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ABU-ABU:
A WILDERNESS QUEST
An Adventure of Search and Discovery

By Cliff Sakry

Dedication

To the ones I love . . . and they are many.

Section One

L O W R O C K

CHAPTER ONE

Come, cast aside
The shams of pride
As morning, fresh born,
        Strips the hide
Of darkness from a mountainside;
And watch with me
        As, silently,
The waking dawn's invading ray
Restores the splendors of the day.

Thus I, the Wilderness,
        Your soul invade
To sweep away that blinding shade
By modern modes of madness made . . . .
And bid you come with me,
        Good friend,
Where nature's magic
        Puts an end
To worldly tension and
        Concern . . . .
And lets a long-lost joy
        Return.

Breathe deep my pristine
        Purity;
Let my peace . . . and beauty . . .
        Set you free!

Thus the wilderness calls. And heeding are many who would travel far beyond the outposts of the familiar world simply to find a sight, a sound, or a silence that is yet in a

primitive state of perfection--to get a glimpse of the earth as it was before its conquest by civilized man.

They go in ever-increasing numbers, these seekers, flowing out in restless streams from the cities in search of soul-soothing space and lung-flushing clean air. Many inevitably find, however, that the asphalt trails are glutted and the nation's great parks are little more than glorified concentration camps. Almost everywhere, one encounters the ominous, swelling evidences of less and less room for more and more people.

Just as popular enthusiasm for the enjoyment of unspoiled nature reaches a new peak in this country, the pure private luxury of outdoor solitude is no longer easy to find. For, as the big swing to the out-of-doors continues unabatedly, many Americans are becoming alarmingly aware that we have seriously squandered our heritage. The vast treasure of unravaged wilderness which once spanned this continent has dwindled to a few mere specks on the map. Far from setting aside enough primitive space for tomorrow's populations, we have failed to even set aside enough for our own.

And so, onward over the endless highways roars the mighty motorcade, eager for a simple view of wide, wild country and a fleeting spell of happy smoglessness. Indeed, the human urge to escape the "unnatural" conditions of life in the urban compound can be so strong that, for many, even the strain of the crowded highway and the carnival-like congestion of some of our more popular national campgrounds are a welcome alternative!

Sadly we must note, however, that for the vast majority there can never be a full realization of their quest. They will travel far. They will <u>see</u> a little but <u>experience</u> nothing from their speeding car windows. They will camp amidst a host of other campers and wonder why this is little different (if not indeed often worse) than their noisy crowded neighborhoods back home. They will plaster their cars with vacation stickers, blow their money at tourist traps, and fill their trunks with worthless souvenir junk. At last they will return home, and for many, thankfully, it will have been as fine and refreshing a trip as could be expected in a world everywhere aswarm with people. And it probably is just as well that most of them may never realize what they actually missed.

There is yet another, smaller group of fugitives from the urban cage who have quite a different notion as to what comprises a full and worthwhile release from the suffocating crush of civilization. These are the venturesome souls who will by-pass the public parks and campgrounds for that far more rewarding if strenuous adventure which is still to be found in the remoteness and solitude of what sparingly remains of the true wilderness. Fortunately a little . . . just a little . . . of such wilderness still endures. And these diehards will not be satisfied until they have penetrated far beyond the outer limits of man's world into the deepest of its primitive recesses.

They will probe the wilds on foot and on horseback. They will paddle canoes for days, backpack over difficult portages, trudge over trackless terrain, traverse hidden water trails, assail a thousand natural barriers . . . simply to find a lake, a river, a canyon, a forest, or a mountain, where silence and solitude still hold an unbroken bond with beauty.

<u>Who are these seekers, and why will they put themselves to such great effort, expense, even privation and hazard, to reach lonely isolation in some harsh and wild environment far from the comforts of home? Why is the sight, the sound, the silence they seek so important? What, indeed, is this strange allurement which the wilderness holds for so many?</u>

Such were the questions which surfaced from the depths of contemplation one wintry evening as I conversed with an old friend of mine who, it might be noted, belonged to that unfortunate group of people who see in the world little of interest beyond the immediate confines of their daily existence. It must be added about this man, in all fairness, that he seemed happy enough in his particular "immediate confines." Fred would have laughed at any suggestion that he was "unfortunate" because he was content with staying comfortably close to the civilized security of his job and home in the city.

To be sure, the cheerful fire before which we lolled in his pleasant study cast such a spell of relaxed well-being over us that one could almost ignore (or at least tolerate) the steady muffled roar of traffic on the freeway nearby and the frequent blasts of jet airliners climbing overhead after takeoff from the airport several miles away. Fred wasn't one to realize, of course, that the very fire he so enjoyed in his own hearth was in itself a kind of escape from everyday humdrum not unlike the escape the wilderness traveler seeks on a larger scale. I had a feeling as I watched him staring contentedly at the flames licking upward among the logs that Fred, despite his assertions to the contrary, would not only make a congenial companion on a camping trip but he might actually enjoy it. I was tempted to suggest to him that he was just then responding to something strangely similar to the attraction which the wilderness exerts. But I held back. Certain as I was of a powerful underlying connection between the lure of the wilderness and the simple fascination of a lazily burning hearth fire, I felt at a loss just then to put the impression into words.

I too, of course, was a willing captive to the fire's assuasive spell. Its blue and orange plumes danced and purred with a gentle hypnotic rhythm that soon had my thoughts drifting far away to a pine-canopied rocky island on a starry night long ago . . . where a lively campfire crackled, free spirits chatted happily, and lifetime friendships were being consummated through one of the richest experiences a group of human beings can share. I could see again those familiar rugged faces, relaxed and cheerful as the firelight played upon them, and I could hear again the wonderful stories, the carefree laughter, the happy camp songs which broke upon the vast silence of the wilderness night. I can seldom sit before a blazing fireplace without being thus reminded of camps and campfires and of grand times on the trail. And now, just as I was joyfully adrift in pleasant reverie, I was suddenly jolted out of it by Fred's voice.

"I can appreciate your concern for the wilderness, Cliff," he was saying, "but aren't you actually obsessed with it, to the point of exaggeration?"

"What are you driving at?" I asked.

"Well, we all know that wilderness is a place where adventure of a sort abounds, and where tranquility and solitude are possible. We know it harbors plant and animal life in a great variety of forms. It has space for freedom of movement, and it has fresh clean air and a clean environment. But look, my friend. We also know that in a general sense most if not all of these things can be found in places other than the wilderness. Don't you agree?"

"Up to a point," I replied. "But there is a difference."

"Enough difference to justify spending billions in federal money just to set aside valuable lands and resources which the nation needs to maintain economic progress?"

"If you mean spending money to preserve primitive areas and to keep the little remaining wilderness wild, then absolutely yes. Not only must we save what's left, we must restore a lot of wilderness already lost."

Fred looked at me dubiously. "You know, don't you," he said seriously, "that you aren't very convincing? Now think about it. Those who would defend the wilderness against its

so-called exploiters have based their arguments mainly on the necessity to preserve just the qualities we've been talking about . . . solitude, scenic beauty, wild animal and plant life, space, clean air and water, and even some vague thing called spiritual renewal."

"I'd say these are all valid arguments, Fred. Why wouldn't they be convincing?"

"Unfortunately such arguments, however valid they may be, have too often failed to do much for wilderness preservation, for they reveal little that is not already obvious and littler still of actual values and satisfactions which could be said to be exclusive with the wilderness."

I was suddenly aware that my friend, however limited or strictly materialistic his own appreciation of outdoor values might have been, was well armed with all the old defenses for progress at any price. I listened as he went on.

"Those who are untouched by such arguments, and perhaps I am one of the untouched, know that if wilderness gives us great scenic beauty, so does plenty of non-wilderness. It is not necessary to go into primitive country to find great natural beauty. One wouldn't say, for instance, that Niagara Falls is a wilderness, or the Hudson River palisades, or the surf washing a California beach, or even a flower garden in a city park. All of these, even without wilderness, have beauty. And if wilderness gives us silence and tranquility, it can be argued that the quiet fields and meadows and pastures of farming country often possess this quality. So might the interior of St. Patrick's Cathedral, or any other church for that matter. The same holds for all the rest. How much animal and plant life can you see in the wilderness that can't be found in more developed areas? A little, to be sure. But it is a well known fact that even the white-tailed deer is more numerous in cut-over forests and on the fringes of agricultural lands. One can see in city zoos a greater variety of animal life than he'd ever encounter in any given wild area."

At this I couldn't help thinking how ironic it seemed that Fred could so familiarly refer to the city zoo without ever in the least being aware of the woeful similarity between the zoo and the city itself. And then suddenly I somehow began to feel sorry for Fred. I don't know exactly why, unless it was simply the fact that he was talking like the blind, sedentary, big-city office inmate who has never seen the real world or even wondered much about it, and who in a very distinct way had much more in common with those incarcerated zoo dwellers than he realized. I also got the impression that Fred was on the defensive, striving too hard to make his point, using the same old hackneyed generalities, the same old pragmatic rationalizations by which men have ever tried to justify their raping of the virgin earth. I found it difficult to believe, though it was becoming rather obvious, that Fred couldn't care less about whether our remaining wilderness areas should be preserved, especially if they contained hidden riches to be plundered. Yet there was a tone of uncertainty in his argument, almost as if he were mostly trying to convince himself that human acquisitiveness is its own justification.

"Now," he continued, "as for adventure and excitement, wouldn't it be absurd to say the wilderness is the only place where you can find that? Or, for that matter, space to move around in . . . or fresh air and clean water? Admittedly, we've probably polluted more of our environment than we have a right to, but, again, there are places within easy reach, without going into wild country, where good air and water still exist. Now then . . . and I hope I haven't burst your balloon entirely . . . what is there, really, about the wilderness that sets it apart in importance and makes it different from all the rest? And, especially, what makes it so different and so important that it must be preserved at all costs?"

Tough question. Not because it hadn't any answer, but because the answer was as complex as the very nature of man, and as diffuse in terms of personal meaning and experience as the great number of people who find the lure of the wild country irresistible. By now I

realized any attempt to explain wilderness to a man who seemed never to have craved it or experienced it would be as futile as trying to explain nuclear fission to an infant. Yet I was determined to try, if for no other reason than to buttress and clarify my own convictions.

"I'm not sure the answer will satisfy you, Fred," I began. "Frankly it's not one you'd be disposed to understand. It involves values which can't be related to our usual, over-rated, over-emphasized materialistic standards. It is simply this: the one thing that makes the wilderness so different and so important is the total absence of man and man's influence. At Niagara and the other places you mentioned it is impossible to ignore the commercial aspects which are present, or even to view these wonders with that kind of complete detachment which is free of the intrusive influence of other human beings and their works. The inside of a church or the wide sweep of a grain field . . . true, these may give us a sense of peace, of spiritual uplift, but they're not wilderness. They are man-made. They are of, by, and for man. They relate man to man. And the church, if it does succeed at all in relating man to spirit and man to God, always does so in some strictly human context through some man-conceived medium. I don't mean to imply that this is not good or necessary, but it is not the same as the wilderness . . . which has a powerful way of relating a man directly to himself and to that primary freedom as a creature of nature which he can experience only in nature."

"Wait now," Fred interrupted. "Maybe I'm not disposed to understand what you're trying to say. But the distinction you make seems to imply that man and his influence are contaminants of some sort, that man can't see himself fully within the civilized environment he has created for himself, and that, consequently, he can never hope to understand himself unless he goes traipsing off into the wilds. Can you imagine everybody trying to do this?"

