, wounded and brave, who pushed forth to the edge despite the chemical handicap he could not control. His achievements were somehow distinctively Canadian: understated and unusual, unheralded and done without fanfare.

And it all happened in a moment of time - a fluke of paths crossing, old university friends coming together with only a promise, and the will to create a memory.

Redbeard returned to St. Joseph's Island, settled down with Charlotte as his wife, raised two kids and never again seemed to find the time to undertake another overnight canoe trip. Oftentimes he would reflect on the dangers and the sheer physicality of what he and Choppy did those six weeks in the autumn of 2009 - a memory that stands apart from all his others for its sheer audacity and daring.

Numerous times he was close to returning to Temagami to visit the site of Schopenhauer's death but he never did.

They never found her body, deciding that morning that her body had been taken with the currents down into the depths of the lake. They had had a muted service on the spot where it appeared she had clawed, Redbeard speaking a few words in her honor. They paddled back all day non-stop without a word through the heart of Temagami Lake and then up the Northeast Arm all the way to the village of Temagami, a distance that had taken Choppy and Redbeard three days to cover at the beginning of their trip. Slowing to the dock at John's, the sun had just set just as a beaver dove off a rock into the water. The two haggard canoers gathered their things and hugged each other, knowing they had just achieved something special across the Temagami spider, with its choppy waters and wind devils, its campsites and waterfalls, and its portages and ancient whisperings that rang through them with each stroke, but both were thinking of their friend Schopenhauer.

Over the years that followed Redbeard remembered her smiling face again and again, still vivid and timeless, taking a moment to relive and enjoy her happiness as she ascended into the spirit world, communicating to him that she indeed loved him - forever. And that perhaps one day, when he passes on, they will be reunited once again.

THE END