"Of course not," I hastened to reply. "That would be quite impossible, as we well know. Furthermore, most people seem content enough to take life as it comes without being much concerned about its meaning, its source, its substance, or its purpose. And perhaps that is fortunate. Also, it would be absurd to insist that anyone who does not seek for a meaning to his existence must go to the wilderness to find it. Nevertheless, I know of no better place to look. I guess what I'm trying to say, Fred, is that for some of us there is something deeply poignant, something that is at once meaningful and unique and beautiful and uplifting and satisfying about the wilderness experience. I'm sure no one knows exactly what it is that lures us to the wilds. We are drawn as bees to a clover field. We only know that we must go, and that the resulting total separation from civilization for brief periods is infinitely rewarding. It is not simply that this complete detachment slows us down and gets us off the racetrack. More importantly, it gives us time to think, to dream, to meditate . . . and provides an edenic setting for leisurely contemplation that is free of worldly distractions. Above all, it provides an opportunity to reduce one's life to almost primitive simplicity, a condition extremely conducive to self-awareness."

Fred now leaned forward somewhat impatiently as he said: "Here again you get back to this self-awareness bit. Do I understand you to mean that you can't relax, you can't meditate, you can't take a good look at yourself now and then without having to go way off into the woods somewhere?"

"That's not entirely the way it is, of course, Fred. But you'll have to admit that our society has too many sidetracks and dead-ends. Like an endless maze, it keeps us too involved to let us really discover ourselves. Think about that for a moment. Have you ever been able to find the time or the occasion to really get acquainted with yourself? Or with the pure, clean world as God made it? Such an experience is a rare thing in our society. We're all go-go and grab-grab till the day we die. We may know our jobs but we seldom know ourselves. Maybe

people generally don't want to know themselves. Maybe they're afraid to. But I think it's mostly that they don't get a chance to. Yet once it happens, it can be a startling revelation. You might be surprised at what a stranger you are to yourself, at how different the real world is from the world you see and how different you are from what you believe yourself to be. Yet to discover your own humanity is the only way you can become fully alive. Maybe a man can accomplish these things without going off into isolation. However, I doubt it. I only know that for me there is no place in all of civilization which can so quickly show me myself or so completely put me joyfully at peace and give me such spiritual renewal as the wilderness."

"Come now," Fred broke in. "If what you say is true . . . if this kind of running away from the world is your only means of coping with the pressures of work and responsibility, you must find life in the crowded city quite unbearable."

"On the contrary, Fred," I replied, "I would have to say in all honesty that I have seldom found life unbearable anywhere. The kind of pressures you speak of don't exist for me. This is one of the things the wilderness has given me, believe me. I find for one thing a good deal of purpose and fulfillment in my work. And it's not because of the kind of work I do so much as it is the kind of meaning I have found in work . . . any work. Such high-sounding things as responsibility, duty, effort are merely the normal and necessary conditions of good, successful, happy living in a highly organized society. However, not everybody thinks so. These very so-called virtues cause plenty of misery for many. Yet if these things put excessive pressure on us, give us ulcers and drive us to distraction, then I'd have to say we've either lost sight of the real values or we've missed our calling completely."

"You seem to take duty and work pretty lightly."

"Not really. But if duty and work are a burden, I'm sure it's chiefly because we have become strangers to ourselves and we're on a hopeless treadmill. And I think if you look around you'll have to admit that as a nation we are very much on such a treadmill."

"You really believe our national life is that grim?"

"Well, take an honest look at it. Whether it be the cramped, foul-smelling, deteriorating, dispiriting slum abodes which all too many of our American citizens must call their home . . . or whether it be the great segments of our disillusioned, disenchanted youth groping about in a blinding storm of protest seeking a better society than the materialistic one their parents molded for them . . . or whether it be that pathetic legion of affluent, prosperous, permissive, perplexed, middle-aged husbands and wives who find cocktail parties and country clubs their only escape from their failures as parents . . . there are agonizing pressures and tensions everywhere. Our whole society is in such a turmoil of restless frustration and uncertainty that it is difficult any longer to be optimistic about our future. For all our technical sophistication, our intellectual exuberance, our great material success, we are a sick society. Wouldn't you agree?"

"Only in degree," Fred replied as he leaned forward and set a fresh log on the fire. "I don't see things as being all that dark and hopeless. Sure, we've got problems . . . lots of 'em. That's life. But we've also got the brain power and the material means to solve them. I'd say things generally have a way of righting themselves. But even if, as you say, we are a sick society, what does this have to do with wilderness?"

What indeed did it have to do with wilderness? I'd never before been faced with the actual challenge . . . the need to explain this strange, vague thing which to me had always seemed so simple and natural and taken for granted. To feel its influence, to have it so completely inside oneself was one thing. To express or define it was quite another. It was, I suddenly realized, a question which had no easy answer, if it had one at all. Yet a heavy sensation clung stickily in

my mind telling me that, out of what I already had experienced in the wilds, I should know there was a connection, a vital connection. And it had to do with more than the rather obvious fact that humanity, compressed unnaturally into a crowded world, was much like animals crowded unnaturally into cages. Our sick society was sick with claustrophobia, to be sure, but it was also sick of spirit . . . alienated from something in its simpler ancestral past which was still desperately needed.

"I'm afraid, Fred, that it would take a lot more insight than I possess to tie all the complicated strings together. Nevertheless, I do have a gnawing conviction that it is from the wilderness, or at least from the simplest manifestations of nature as our society no longer knows or recognizes them, that we can ever hope to extract an ultimate solution to the human problem. We have forgotten that we are creatures of nature, a high form of evolved biological animal, if you will, with deep-set instinctual drives which, despite our highly developed brain, still dominate our lives in more ways than we realize or understand. In having renounced nature, ignored it, exploited it, violated it, defied it, denied our true ancestral ties with it, we are mortal organisms trying to act like gods. We boast that we have 'conquered' nature, yet we are its constant subjects, locked in its formula, structured of its material, driven by its force, governed by its inexorable laws. Despite all our civilized conceits, we are strangely compelled to keep involving ourselves with nature at every opportunity. How else can we explain those endless bumper-to-bumper motorcades flowing out weekend after weekend into the country in ceaseless obedience to some mysterious attraction which seems always to lead to open space and natural surroundings? It's always there, that urge to identify with nature, and we simply must respond in one way or another, hardly knowing why, hardly realizing that somehow, instinctively, we sense a belonging with and a need for the simple, natural things."

"All right, all right," Fred interjected in a tone which clearly implied I'd had the podium long enough. "So that's their bundle. It's an important form of recreation. But why complicate it? If people enjoy nature, fine. If it's good for the soul, fine. But I'm afraid you're biting off too big a chunk when you imply that this civilized human being you call an evolved animal can't make the grade without some kind of massive immersion in nature. You forget that we've created and accomplished much that nature never could."

"Not really, Fred." I had to go after that one. "If we're creatures of nature, then anything we accomplish is merely an extension of nature working through us. If what we build or create complies with nature's laws, it can endure. On the other hand, as we've learned through bitter failure many times, nothing we do in defiance of the fundamental laws of nature can ultimately succeed. Anything we are, and anything we do, is simply nature working itself out."

"That isn't exactly what we've been taught to believe in our religious training," Fred countered. "You're giving a lot of credit to nature but very little to God."

"Not so. Any credit to one is credit to the other. How can we separate God from nature? They're one and the same, though we may view and interpret our relationship with them in many different ways. At any rate, it is impossible to ignore the simple fact that most people, whatever their understanding or belief, and whether they realize the fact or not, find it necessary instinctively to maintain some kind of contact with natural things. What is more typical than the widespread urban preoccupation with flowers, gardens, shrubbery, lawn grass, shade trees? It's pretty obvious that these provide the city dweller with his only means of holding onto nature in an otherwise nature-less environment."

"There," exclaimed Fred. "You've said it yourself! There are things, even in the city, which give people an outlet for natural cravings. It confirms what I've said all along . . . that the

wilderness, which most people never see anyway, is grossly over-rated."

"Well," I said, "if these things were enough to satisfy everybody, I'd have to agree. But we still have to account for that great annual summer hegira into the open country. We know the attraction is there and that it is deep, recurrent, insistent. Yet I'm sure we understand this urge only superficially . . . only in obvious terms, only in the light of the familiar things which fill our senses and stimulate our emotions. But beyond all that, the tantalizing question still remains: What is it really that attracts these millions of restless souls?"

Yes, what is it? If I learned anything at all from my conversation with Fred that night, it was the fact that a full answer to that question has never been adequately expressed. And I wasn't sure that it could be answered, since people seem to differ so in their outdoor interests and pursuits. All I was sure of was that there are so many such people, of all ages and from all walks of life. And I could only conjecture that something marvelous . . . and useful . . . underlies it all, that, despite the variety of courses the nature seekers take, they are all responding to a single, deep instinctual motivation which binds man inescapably to his natural origins.

The question, particularly as it applied to myself, haunted me thereafter and I became determined to get to the heart of it.

Reviewing what I'd learned from my own experience, I could readily empathize with those who see in the remaining wilderness all that is left of the Creator's purest handiwork, and who regard its exploitation for profit as sheer sacrilege. For them, earth's last shrinking remnant of Paradise . . . this vanishing vestige of what was once a boundless domain of unspoiled outdoor splendor . . . is now all-too-limited. Yet it holds a treasure far greater than any other, a wealth so sacred, so precious, so irreplaceable, that it cannot be bought, or sold, or even measured by any set of mundane values.

Back-glancing into our nation's brief history, I found it difficult to realize that America had begun so very recently as a perfect wilderness. Only a little while ago, the settlers had found it stretching unbroken from ocean to ocean. But to them it was a savage barrier of mountains, rivers, forests, prairies, and deserts that had to be conquered to make room for towns and farms and roads. In but a few short centuries that wild, living wilderness had all but vanished before the assault of rifle, shovel, axe, and plow.

It was virtually a clean sweep. The growing nation had pushed back its frontiers with an incredible surge of energy, and for too long no one foresaw the inevitable exhaustion and therefore the need to set aside wild reserves. In a few generations that vast wilderness heritage had shrunk until most is gone, the rest going as a swelling population presses for more room.

All that remain are a few remnants mostly preserved in a few federal parks and forest preserves. Now, with so little left, the wilderness has become an object of grave concern to those who have sadly watched its rapid decline and, with it, the general decline of much of our wildlife. No one can predict for certain which of the animal species are marked for early extinction . . . but if wilderness goes, can any of these be far behind?

Why save these creatures? Or the natural wonders with which they co-exist? Do we really need them? If we do, why? Thinking about it, I had to conclude again and again that one of the main reasons the question has never been fully resolved must be simply that the wilderness has such a variety of special meanings for each of us.

And so, for each who hears the wild call of that enchanting world beyond the highway's end, there can be but one way to find the answer: to put civilization behind and follow the beckoning, hidden trails of man's interminable wilderness quest.

CHAPTER TWO

The call of the wilderness comes early to men of adventure. It favors no age and heeds not that some such men are yet too young to go forth on their own. My twelve-year-old son Mark was such a "man." Through most of the spring and early summer he had been avidly reading everything he could lay his hands on relating to camping and woodsmanship, and there seemed little else he cared to discuss with anyone. He would bring out my wilderness maps, study the lakes and trails, and ply me with endless questions about the primitive country we were planning to explore during the coming July--which is the season when great patches of ripe wild blueberries carpet the forest clearings and the weather is most likely to be warm and stable. It is also a time when the wild bears are feeding heavily on the berries and therefore least likely to be interested in campers' kitchens.

About a week before our departure it was necessary to get the group together to finalize our plans. Gene Tomlinson, a successful business executive when he wasn't away somewhere camping, provided what turned out to be a most impressive prelude to our canoe trip by inviting us all for an evening cruise on his house boat on Lake Minnetonka. Anchored in a wide bay out near Big Island, with the boat bobbing gently beneath us, we were treated to several of Gene's favorite hospitality specials, charcoal broiled steaks and a sharp, delectable Caesar salad of his own concoction. But even as we sat enjoying the repast we were aware of an unusual amount of din and unrest all about us. Indeed I felt a kind of disappointment, if not outright resentment, at seeing this beautiful bay in such an opposite condition from the quiet seclusion one might expect in such an out-of-the-way place.

But, of course, one had to remember that this was not any longer an out-of-the-way place. Privacy, as anyone who knows Lake Minnetonka will tell you, is hard to come by on this attractive but overcrowded water playground. Now almost completely engulfed by the swelling suburban sprawl of the greater metropolitan Twin Cities area, Minnetonka is a gradually dying lake, no longer capable of assimilating the sickening, ever-increasing volume of pollutants with which those who have most enjoyed this lovely lady have cruelly defiled her. And even on the calmest summer day her surface seethes in an agony of unrest as thousands of speeding motor craft churn her waters into a cauldron of ceaseless turbulence. At the spot where we were anchored, away from the active boating lanes, our houseboat nevertheless rocked unevenly to

irregular but constant wave action coming in from the open lake.

Anchored all about us in the bay were dozens of pleasure craft ranging in size from small cabin boats to some surprisingly large cruisers. A loud cocktail party was in progress on one of the bigger boats which floated bulkily not more than a plug-cast away, and elsewhere nearby a noisy group of young people was having a beer bust on a pontoon raft. Some were diving and swimming, and at one point a girl screamed as two young men tossed her unceremoniously over the rail. On the nearby beach a bonfire flared and the sound of guitar rhythms and boisterous singing wafted through the general din. The whole of it was a grotesque kind of condensed bedlam, a weird mixture of compressed noise and energy gasping for space, over which, despite the apparent fun and gaiety, a sad note of desperation and futility seemed to hover. I realized people have to have fun, but the kind of fun I was looking at seemed to lack the joyous, relaxed exuberance one expects of happy people. It seemed instead to be a forced, uncomfortable, better-than-nothing kind of pleasure, deprived of even a little room and a little privacy, and dependent upon a dubious variety of excesses for its sustenance. There was a quality of wild abandon--and futility--in it. It seemed somehow purposeless and pathetic, a reflection perhaps of the madness that waits on the brink of boredom. I wondered if I were seeing it as it really was or whether I had let my own preferences influence my reaction. I can remember that I tried hard to justify this strange revelry, to pass it off as normal and necessary in a populous environment. Yet I could not expunge the feeling that it was all deeply symbolic of something sinister gnawing at the soul of our congested, swelling, over-indulgent, affluent society. And I wondered how many more boats and people this harassed lake could tolerate before it struck back with some kind of stark spiritual suffocation which finally choked off whatever was left of human dignity and aspiration.

Gene Tomlinson was watching a tanned, plumpish, middle-aged female in a bikini swimsuit on the deck of the big pleasure cruiser just as her particular choice of diversion had reached an unhappy climax. She was violently vomiting her martinis over the side. A flabby, balding man came over and held up her head with one hand while he massaged her navel with the other.

"Her cup of merriment runneth over," Gene commented wryly. Always a man to make a point, he added, "Sometimes it's hard to tell which is more polluted, the water below the boat or the people above it."

"Don't be too hard on them," pleaded Bill Sweasy who had a penchant for defending people. "They probably know not what they do. Just a hell of a lot of people in our society are trapped in their own wine cellars."

Tom Manko, sitting beside him, shook his head. "What a way to get away from it all," he said. "Am I glad I'm just a poor, plain backwoodsman with just enough money to buy a fishing license and a camping stake." Tom was joshing, of course, for he happened by profession to be one of the finest Boy Scout executives around, and as practical and disciplined a gentleman as ever packed a knapsack. For a man in his late fifties, with half his scalp showing, he was remarkably youthful in appearance, and as lean and sinewy as a college athlete. Eminently successful as a leader of leaders and trainer of boys, Tom was the kind of man who added something very special to a camping trip. To have him along was to know that there was present a doctor, a nurse, a gourmet cook, a geologist, a zoologist, a meteorologist, a carpenter, a plumber, a philosopher, a mechanic, a jack-of-all-trades, a cheer-leader, a songster, a story-teller, and best of all, a most engaging companion. He could burst into song upon the slightest provocation, and he had a special genius for making up "instantaneous" (as Sweasy called them)

verses to fit the situation of the moment. We were destined, before our forthcoming project would be over, to be pleasantly exposed many times to this unique bit of Manko magic.

Our host, a powerfully built, authoritative, conservative kind of man, having made certain we had all paid notice to our highly civilized surroundings, now turned away from the scene and in a quite serious tone addressed us.

"Fellows," he said, "I must confess that I invited you here for a somewhat ulterior reason . . . though it does relate to what we are planning. We could have met in a far less distracting . . . maybe 'nauseating' is a better word . . . atmosphere, but I wanted you to get a good look at what our great American society is doing to itself. I wanted you to get what I somehow see as a kind of contrast between wantonness and wilderness. What we are looking at here certainly doesn't inspire any great notions about the nobility or boundless wisdom of man . . . or about the kind of environment man has made for himself. But I thought a taste of this may help us all appreciate so much more richly what we are going to encounter in the big woods up north. And I kid you not . . . the contrast is going to be especially startling if we are able, as we've hopefully planned, to find the Lake of Echoes and the Isle of Abu-Abu.

"Enchanted Isle of Abu-Abu-," corrected Tom with a peculiar twinkle in his eye.

"Enchanted, eh?" grinned George Daugherty dubiously. "From what you guys have been hinting, this Abu-Abu sounds more like some impossible Shangri-La."

"Yeah," added Bill Sweasy jokingly, "you better not over-sell us, or we'll be one disappointed bunch."

Gene chuckled. "I don't blame you," he said. "I'll confess I've had some doubts myself. But this old friend of mine . . . a French-Indian guide by the name of Pierre . . . who first told me about it . . . sounded pretty convincing. We were on a fishing trip up in Canada some years ago. He got talking about this fantastic lake the Indians called 'Lake of Many Voices' . . . where strange things happened and the fishing was out of this world."

"Strange happenings. Unworldly fish. The plot thickens," remarked George wryly.

"Ha! Leave it to Gene to cook up a little mystery to spice up our canoe trip," laughed Al.

"Hey, no kidding," Gene was suddenly serious. "Old Pierre even helped me sketch out a rough map, and I've been itching to go and find the place ever since."

"You mean we have to search for it?" queried Bill.

"Well, sort of. It'll depend on how accurate my map is. I've a good idea of the general vicinity, but all I know for sure is that it's somewhere in the Quetico, quite remote from the main lake chains and probably not easy to reach."

George still sounded skeptical. "Does this 'Lake of Many Voices' appear on the regular maps?"

"No, it doesn't. But that's not unusual. It could well be under a different name, or, because it's isolated, it may not even be shown."

"And so we really haven't much to go on, right?"

"Just my rough sketch . . . and the legend itself. All we can do is give it a try. If my friend was really onto something . . . and I'm inclined to suppose he was . . it'll be well worth the effort, believe me."

By now the boys, sensing something mysterious, had moved inside the circle of deck chairs in which we men had settled ourselves. They sat goggle-eyed and cross-legged on the deck, listening intently.

My brother Al spoke up. "I'll confess, Gene, that I do have some doubts about this. Your Abu-Abu sounds like an exciting place . . . if it's real. But how do we know we won't wind up in

a big bog? After all, legends make fine story-telling, but you know how unreliable such things are."

"Well, I wondered about that. But Pierre seemed quite certain . . . from having once been there . . . that what he called the 'Lake of Echoes,' along with this strange island, could very well be the true location of the legend of Abu-Abu. Since then, Tom and I have been digging wherever we could . . . at the library, in Indian folk lore, stories of early fur traders, and even in some old Scouting campfire tales. And we've found some pretty interesting stuff."

"Gosh, will you tell us the legend, Mr. Tomlinson?" Billy Sweasy cut in, unable to restrain his curiosity any longer.

"Yeah . . . tell us . . . tell us!" pleaded the other boys. "Ah, yes, the legend," Gene replied teasingly, obviously enjoying their sudden burst of enthusiasm. He leaned forward in his chair, taking time to relish the suspense he had created. He pondered for a moment, then continued: "As I've said, I got part of the story from old Pierre. But only bits and pieces. What I wanted was the actual legend, if I could find it. Well, Tom kept checking around and finally came upon some old voyageur and Indian accounts at the State Historical Building in St. Paul. And there, sure enough, among some old manuscripts, he found it . . . the Legend of Abu-Abu . . . It's quite a tale, and I've asked Tom to bring it along and read it to us today. Are you ready, Tom?"

Meticulously as always, Tom was ready. He now opened a folder and removed some typewritten sheets. He explained that the words of the title, Abu-Abu, seemed to have some deep mystical meaning which perhaps only the Indians fully understood. Then he began to read aloud.

The Legend of Abu-Abu

Long before the white man came, the northern country lying west of the Big Blue Sweetwater Sea (Lake Superior) was a fair land of great forests and sprawling prairies teeming with bird and animal life and rich vegetation. Its rolling hills were green and gold in the summer sunlight, and countless blue lakes which bejewelled its vast landscape were like a million stars fallen from the high regions of the Great Happy Hunting Ground. In that primitive time it bore a name by which the Indian tribes throughout the earth knew it: Land of Sky-blue Water. It was mutually occupied by two great nations; the Ojibway inhabited the woodlands of the north and east, and the Sioux dwelt on the prairie lands to the west and south. And all the redmen found peace and contentment here where food was in great enough abundance for all. Through many centuries the wise chiefs of both nations observed boundary agreements and maintained their tribes in a strong alliance of friendly peace. All found security and happiness in this brotherhood of peoples, and the great Sun Spirit smiled upon them.

But finally a very unfortunate event occurred which would change everything. The great Sioux chief, Ogochawa (which means "wise eagle"), died from a mysterious illness during a severe winter, and his eldest son, Maraburu, succeeded him. No one knew that Maraburu had poisoned his venerable and kindly father. This young man (whose name meant "winged hunter") was a restless, cunning and cruel brave, ambitious for power, who had become discontented with the peaceful ways of life. He was bored with the constant routine of hunting for food. He hungered for a more violent kind of excitement. All his life he had thrilled to the old legends of

ancient warriors who had covered themselves with glory in the tribal wars many generations before his time. And now, finally, his lust for blood had taken possession of him. He longed to feel the thud of his tomahawk in the skull of a human victim, and dreamed of the day when he could aim his arrows at other than the prey which provided the vital meats and hides for his father's people.

Thus, when he became chief, Maraburu knew that he was free to lead the Sioux as he chose. He had often scouted far to the northeast and gazed covetously at the great forests and their island-studded lakes which were a natural attraction for the much-prized moose, deer, brown bear, beaver, muskrat, fish, and water birds. Here, he thought, was a rich hunting ground which the Ojibway had possessed long enough. He determined to overthrow his neighbors and take control of all that rich green land of sky-blue waters.

He began in great earnest to prepare the young men of his tribes for the great day of conquest. He confided his plans only to a few of his trusted sub-chiefs, but to the rest of his people he said only that he was preparing for a great hunting expedition which would provide ten moons' food for all of their women and children. These, together with the old ones and the strong young men and maidens of the Sioux nation, threw themselves trustingly and wholeheartedly into the task. Bows and arrows were made in great number. Hard flint stones were chipped and shaped into sharp arrowheads and spearheads and hunting knives and tomahawks. Little did they realize what a great tragedy their young chief's evil ambitions was to bring upon every Indian village throughout the smiling lands of the Sioux and the Ojibway.

After many weeks of preparation, all was ready. Every able-bodied brave had a plentiful supply of all the implements of death that he would need. There were contests among the tribes in which the young warriors matched their skills in the use of their weapons. The excitement of it gradually worked them into such a wild competitive fervor that it could not but eventually lead to some fiercer and bloodier form of activity.

Maraburu had planned well. Behind his usual stoic calm there now burned an intense inner frenzy. His friendly, peace-loving tribes were becoming the savages he wanted them to be . . . and never did they suspect the gradual change, nor that his own evil motives were behind it. And if he was satisfied at the progress he had made in arousing their ferocity, he was also becoming impatient to begin his career of murder and destruction.

One day his scouts reported that a large village of unsuspecting Ojibway, armed only with their usual hunting weapons, were encamped in the Abu-Abu region . . . a place sacred to the Ojibway . . . near the shores of what was known as the Lake of Many Voices . . . only seven suns distance north of the arbitrary tribal border. It seemed an ideal opportunity to launch his deadly plan. But now, even as he contemplated this first chance to attack his neighbors, there came also the first of a series of omens which were to plague him with recurrent flashes of apprehension and fear.

The first omen came one night in a dream, in which he was warned by an inner "spirit voice" that it would be folly to violate the sanctity of the land of Abu-Abu . . . that only death and suffering could come of any desecration of that holy place. Maraburu had been taught by his father that the forest people revered this as the place where the Nature Spirits speak, and they believed that when the earth people would one day begin to understand the message hidden here, the great universal secrets of truth and beauty would be revealed. To them, the lake and especially its magic island were a mystic shrine where the Sky and Water Spirits spoke in strange ways, sometimes with the sound of a thousand thunders; sometimes in sighs and whispers and echoes, or in soft melodious tinklings and murmurings, and even in the calls of the seagull, the

loon, the wolf, and the raven. They regarded the Isle of Abu-Abu as a haven for fugitives, a place to be held in awe, where no enmity was permitted to dwell or warfare to be waged, where whoever came would find refuge. It was the sanctuary where the Earth Spirit and the Sky Spirit met to reaffirm their peace agreements (even as the Sioux and the Ojibway had done on the island long before) . . . and to speak words of wisdom to any mortal who would come peaceably with open ears and a seeking mind. It was a place where wise chiefs wanting counsel came to meditate and listen to the Spirit Voices. It was a place where no one would starve, where the great Nature Spirits provided the entire Abu region with food and materials in abundance: fruits, berries, nuts, herbs, shrubs, and wild rice; birds, animals, turtles, frogs, and fishes. The land was rich with skins and furs and meats . . . beaver, otter, mink, muskrat, deer, moose, wolf, fisher, lynx, and bear. The forest of Abu-Abu contained superb birch groves which yielded the finest bark for making canoes and building huts. And from the insects came nature's own crowning gift of sweetness, the nectar of the honey bee. The dream also reminded Maraburu that the dreaded spirit-fire often guarded the approaches to Abu-Abu, and warned that when the "flowers of the fallen stars" (white water lilies) appeared in clusters of five, it was a sign that the Nature Spirits were angry and therefore to beware their wrath.

But as the night passed, so did the dream, and Maraburu was up with the sun eager as ever to pursue his ambition. All that remained now was to incite his people against the forest tribes and then lead them to the attack. And he accomplished this with his usual heartless cunning, resorting to the most diabolical treachery.

On a dark night, Maraburu lured his own beautiful sister, Mah-lo-wanee (meaning "Moon-eyed Maiden"), to the shores of Mississippi, father of waters, which was the tribal boundary, and there cold-bloodedly murdered the defenseless girl with a tomahawk which one of his scouts had stolen from the Ojibway village. The finding of her mutilated body the next day, with the accusing Ojibway hatchet still embedded in her forehead, shocked the entire Sioux nation.

"Let us rise up! Let us avenge the murder of Mah-lo-wanee!" cried the young warriors.

"Lahka-ah, lawa-ahnu Kiligar Missuma," echoed the women young and old as they, too, tricked into fiendish hatred, urged their men forward to the grim debaucheries of war.

And so, after a great war dance, Maraburu led a large band of his tribe's best hunters out into the densest part of the big woods. He ordered utmost secrecy and silence so as not to warn the Ojibway of the disaster which was moving upon them like a soundless breeze through the forest. No fires were lit at night. The warriors slept wherever they stopped, their weapons always ready on the ground beside them.

On that very first night Maraburu began to have a series of troubled dreams which would haunt him relentlessly. Sleep brought him face to face with his guilt, and the evil of his deeds would invade his thoughts whenever he lay down to rest. Now came a dream in which he heard a great sighing and saw his murdered sister Mah-lo-wanee standing before a dark cave on an open patch of rock on an island. The rock glistened like snow in the bright moonlight and he saw her hand holding out a yellow half-gourd, cut in the Indian manner into a drinking goblet. Into the gourd, trickled a steady crimson stream of blood from a gaping hole in the middle of her forehead. She said nothing . . . only stood there and stared at him, as if her silence itself was a most eloquent condemnation of his crimes. He awakened with a terrible start and slept no more that night.

It was not so much the image of his sister which disturbed him as it was the yellow gourd in her hands. The yellow gourd goblet had a mystical symbolism for the Indians which

even the unscrupulous Maraburu could not dismiss from his mind. Because it was the color of the sun, the golden gourd was considered to be related to the sun, and also the worldly token of the great Earth Spirit. It was, too, the Indian symbol of fruitful, happy, peaceful living. And even at the great tribal peace pow-wows on the Isle of Abu-Abu generations before his time, chiefs of the Sioux and Ojibway nations had used the gourd to drink the magic peace potions of the medicine-men during long elaborate ceremonies. (Wild gourds, not common to the northland, had to be procured through trade with friendly tribes far to the east and south. Therefore, these useful and interesting plants were highly prized and often became sacred objects.)

The gourd troubled him, for he knew it was the Sioux-Ojibway peace charm . . . whose sanctity he was about to violate. The gourd would continue to haunt him from that night on.

At daybreak the war party again sifted into the forest. Maraburu led them on a round-about route which would give them the advantage of complete surprise at the moment of attack. He knew the Lake of Many Voices was difficult to reach. And another strange thing about the lake occurred to him. A stream entered it, but none left it. Its waters seemed to vanish into the earth as if the earth itself drank it up. Also, what of the spirit voices on the island? Would the spirits oppose him? What strong magic might the Ojibway have that might thwart him, he wondered.

He covered many miles that day, moving swiftly under cover of the woods, avoiding clearings and open water. But that night when he again sought rest on the cool forest floor, the young chief received another visitant in his dreams. It was his father, standing upon the pinnacle of a high hill, framed against a turbulent gray sky filled with lightning and thunder and huge black clouds boiling. And almost as blinding as the sun was a frightful golden gourd, held nestled in the hands of his father. Then his father spoke: "My son . . . my own flesh and blood . . . what fiendish scheme have you embarked upon, that you would defy the Nature Spirits and destroy the great Peace Treaty of Abu-Abu? What fateful venom fills that poisoned mind? You have betrayed your trust . . . deceived your father and your people! And thus have you betrayed all men. For it is to the treachery and greed of such as you that the world henceforth will owe most of its misery. You have opened the way for a new and deadly evil . . . and long after your flesh has fed the raven, your accursed handiwork will remain to plague the tribes who follow. It is my wish that you go soon to your well-deserved death, though even that cannot lessen my regret at having been the seed which gave you life. I await your terrible destiny . . . which belongs to the Golden Gourd of Peace, symbol of the sacred trust which you have desecrated."

With that, amid a babble of wailing voices, the dream ghost of Ogochawa faded into the darkness, and Maraburu lay sleepless until dawn began to gild the eastern edge of night.

So intent was he upon his mad project that Maraburu again dismissed the omens of his dreaming and trudged forward as soon as there was light enough to see. Coming ever nearer to the region of Abu-Abu, Maraburu and his marauders began to see growing signs of its fabled abundance. Near the swamps especially, along the forest fringes, were to be seen deer, occasional moose, bear, and beaver. And in certain broad marshes flourished the great sacred food plant, manomin (wild rice), of the Ojibway people who revered it because it was plentiful and could be stored for many moons to carry over long periods of famine between seasons of good hunting and fishing. Maraburu saw this abundance and felt more than ever that he must possess it.

On the third night, the young chief's restless slumber again was interrupted by a dream in which eerie voices chided him, and he seemed to see countless accusing eyes like a sky full of

cold stars staring angrily at him from every direction. And when he tried to turn away, it was only to find himself gazing full into a glowing radiance of a great yellow gourd which rested strangely upon a huge eagle's nest atop a tall pine tree. The tree stood on the shore of a lake whose waters had the reddish color of warm blood. From somewhere beyond a beautiful green island out in the lake came the dismal call of a loon.

Thereupon the dream faded and Maraburu found himself sitting upright in the darkness, chilled by a cold sweat, listening to every wild sound that ruffled the stillness of the night. For some time the voices of the forest continued, and even those that had once been friendly seemed now to revile him angrily. Sarawu the screech owl, shrieked, "Look, brothers of the forest, here is the evil one himself who comes amongst us!" And Gak-La the timber wolf howled in the distance, "The day of feasting is near. Look who comes to kill. Soon there will be blood and flesh and carcasses for all of us!" And from the marshes rose the steady dirge of Clut-clut the leopard frog, and his mournful choristers whose song seemed to say:

Never before such tragedy
Since mortal life began . . .
For each shall slay his brother,
And man shall die of man.

On the day that the war party approached the Lake of Many Voices, a wave of restless anticipation spread amongst the braves. Maraburu called them together in a brief pow-wow and outlined the plan of attack. They would strike just before daybreak on the following morning. They would fall upon the Ojibway village from three directions, destroying everything in their path. He cautioned them that no life was to be spared; no one was to be allowed to escape and warn other Ojibway villages; even the squaws and their papooses must be slain. R T024But Maraburu was to encounter yet another omen before the onslaught . . . in the form of some medicine-men's witchery involving the use of the sacred gourds. Old Ojibway customs included many rituals and ceremonies honoring the great Sun Spirit. In this instance, the Ojibway had placed around their village a series of gourd charms, hanging from low tree branches, to drive away hunger and bring good luck to the hunters.

It was such a charm as this, a small gourd no larger than his fist, which stopped Maraburu in his tracks at the edge of the village. The miniature pumpkin bore a grotesque face, painted with a crimson stain, which leered forebodingly at him . . . and he thought he recognized the features of his dead father in that hideous little countenance. A wordless, haunting terror gripped him for a moment as he violently tore down the dangling gourd-charm and squashed it beneath his feet. Then he turned frantically to the bloody business at hand, hardly realizing even then that a formidable, inescapable curse was upon him.

Within the lakeshore clearing stood some fifty birch-bark huts and lean-tos peacefully clustered in the slumberous silence of early morning. Redwing blackbirds astir in nearby rushes had begun a lively chatter, and an occasional splash on the smooth surface of the lake disclosed the presence of Ba-Ku-La the smallmouth bass, foraging for food in the shallows where mists rose up like smoke from smoldering coals. No one yet moved in the village.

Then, loud and distinct, with a piercing nearness which made it audible everywhere, came the alarm call of Mo-O-Ahmi the great northern loon. This was Maraburu's prearranged signal for attack. As soon as it sounded, a frightful war cry burst upon the quiet air and the tranquil scene of a moment before became a horrific spectacle of butchery and destruction,

accompanied by savage yelps and agonized screams. Like a relentless deluge, the raiders fell upon the encampment, inflicting quick death upon all whom they encountered. So thorough and so rapid was the slaughter that the victims, most of them old men, women and children, were slain before they could even comprehend the disaster which had overwhelmed them. By the time the sun had scaled the tree-tops and pushed back the thick concealing vapors from the lake, many bodies lay crumpled and scattered all over the clearing, while still others lay in gory death where they had lain in peaceful sleep . . . upon their deerskin and pine-bough litters.

Thus had the tribes of Maraburu reverted to the savagery of their primitive ancestors; and thus had come to the Indian world the universal curse of humanity; war, hatred, barbarian blood-lust, and the martyrdom of the innocents. And all because one man, by coveting more than was his right to possess, had forsaken those attributes which raise mankind above the status of the beast.

And now Maraburu had his first intimation of futility and serious trouble to come, for he learned that most of the able-bodied braves of the village had departed on a hunting expedition two days before and therefore had escaped his carefully planned mission of extermination. To further heighten his apprehensions, not every occupant of the village had been slain as he had ordered. Two young boys, awakened by the first warning cry, somehow evaded the attackers, reached a canoe and before they could be caught, were seen to paddle out around the Isle of Abu-Abu and vanish in the heavy mists that still obscured the lake. At the far end of the lake the boys set the canoe adrift to further confuse the enemy; then, leaving no trace, they made their way to a hidden lake nearby, known to their people as the Lake of the Warrior Bigmouth. From there they travelled swiftly to the camp of their tribe's hunting party. Three others, an old man, a girl and a boy swam unseen to nearby Abu Island and, hiding in a cave, survived to tell their people of the terrible slaughter.

Meanwhile, Maraburu's warriors baffled by the empty floating canoe, vainly searched the entire lakeshore for tracks. After half a day, not a trace could be found. This meant that the Ojibway could be expected to retaliate should they get word of the massacre. Almost as if this knowledge rendered Maraburu completely mad, he had his men inflict countless needless atrocities upon the murdered village. The bodies of the women and children were hacked and slashed into small bits and thrown upon a huge pile near the lakeshore. Every shelter was put to the flame until nothing but that hideous stack of human flesh stood above the level of the ground. Satisfied that no further destruction could be done, Maraburu finally led his band of warriors once more into the forest.

Swift and sure moved the forces of retribution. Intent upon finding the Ojibway hunting party before the two escaped lads could warn them, Maraburu's raiders roamed the vast wilderness for eleven days. They swung westward and then moved in a great circle to the north and east. But in this very desire for more bloodshed, Maraburu made his first big mistake. Their search proving futile, the war party finally made their way southwestward toward their own villages. Often now Maraburu noticed Si-Si-Shawa the bald eagle, the spirit bird of the Ojibway, circling high overhead . . . and he wondered if this could be another omen.

As they neared their home camp, the men crossed near the headwaters of the great river and then rounded the final hill. There they came upon a sight which horrified even their savage hearts. The Ojibway had had their revenge. While Maraburu had been searching for them in the north, they had swept southward upon his own undefended village after being warned by the two boys, and had completely annihilated it. Ironically, even as he had done, the vengeful Ojibway had stacked the bodies of his people high in the center of the charred, rubble-strewn clearing,

leaving almost as gruesome a scene as he had left in their camp.

All this had happened three days before, and now as the crestfallen Sioux began to recognize the mangled bodies of their squaws and children, their mothers and sisters, and their old men and women in the gory heap, their dismay was sharpened the more by the nauseating stench of flesh three days dead in the hot sun. And the wild scavengers of the forest had left livid signs of their feasting where bare unrecognizable bones, picked clean of flesh, glistened white in the sunlight. As if this were not enough, the Ojibway in a parting gesture had gathered all the gourds they could find and arranged them on the ash-littered ground in a huge circle surrounding that hideous, reeking mound of death.

Thus was the great golden Gourd of Peace flung back into the face of the man who had dared to shatter its sacred centuries-old peace accord.

Once kindled, the flame of war spread far and abroad like a gale-driven forest fire. No longer was there a peaceful village throughout the land of sky-blue water. Far up in the heart of the Ojibway country, on the sacred Isle of Abu-Abu where they had so often celebrated peace, the chiefs of all the northern tribes held a great war council. They sat in solemn conference for three days, pledging all-out vengeance against the prairie people.

Likewise in their own war councils, the Sioux tribes gathered to hear from the treacherous lips of Maraburu how they must wage relentless war against their northern neighbors. Deadly raider bands were dispatched by both sides to roam the forests and the prairies, and not a village of either nation was safe from surprise attack. Accounts of further massacres came from trembling survivors who told of unbelievable orgies of butchery and torture. Such a wave of savagery and hatred and destruction moved through the great woods and grasslands, and along the lakes and rivers, that within two summers half the populations of both Indian nations either had been slain or had starved or frozen during the bitter winter which followed Maraburu's first summer of war.

Many of the tribes' best hunters were dead, while those who remained were so occupied with raiding enemy villages or defending their own that they had little time to hunt for desperately needed food and hides.

Maraburu had not had any additional disturbing dreams for some time after that first massacre at the Lake of Many Voices. Believing himself freed at last of his father's curse, he plunged blindly into the full course of his madness and continued to add to his victims. He carried on his depredations until late autumn of the second year of war, seeming for a time to have rare good fortune in his encounters with the Ojibway.

Meanwhile, the Ojibway, having been caught off guard and outnumbered in the beginning, had been forced gradually to withdraw deep into the trackless forest and take the necessary time to prepare for the intense struggle which they knew would be renewed with the first warming winds of another spring.

Another long harsh winter kept Maraburu and his people busy gathering food and furs which were never quite enough, and it made him realize he could not sustain a long drawn out struggle. He determined that his only chance to effectively drive away the Ojibway lay in gaining full control of their heartland, the region of the Lake of Many Voices and its hallowed Isle of Abu-Abu.

When spring came at last, with its restless throngs of birds returning to their summer haunts, and as soon as the red winged blackbirds were nesting and the yellow swamp flowers were in bloom, Maraburu summoned the warriors of his seven Sioux encampments. After several weeks of feverish preparations, he led them once again toward that strange island lake,

intent on ending the conflict once and for all. With one decisive stroke he would seek out their main camp, crush all opposition, and thus wrest the rich north country from his former friendly woodland neighbors.

As if hoping to discredit the old tribal customs and traditions by defying them, he took with him a large yellow gourd which he would use to commemorate his conquest and to demonstrate how much more powerful was he, Maraburu, than this meaningless peace symbol of his ancestors.

But now the Ojibway were ready. Inferior in number, they had become superior in cunning. Led by a wise old chief, Kasha-Soma (which means "guardian of the forests"), who had spent the winter counseling with the nature spirits on the Isle of Abu-Abu, they had resorted to a new kind of defensive warfare, using their forest skills, prowling soundlessly in small bands among the lakes and through the woods they knew so well, remaining always out of reach yet ever near enough to harass Maraburu's braves at every turn. They would steal into his camp in the depth of night like silent shadows, leaving always some terrible reminder of their visit. Even after the first day's trek, while encamped for the night on the shores of Lake Akasati (which means "giver of life"), where Mississippi, the father of rivers, is born and begins its long journey to the distant southern sea, he learned that his enemy intended to give him no rest. Near the outposts of his camp, three of his sentries were found dead, each with a yellow arrow imbedded in his heart, and upon each arrow a small yellow gourd impaled.

At sight of the gourds thus forebodingly taunting him, Maraburu grew fearful, for he realized that the curse was still upon him as surely as was the blood of many of his own people. Now came also ominous sightings of spirit fire in the woods . . . the dreaded ghost glow on moonless nights which the forest people claimed to be the signal fires of the forest spirits talking to one another. [Note: Slow oxidation of phosphorus, causing phosphorescent glow, often seen in decaying wood on the forest floor; commonly known as <u>fox fire.</u>] He doubled the night lookout, yet despite the extra precautions, each morning there would be still another victim . . . always slain in the same manner.

Amid great difficulties, having to move a large war party through trackless wilderness amid growing dissention among his warriors, and ever relentlessly tormented by the stalking Ojibway, he finally brought his band to the Lake of Many Voices. There, fearful of the spirits of his former victims, he avoided the side of the lake where lay the charred ruins of his original carnage and set up a carefully guarded camp on the opposite shore.

By now, Maraburu had become ever more troubled by continuing signs of his father's curse. While checking his defenses along a small shallow inlet of the lake at the north edge of his camp, he was startled to see in a lily bed just off shore a cluster of <u>five</u> fallen-star flowers. They were blooming weeks ahead of their time, as if somehow mysteriously put there to warn him once again of the wrath of the Nature Spirits. All this had begun to weary him, and he found himself struggling against a growing dread about the outcome of the war he had started. He kept asking himself how he might quickly crush the Ojibway people, take their territory, and yet restore peace and order before he and his own people should suffer some great calamity.

As if in answer, Ra-Ra-Wa the raven appeared to him in a dream and told Maraburu he had offended Si-Si-Chawa the great bird of peace, and that his only hope of ending the conflict and escaping the arrows of the Ojibway was to appease the great Bald Eagle by placing the Golden Gourd of Peace in the eagle's nest. He would find the nest at the top of the tallest pine tree within sight of the Island of Abu-Abu.

Next day the tree was found not far up the shore from camp . . . a magnificent white pine

with a huge eagle's nest at its crest. So distraught had Maraburu become that he hopefully interpreted the dream to mean that by the mere act of offering the Gourd of Peace to the Bird of Peace he would make amends for his past actions and a quick victory would be given him. Thus he lost no time in making the long, arduous ascent to the top of the tree, little suspecting the fateful trap into which his lust for blood and power was leading him.

As he reached the branches just beneath the nest and was about to stretch upward and deposit upon it the Gourd of Peace, a sudden burst of wind shook the tree. In an instant a thunder squall had swept out of the west and moved swiftly across the lake. Fierce wind gusts whipped up huge waves that crashed against the rocky shore. The great pine began to sway wildly. Maraburu, almost torn from its branches, clung to the tree in terror. In his frantic effort to save himself, he let the Gourd of Peace slip from his fingers. It plummeted downward and burst into bits as it struck a rock far below. Now lightning flashed and the thunder drums of the Sky Spirit roared angrily and echoed deafeningly across the lake.

And then . . . sping! A blinding bolt of lightning splintered the great pine into several sharp shafts, one of which crashed to the ground, breaking in half as it fell across a large round boulder. Another shaft, lower down, remained upright in the form of a huge spear . . . and upon this Maraburu fell, skewered like a rabbit on a spit.

Fear and horror gripped the warriors of Maraburu as from the ground below they helplessly watched their leader held up on high as if staked to the wild sky, kicking and screaming in agony, his anguished voice echoing frightfully from ridge to ridge. From the opposite shore of the lake there arose a wild, jubilant uproar of victory cries where a band of Ojibway had gathered in puzzlement to watch Maraburu's desperate climb up the peace tree of Si-Si-Chawa. And as he slowly expired, his men leaving his body to be picked clean by the ravens (as his father had foretold), fled in panic into the forest, many to be ambushed by the waiting enemy. Only a few survived to reach their home villages and bring the news of their defeat.

Thus did the evil design of Maraburu come to its inevitable end. An uneasy truce returned to the northland, but not again would the Ojibway and the Sioux trust each other or their chiefs smoke the peace pipe together. In generations to come, the territory west of the Big Blue Sweetwater Sea would change hands repeatedly as the tribes from time to time struggled for dominion. But whenever the prairie people won possession, the forest people would eventually drive them out again.

And Peace, that precious fragile flower that all men wanted but few men cherished, never again took root and flourished in the forests and on the prairies of the Land of Sky Blue Water. Only at remote Abu-Abu, deserted and avoided and forgotten in after years, did Peace still prevail . . . but it was the Peace of the Nature Spirits, and only the wild things knew and understood its nurturing magic.

As he finished, Gene leaned slowly back. No one spoke for a moment. Not even the clamor around us could immediately break the spell which that intriguing account had cast upon our entire group. Here surely was the kind of magic that wilderness dreams are made of. Finally, Mark was the one who broke the silence.

"Warrior big-mouth," he mused. "Boy, that sounds just like some fighting large mouth bass."

"Aw, everybody knows large mouth bass aren't found that far north," protested Mike.

"That's what makes the whole legend sound fishy," quipped Tom. "But seriously, I'm interested in the strange name of that island. Abu-Abu. It seems to me I've heard that term before . . . something out of Indian lore. If I'm not mistaken, Gene, doesn't Abu-Abu represent a sort of mystic notion in the Indian mind of man's oneness with nature . . . or something like that?"

"Sort of," Gene replied. "But I think the Indians weren't nearly as philosophical as they were superstitious. I've tried to find something on it, but there's not much to go on. The only thing I can figure is that Abu-Abu was some kind of earthly Utopian hunting ground which the forest Indians believed to exist and which they constantly sought during their wanderings."

"You know," Bill Sweasy commented, "in a way, Abu-Abu sounds very much like many places up in that beautiful country."

"Well," observed Al, "whatever it all means, the whole thing sounds pretty exciting. At least we have a marvelous goal to shoot at. Won't it be something if we actually find an Isle of Abu-Abu?"

"And a lake of echoes?" added Mark.

"And those warrior big-mouth?" Mike's fishing fever, ever a chronic condition, was simmering noticeably.

No doubt about it, Gene and Tom had succeeded in whetting our anticipation to the boiling point. The remainder of that evening on the houseboat was devoted to a spirited discussion of our plans. The logistics were carefully gone over. Details of food procurement, packing, hauling of our canoes on car-top mounts, rendezvous at Ely in time to catch the tow launches on Saturday morning at Fall Lake and at Hoist Bay on Basswood Lake, were thoroughly worked out.

At last all was ready. The return cruise across the lake, with Gene chatting jovially at the wheel, seemed all too short, so good was the feel of the house boat's gentle pitching underfoot and the sound of the water rippling alongside . . . a fitting foretaste of wonderful sensations to come.

As if reading my thoughts, Gene smiled as he said, "There's something about the flow and motion that gets into your system . . . but it's so much better when you're using paddles instead of pistons for power. I guess as much as I love this old tub, I'd trade her for a canoe if I ever had to make that drastic choice. Anyway, we'll soon have all of it . . . the canoes, the clean silent lakes, the forests, and privacy so complete we'll think we're in a world entirely our own."

"Boy," exclaimed Al, "I might as well take next week off. I won't be worth two cents on the job. All I'll be thinking of is Abu-Abu."

Thus did excitement and anticipation take possession of us. And when finally we left the houseboat at the landing and went our separate ways, a dream went with us. The next time we would all see each other would be at a wilderness outfitting headquarters in Ely, from where, after a final checkup of duffle, personal gear and maps, our wilderness quest would begin.

It would in the meantime be a week of impatient, monotonous waiting, brightened only by the frenzy of preparation and the pervasive vision of Abu-Abu. But that would be enough. Whether fact or fancy, that enticing legend would be balm to restlessness until the day this party of adventurers was happily on its way into the wild unknown.

CHAPTER THREE

Happy day! At four a.m. on the appointed Saturday morning, Al and I and our two sons Michael and Mark pulled up in Al's heavily laden Ford pickup-camper in front of the wilderness outfitters at Ely. We had traveled most of the night, Al and I sleeping and driving alternately while the boys slept on top of a stack of duffle in the back. We were early and the first ones there.

We stepped out of the cab to stretch. Beyond the slumbering town to the northeast the sky already wore the first soft glow of approaching dawn. Lights were on in the outfitters store. Checking the two canoes lashed upside down atop the camper, I thought how incongruous and useless they looked up there, and I couldn't wait to get them into the water.

Excited as we were and impatient for action, there was little to do but get back in the car and wait for the arrival of the others. Al promptly dozed off, but my mind was so filled with anticipation of what lay ahead that I found myself wide awake. I sat thinking about the legend. Abu-Abu had somehow become for me a symbol not only of everything I loved about the wilderness, but also of its vast mystery, and suddenly I was praying that we would indeed find the "enchanted" island and the Lake of Echoes. The legend had told of Nature's voices . . . speaking wisdom and truth for all who would open their ears. And I wondered: did this not hint somehow of man's long alienation from nature, of secrets begging to be solved, of knowledge plainly offered but vainly rejected, of primeval connections long repudiated and denied? Surely there must be a message out there in that wilderness . . . and at any rate, I would have a chance to find out. I would be as close to pure nature as I could ever hope to get, and I would open my ears and my eyes and my mind and my spirit. I would look and listen and meditate . . . and I would pray that that elusive voice might somehow somewhere single me out and speak to me . . . if only to confirm what I already suspected. If keeping an open ear and seeking mind were requirement enough, as the legend implied, I stood a good chance of hearing, of discovering, of learning . . . something . . . anything that might cast further light upon the beguiling mystery that had become the abiding object of my wilderness quest.

It was in the midst of such musings that I heard car motors approach and stop behind us. They were here. We all piled out onto the sidewalk and at once were greeting the Sweasys, the Tomlinsons, Manko, and Daugherty with an enthusiasm which clearly reflected everyone's relief at having made our rendezvous on time and without a hitch.

"Hi ya, Billy boy!" Mark shouted. "I thought you'd never get here."

"I thought so too, Mark. That's a long haul. We stopped along the way and slept awhile."

"Aw, who could sleep at a time like this?" beamed Mike. "Let's move on to Basswood!"

"Hold it," laughed Gene. "We've a few preliminaries here at the outfitters first. Have to check in for our launch reservations and pick up a few additional supplies."

At this we all marched into the store. Gene found the proprietor and attended to the arrangements while the rest of us browsed among attractive displays of fishing gear, hunting knives, outdoor togs, canned and dehydrated camping foods (canned foods were not yet banned in Quetico as they were later on), camp tools, tents and accessories, wilderness maps, canoeing gear, stacks of knapsacks and Duluth packs--a veritable stockpile of every kind of camping equipment imaginable. A party could come here entirely unprepared and rent or buy everything needed for an expedition. We, of course, had come well-equipped with our own things and had to buy only a few special camp food items to fill out our needs.

"Well, fellows," Gene finally announced, "we're all set. Let's head out for God's country."

He didn't need to say more. We hurried over to an all-night restaurant and after catching a hearty breakfast--we were soon driving out the east end of town, headed for Winton on Fall Lake three miles away. At Winton we drove down to the loading dock. This was the highway's end, as far as we could drive by car. Here, in such a flurry of ambitious energy as I've seldom seen on the part of the boys, we quickly transferred our canoes and packs from the cars to the big launch.

Fall Lake is six miles long. It is one of several access routes to the border waters of Basswood Lake and most canoe parties which go this way use the launch service to get quickly past its busy boating traffic. As we sped smoothly up the lake we were still seeing many signs of civilization--rows of cottages and lodges along its shores, with boats resting at docks and already, though the rising sun was still low in the east, occasional fishing boats out trolling or at anchor.

A rough, narrow, four-mile dirt road, the remnant of an old logging trail, links the upper end of Fall Lake with Hoist Bay on Basswood Lake. This phase of our journey was a dusty, bouncy ride aboard an ancient weathered bus which the boys appropriately named "bump buggy." If its presence in such a remote place was unusual, so was the fact that it ran. Yet, with only a few coughs of its tired old motor and some loud grinding of gears, it transported us safely through the forest to Hoist Bay. An old beat-up panel truck and rack-trailer followed the bus with our canoes and duffle.

Somewhere along the road as we rounded a turn, the driver shouted, "Look ahead!" and there, with its big ears straight up, stood a beautiful whitetail deer staring at us. The animal must have been accustomed to seeing this antique shuttle service for it merely tossed its head up high and strolled indifferently off into the woods.

"Venison," commented Mike.

"All that kid thinks of is food," muttered his father.

"He's a growing boy," offered Bill with an understanding grin.

In the back seat, to the accompaniment of squeaks and rattles, Tom was happily singing a camp song.

Just ahead of him, George Daugherty, a professional engineer with scientific inclination, was studying a wilderness map. Beside him sat Will Tomlinson, Gene's oldest son, whose first-hand knowledge of the Quetico canoe country was second only to his father's. For more

than half of his seventeen years Will had shared many a canoe trip with his dad, and it was a comfort to know that these two "veterans" of the wilds would be our trail-blazers.

Hoist Bay is one of many large bays in big, sprawling Basswood Lake. Along with Moose Lake some twenty miles to the east, the Fall Lake/Hoist Bay combination is a favorite gateway to the Quetico wilderness canoe area. From the landing on Hoist Bay--with the exception of motor boats which can still get into Basswood with little extra effort--the main mode of travel is by canoe (motor boats were still allowed on Basswood Lake at this writing). Basswood itself, though otherwise as lovely a body of islanded, forest-fringed water as can be found anywhere, is yet too near the road's end, too accessible, too open to the influence of civilization which still presses against its southern shores. The true wilderness seekers want none of its motorboats and fishing traffic, dispersed though they be in such a far-ranging body of water, so they move up through its eighteen scenic miles as quickly as possible, often by tow-launch as we were about to do, and actually begin their canoe travel northward into the Quetico from its upper bays.

We now had only Basswood Lake between us and the all-pervading wilderness. Our gear was set out on the Hoist Bay dock, ready for the final tow-launch. Gene made a careful inspection of the packs to make sure not only that they were all there but that all were properly secured for rugged toting.

There would be a short wait for the launch. With everything in readiness, we had our first opportunity to relax and discuss our immediate plans. Tom wanted to know how long it would take the launch to haul us up the lake to our canoe take-off point in North Bay.

"A couple of hours if all goes well," explained Gene. "We'll have to stop and check in at the Canadian Ranger Station and Customs on the way. They're on a couple of small islands just below big Ottawa Island."

"It doesn't look as if we'll be in our canoes much before noon," Tom observed as he studied his map.

"That leaves us about five or six hours of paddling and portaging before we have to pitch camp for the night," George Daugherty was counting on his fingers. "Are you sure there are some good campsites five hours out of North Bay?"

"No problem," replied Gene. "As a matter of fact, I have a good spot in mind. We should make it easily if there are no serious delays."

"What would delay us," asked Al.

"A capsizing, maybe?" quipped Tom as he glanced meaningfully at the boys. They got the message.

"No horsing around in the canoes," replied Mike's father who was quick to put down any show of cockiness unbecoming a fledgling so lately admitted to the ranks.

"Well, as long as we're on the subject, just remember, everybody, to wear your life jackets whenever you're in a canoe," Gene warned. "That's safety rule number one on this expedition."

The tow-launch was brought over finally from its mooring place, and within fifteen minutes our gear was stowed aboard and we slid away from the dock. It was great to feel the wind in our faces as we raced out of Hoist Bay into the broad open expanse of the lake. The boys, visibly excited now, stood along the rail and chattered about everything they saw.

Strong waves were running before a moderate breeze and the bow, as it cut through them, threw up occasional bursts of fine spray. The spray blurred my sunglasses and it felt cool on the skin. White gulls flashed by, attracted by the foaming wake and the possibility of food. Far out

ahead to the east, small rocky islands topped by tall pines and spruces broke the continuity of the distant shoreline. Wherever one looked now, the scene consisted of varying combinations of the four primary features which would dominate our environment for the next two weeks: water, sky, rock, and forest. No longer were we aware of anything related strictly to the civilized milieu which we were now putting rapidly behind us. Except for two men in a boat anchored off the point of an island, fishing, and a speck of a speeding motor launch far toward the south shore spewing a bright spray in the sunlight, we were quite by ourselves on the big border lake, passing imperceptibly from America into Canadian waters, and we were having our first sensations of the wilderness closing in.

At length, having traversed the open stretch of the lake, the steersman throttled down and guided the launch into a narrow channel which curved gradually between two densely wooded islands. Turning abruptly out of the far end, the launch headed straight toward another island which, unlike the others, had the open manicured appearance peculiar to human habitation. From a rough-planked floating dock at the water's edge a pathway wound upward among tall, scattered red and white pines to a rustic, recently painted brown cabin. Conspicuous against the dark greens of the trees, the blazing red and white ensign of the Canadian government flapped gently at the tip of a high pine pole. By providing the only eye-catching patch of bright color in sight, the flag not only clearly announced the location of the Ranger Station but somehow seemed to reflect a warm note of official welcome.

And certainly the official welcome we received from the Ranger himself was no less warm. In that typically friendly, easy manner which one encounters so often among the Canadian people, he processed the required permit forms with a courteous dispatch which showed he understood the importance of saving as much of our time as he possibly could.

"This is your forest travel permit," he explained about the first form he began filling out. "It actually is a safety measure which tells us of your whereabouts in the wilderness in case of emergency. Now then, how many days will you be in the Quetico?"

"Fifteen," Gene replied, "counting today and the Saturday two weeks from now when we come out.

"Destination?"

"Echo Lake . . . if we can find it."

The Ranger looked up and I thought I detected a flicker of incredulity in his glance as he thoughtfully repeated the name. "Echo Lake?"

"That's right," said Gene. "I understand it's off the beaten trail."

"Yes, quite. Are you familiar with the route?"

"Never been there. But I have a rough map which was given to me by a friend who has seen the lake. Why do you ask about the route? Is it bad?"

"Bad is probably not the word." The Ranger glanced around at the rest of us. "But you's better be sure you're all in good physical condition. A few of those seldom used portages are difficult enough to turn back nine parties out of ten. It does increase the possibility of injury and fatigue . . . especially if you should get lost and miss the lake. It's really isolated, and there would be no quick way for you to get out if you really had to. It's only fair to tell you what you're up against."

"What about the lake? Is it worth the effort?"

"I'd say it is. But you have to realize it's not on one of the established chains . . . and you will have to go cross-grain to the general direction of the waterways. That means you'll have to cross some difficult bogs and high ridges. You certainly are not likely to see any other canoe

parties in that area . . . so you'll really be on your own."

"Sounds pretty rough," Bill Sweasy interposed.

"And exciting," added Tom with a smack of his lips as if the prospect of danger and difficulty were something to be relished.

Well, if you really want to work for it," the Ranger assured us, "you'll have a beautiful place all to yourselves which in my opinion can't be duplicated anywhere."

At this point Al suddenly asked the question which probably was on all our minds. "Have you ever heard of a legend about an island called Abu-Abu?"

The Ranger smiled. "Oh, you've heard that one too? Yes, there seems to be some sort of legend, but you know how these Indian myths are. They have any number of versions . . . and mostly they are vague as to exact locations. Why do you ask?"

It was obvious that the Ranger, though he may have heard the legend, did not connect it with Echo Lake. Yet he knew of the lake, so we could at least be certain of the lake's existence.

"It's just something we happened to hear about. Probably nothing to it." I could see that Al, without wishing to reveal the nature of our particular interest in Echo Lake, was mainly angling for information. "By the way," he added, as if changing the subject, "is there any good fishing up in that area?"

"Should be excellent. You can be sure it isn't over-fished. Well, now . . . let's get on with the permit." The Ranger indicated on the form, with further information from Gene, the general route we would be following as well as the number of persons in our party.

Next we were issued entry permits for five canoes, for which we were charged four dollars each. Then a campsite permit for five dollars, which was required for occupancy of campsites anywhere in the Quetico. Finally we bought fishing licenses for the six adults in our party, at six dollars a license. The four boys, all under eighteen, would be covered by their fathers' permits. The Ranger concluded the transaction by providing us with a supply of plastic trash bags to be used for hauling out any litter which couldn't be burned in our campfires.

"A good woodsman leaves a clean and tidy campsite," said he in a parting oration that had the flat recitational cadence of a memorized speech. "Be sure to burn all waste papers and rubbish, including garbage, regularly each day. And remember, green trees make poor firewood but fine scenery, so cut your wood from dry, dead timber. Dig your latrines at least a hundred feet from the lakeshore and the campsite. Make your campfires on bare rock or sand, and never leave a fire unattended. Soak it with water until it is dead out. Goodbye, gentlemen . . . and have a safe and enjoyable trip."

One more formality remained--a quick visit to the Customs station on another nearby island. There, in much the same businesslike but friendly manner of the Ranger, the Customs officer made a perfunctory listing of our gear and food supplies. After some quick calculations with pencil and paper, he concluded that the foodstuffs we were bringing in--which, of course, had been purchased in the United States--were subject to an import duty of thirty-one dollars and twenty-seven cents.

Somehow this final raid on our budget by the Canadian government struck me as being extremely irregular. It had the implications of an outright shakedown. The permit purchases we had been obliged to make at the Ranger station had seemed fair and acceptable; at least they covered services and privileges we would be using and enjoying throughout the expedition. But having to pay twice for one's groceries--considering that one had paid plenty for them in the first place--seemed a low blow indeed! In view of the utter necessity of a food supply in the wilderness, and the rather contrived manner in which Customs took advantage of this fact only

after the camping party had fully committed itself, it was difficult to regard the practice as anything but sheer extortion. I could have hoped that my final impression of our good hosts might have been more satisfying.

The incident was soon forgotten, however, in the keen sense of adventure which mounted mile by mile as the tow-launch streaked up along the west shore of big Ottawa Island, past Canadian Point, up the long northern arm of Basswood Lake with its grand view of high, shining green Minnesota Point several miles across to the west, then through the picturesque high-rock narrows of White Island, and finally up into the north end of North Bay.

During this run we had time to eat a sandwich lunch of cheese, sausage, ham, oranges, sweetrolls, chocolate candy and canned pop which we had brought along in a special carton for just this occasion. When next we ate, it would be a hot supper off our first evening's campfire.

And now at last that great eagerly awaited moment of final transition to the wilderness was close at hand. The tow-launch came to its last stop and we found ourselves floating gently in calm water off the sheltered side of a narrow little island close by the north shore, an ideal spot for the grand embarkation. In a matter of minutes our one remaining contact with civilization would be severed. Under the meticulous supervision of Gene and Tom, the canoes were lowered to the water one by one and loaded carefully with the number of packs they could safely hold. Some were given three packs, some four, depending upon weight and bulk.

We almost had a dunking when Mark, overly anxious to get into our canoe, slipped while scrambling over the rail of the launch and landed, luckily, in an undignified sprawl across the bow of the canoe. As he settled sheepishly into his seat, amid a chorus of playful chiding by the other boys, Gene cautioned them.

"All right, fellows," he said, "there's a good example of how things can happen. I want to warn you again that canoes are safe and sturdy craft, but you've got to respect them. They don't like careless, clumsy handling. Now I know you're excited, but I can't think of a place where it's more important to keep your cool than in a canoe. So let's just slow down and have a nice 1d 1r 1y trip." R T024"And while we're at it," Tom cut in as he looked us all over, "let's make sure everybody is wearing his life jacket, properly secured."

I've already checked them out," replied Al. "I think we're all set. Come on, Mike, you take the bow."

Mike and his father boarded their canoe and pulled away a short distance from the launch to await the others. I handed Mark his paddle, then climbed down into the stern seat, and we too pulled away. The canoe felt good under me. For the first time, I realized, I was beginning noticeably to relax. Until now I'd been up-tight, impatient, anxious, still under the tensions of the past week on the job. I filled my pipe and lit it. A wonderful elation was coming over me and I felt strangely grateful that fate and circumstance had made all this possible.

"Ho, Mark," I called out, "how do you feel now?"

"Geeze, Pop," Mark turned around with an expression on his face which would have made his words unnecessary. "Thanks for bringing me along."

Something in that simple utterance told me I had a fine son, and I wanted to hug him.

"I wouldn't want it any other way," I assured him.

Bill Sweasy and his boy were now paddling over towards us.

"I've sure been looking forward to this," Bill exclaimed as they came alongside. "What a gorgeous day!"

And gorgeous it was. The bright sun gave a vivid glow to the green forest which stretched away along the near shore, and the sky couldn't have been more blue. The air over the

water was cool, clear, and invigorating.

Next came Gene and his boy Will. The sure, easy way they handled their canoe indicated they'd done this plenty of times before. I glanced toward the tow-launch. Manko and Daugherty, the last to leave it, were just pushing off. As soon as they were clear, the steersman started his motor and after a parting shout of "Good luck!" and a farewell wave of his arm, he churned off with a roar. Silently we watched the launch recede into the distance until its motor could no longer be heard.

"Well, Voyageurs," shouted George excitedly, "from here on it's all ours! Onward to Abu-Abu!"

If it can be hoped of this account that the full dimensions of the experience shall have been recorded, then certainly, to me, one of the rich enjoyments of this particular trip had to be the way troubadour Tom filled his moments--and ours--with frequent zestful renditions of camping songs, many of which he actually made up to suit the occasion. And now, as he and George glided up to join the flotilla, his good strong voice, mellowed by many summers of carefree campfire vocalizing, burst forth upon the quiet air with a song entirely new to us which we were to hear many times in varying versions. It was, as he would explain later, his "official" theme song for our expedition--something he'd just dreamed up piece-by-piece as we went along and which he had titled, appropriately, <u>The Song of Abu-Abu.</u>

It proved to be a catchy little camping ditty, its simple words and melody (delivered in a number of variations) reflecting much of the spirit and sentiment of our wilderness adventure. And here was our introduction to it, in that assertive yet nonchalant and natural style which gave every Manko song a kind of intimate conversational quality. it shouldn't be surprising that I later pumped as many of the words out of him as he could recall and recorded them in my journal. The lyrics are raw and to a great extent unpolished, but this seems to give them a genuineness and spontaneity which make them charming and meaningful. At any rate, this account could hardly be complete without including at least the best of them. So here is the song as we initially heard it:

<u>VERSE:</u>
When the spring
Breezes bring
Warming days and birds that sing,
Then I dream of ABU-ABU . . .
And I long once more
For the friendly shore
Of that happy island campground . . .

<u>REFRAIN:</u>
<u>Where ev'ry trouble</u>
<u>Becomes a bubble,</u>
<u>And ev'ry day is brighter,</u>
<u>Cares are lighter . . .</u>
<u>Comes the dawn, packs are on, paddle on and portage on . . .</u>
<u>ABU-ABU here we come!</u>

VERSE:
There's a place
Where the pace
Never gets to be a race
On the Isle of ABU-ABU . . .
It's a peaceful spot
That the world forgot,
In our happy island campground.

REFRAIN: Where ev'ry trouble . . .

How I pray
For the day
When I'm paddlin' on my way
To the Isle of ABU-ABU . . .
I'll be ABU bound
Till at last I've found
That happy island campground.

REFRAIN: Where ev'ry trouble . . .

VERSE:
Pack a sack
On your back,
Soon we'll pitch a bivouac
On the Isle of ABU-ABU . . .
Under smiling skies
Where the seagull flies
We will find that island campground.

Urged on by our troubadour after a few stanzas, we were soon joining him in the song's hearty refrain, its high spirit becoming so infectious that it put everyone in a kind of delirious spell. In an extremely loud if somewhat dissonant chorus we intoned the final repeated phrases as if we wanted that vast silent audience of conifers along the shore to hear every word:

. . . Where ev'ry trouble
Becomes a bubble,
And ev'ry day is brighter,
Cares are lighter . . .
Comes the dawn, packs are on, paddle on and portage on . . .
ABU-ABU here we come!

[Insert musical score here]

CHAPTER FOUR

"Okay, men," Gene commanded as soon as the song was over and Tom had been roundly applauded, "we have a long way to push . . . so let's hit the paddles!"

Whereupon he and Will took the lead and struck out sharply along the shore toward a wide shallow cove profusely grown over with reeds. Behind them the other canoes moved in single file like mallard ducklings trailing their mother. Nearing the reed patch, the Tomlinsons made a wide turn and entered the narrow channel of a small stream sluggishly winding down among the reeds into the lake. Paddling steadily up this channel we were soon out of sight of Basswood Lake.

As the course of the stream gradually narrowed between two solid walls of spruce, I suddenly realized we were truly within the wilderness now. We were at that point where the first-timer gets his initial contact with real wilderness on this particular route out of Basswood. Watching Mark in the bow as he stroked the water, I knew the intense excitement which gripped him, for as he scanned the shore and then the sky and then the clean, clear water beneath us, literally gulping in the whole visible world about him as if fearful of missing even the smallest part of it, I could recall myself in a similar situation long ago during my own first encounter with such a primitive world in the company of my father. Then it dawned on me that many of the most lovable things I remember about both my father and mother were related somehow to nature and the sharing of outdoor experience. What a bounty of lifelong happiness they had given me through early exposure to the beauty and the mystery of the natural world. And what a satisfaction it was to be able now to pass it on to still another generation.

Here in the shelter of dense vegetation close by on both sides, the air was still and the sun hot. Perspiration glistened on straining brows as backs and muscles flexed with every paddle stroke. For a short time the soft rhythmic did-dip-dip of the paddles was the only sound as each of us in his own way fell pensively under the spell of the silent, enveloping forest.

Ah, but it was good to be here. It had taken some doing, but we were into the wilderness at last--into that brief edenic freedom which no longer is anywhere to be found except in a few remaining wild places such as this. Where else can there be such freedom? For as free as we may fancy ourselves to be in our cozy strongholds of urban domesticity and commerce, where else indeed but in the wilderness can we feel beholden to so few and shed so easily the burdens

of our temporal concerns? At home, caged in as we must ever be by the ceaseless demands and pressures of civilization seething about us, and fettered to a thousand tight little customs, we may wistfully speak of freedom, think of it, imagine it, and yet know it not. True, in the city we have no restraining bars around us, and we come and go at will, but freedom is so much more than that--especially when measured against the kind of joyous abandon we were now beginning to experience in the wilds. Can we ever, under the city's stifling pressures, really live even briefly outside ourselves or our conventional shells? Dare we loaf and loiter for even a moment? Dare we take a day off when we please for idle dreaming? Dare we miss a morning's shave--or a monthly payment? Dare we freely speak our thoughts or truly be ourselves? Dare we keep our doors and windows open day and night or leave the keys in our cars? Do we really live a whole and happy life or do we merely "make the best of it" by kidding ourselves endlessly?"

Yes, into the wilderness at last. Free at last. Free in a way perhaps that few modern humans can ever be. Already you could sense the tensions slackening as men and boys, after those first speechless moments of contact with the strange wild world which would be our home for the next few weeks, eagerly began discussing the prospects which lay ahead.

To the three youngest boys, of course--Mark, Michael, and Billy--the wilderness adventure now beginning to unfold was entirely new and therefore especially impressive and stimulating. I found it fascinating to hear them react to each new discovery.

"Those woods are like a solid row of church steeples," observed Mike as he scanned the serrated skyline of the spruce forest.

The trees did indeed suggest spires pointing heavenward, and Mark responded with something I remembered having heard once and later told him on a hike: "Maybe that's because the forest is the only cathedral God built with his own hands."

"Sure beats man-made things," mused Billy, paddling close behind us.

In the clear water beneath us, which was no deeper than one or two lengths of paddle, small fish could be plainly seen darting among rocks and patches of aquatic vegetation.

"Lots of minnows in here," Mark called back as our canoe glided steadily forward.

"Know what that means?" I replied.

"No. What?"

"It means this is a very likely place for big northern pike to be feeding."

I'd hardly finished the sentence when Mark suddenly lurched forward and stared wildly into the water just ahead. With a shout that was more like an uncontrolled squeal, he stammered, "Geeze, Dad! That's a . . . that's a fish! I thought it was a log! Big! A big one . . . !" He was now rocking the canoe as he shifted about and peered intently over one side and then the other.

"Steady, Mark," I cautioned.

"Ho, man! You wouldn't believe it! Hey, Billy . . . I just saw a fish as long as my paddle scoot ahead of the canoe!"

"Aw, that's nothing like the one I'm gonna catch," Billy shouted back.

"Ha! You'll be lucky to catch one a quarter that size!"

"Wanna bet?"

"Sure. Two bits I catch the first northern!"

"Two bits I catch the biggest northern!"

Then, from the canoe in front of us, Mike cut in. "I'll take the first and the biggest," he boasted. He stretched his arms out wide and nearly lost his paddle.

"Keep her in the channel!" boomed his father as they swerved toward a protruding deadhead. "Let's get to Abu Island first . . . then maybe we can all go fishing!"

"Portage!"

Gene's voice cut in crisply from up ahead. He and Will were approaching what appeared to be a rock-shelf landing at the water's edge. The stream beyond them lost itself among impassable boulders. From the landing a wide rocky trail led up to the top of a low granite bank.

Minutes later we were unloading the canoes and lifting them one by one out of the water. Gene quickly sorted the packs according to weight and assigned the lighter ones to the boys. He then slipped his shoulders into the straps of a pack and with an easy flip of his powerful arms raised his canoe bottom-side-up and over his head. Balancing it on his shoulders, he set out gingerly up the trail.

"This is a short one, fellows," he called back. "The next lake is just over the hump. Don't overload. We can come back for any excess baggage."

"Don't overload, he says," quipped Tom, watching with hands on hips as Gene with his double burden disappeared beyond the rise. "Do you realize he deliberately selected the cook pack?"

"Yeah, and that thing weighs a ton," exclaimed Billy admiringly.

"What would happen if you tried that?" Mike asked his father teasingly.

"That remark borders on the impertinent," replied Al with a meaningful smile. "I hope the only thing I have to paddle on this trip is the water." At that he shouldered a canoe and trudged up the trail.

I helped Mark get his pack on his back and off he went. I got under a canoe and followed. Behind me came the others, each with his own burden. The distance to the top of the rise was about fifty paces. Reaching it, I could see ahead to where Gene was putting down his canoe at the edge of a lake hardly more than a hundred yards across but which stretched out lengthily to the left. The opposite shore was a solid forest wall of mingled spruce and red pine.

"Not much of a lake," I said as I came to the water and floated my canoe beside Gene's.

"Well, this one's not very wide, but it bends around over there for better than a mile," he said, pointing to the left. "We catch the next portage at the far end."

"Hey, Gene," called George as he came over the rise with a canoe. "I hope all the portages are as short and easy as this one."

"I sure wish they were," chuckled Gene. "Luckily, though, the first few aren't bad . . . gives us a chance to get warmed up for the tough ones."

As soon as all the gear had been brought forward and the canoes re-loaded, we embarked again, this time over open water where we could proceed in close flotilla formation.

"Hey, let's race to the next portage," shouted Mike as he chopped vigorously at the water.

"It's a deal," responded Mark, quickening his paddle strokes.

"Knock it off!" cracked Tom. "Nothing will poop you out quicker! Keep to a steady, comfortable rhythm. You'll know why soon enough. We just can't afford to lose time waiting for paddlers who've run out of steam. This is a real test of endurance, and you're going to need every ounce of energy you've got."

"Once we're settled in camp, you guys can race all day long," added Gene. "Just now, let's make sure we conserve enough stamina to get us to Abu-Abu."

"Amen to that," agreed George solemnly.

"I'm thirsty," Mike suddenly croaked.

"Well, help yourself," his father replied. "Your fountain is all around you."

Mike looked glumly at the water "Is it really safe to drink?"

"Much safer than not to drink."

"Whuddaya mean?"

"Drink, and be replenished. Don't drink, and die of thirst."

Just then Billy dipped his cupped hands into the lake. "I've been waiting to try this," he said. He drank several helpings in quick succession as Mike watched him.

"How does it taste?" queried Mike, revealing by a slight hint of repugnance in his expression a finicky side to his character the progress of which was going to be interesting to watch under the rugged conditions of wilderness living.

"Flat," answered Billy.

By then Mark also had tried it. "Sure beats being thirsty," he muttered not too enthusiastically. "But I'd prefer seven-up."

When the rest of us confidently dipped in and drank our fill, Mike, at last sufficiently reassured, finally tried it. After a cautious sampling he apparently decided nothing could be worse than thirst, and from then on he drank lake water whenever he needed to.

Actually, after a few tries, one gets accustomed to the flat tastelessness of this extremely soft water; and it helps, I suppose, to be aware that you either drink this water or none at all! It is something in this day and age to be able safely to drink water that stands exposed to the elements the year around . . . water that has not yet been befouled by man and his wastes . . . water that is till as pure as the fountains of paradise. Watching my companions thus trustingly accept this vital life-sustaining potion from the hand of nature, I was impelled to wonder: is not the imbibing of this entirely clean and therefore perfect wilderness water somehow a partaking of heaven's own nectar . . . a tapping of the creator's wellspring of life . . . a receiving of a kind of sacramental pabulum placed here in the beginning in limitless abundance for the sustenance of all living things? Then I wondered further: would it not follow that the widespread desecration of this sacred life source by man must assuredly be one of man's most perverse acts of defiance and insult against the Almighty whose hand it is that feeds him? . . . Yes, and certainly the most stupid and foolhardy of insults, because it is as suicidal as it is unnecessary? Pondering these things, I needed no longer to wonder why; when I dipped up and drank of that wild unblemished water with the rest of my companions, I felt sweep over me the same sensation of deep reverence and mystery which I had experienced as a boy when receiving communion in church.

Again I was aware of the plain and simple fact that much of the reason why everything in this pristine environment had such irresistible appeal was because it was still relatively free of man's contaminating influence. This surely had to be basic to the values and meanings behind the lure of the wilderness.

I looked at all of this quiet world about us, thinking how closely purity and beauty walk together. And as we paddled steadily onward, it was wonderful to be able to day-dream by the hour, wrapt in contented musings, filled with the pleasant sensation of peace and well-being. All the things were here that gave strength to the body and peace to the spirit. And they were here in a perfection rarely to be found. Where else is air so fresh, or water so pure, or earth so clean, or silence so serene, or sounds so soothing, as where the forest whispers to the ancient hills?

After traveling the length of this lake and making another brief portage, we found ourselves afloat on a picturesque body of water much of the shore of which was set off impressively by a slanting, bright pinkish rim of weathered granite occasionally indented by small bays. At a distance the slanting slab-rock looked like sandy beaches. Above and beyond the rocky shores reposed the imperturbable forest, its serried north face a cheerful, shimmering green in the direct sunlight while, opposite, its backlighted south face wore a veil of somber shadow, providing contrasting moods of "glad" and "gloom" staring at each other across the

water.

Ahead and to the right, several narrow points which were little more than protruding reefs jutted out from the shore. Around them a brownish cast to the water indicated extreme rocky shallows of the kind that have little respect for the thin skin of canoe bottoms, so we swerved toward the left shore and followed this for about a mile.

At one point a pair of loons swimming just ahead of us dived out of sight. Minutes later they bobbed to the surface a hundred yards off to our right. Mark was quite impressed.

"Can they actually swim that fast under water?" he asked.

"Faster than fish," I replied.

`"Those big clumsy birds can swim faster than fish?"

"They couldn't live if they didn't, Mark."

"I get it. Loons are fish eaters . . . right?"

"Right. It's hard to believe, but they have to get most of their meals by out-swimming the swimmers, so to speak."

Mark thought for awhile. "Well," he finally observed, "I guess loons aren't so loony after all."

We were cutting along briskly now, with a slight breeze at our backs. Suddenly Tom started singing again, and we were delighted to hear him reel off another appropriate verse to his Song of Abu-Abu, timing it to coincide with our paddle strokes:

Glide along,
Sing a song,
Paddle steady, paddle strong,
On the trail to ABU-ABU . . .
Leave our cares behind,
Paddle till we find
Our happy island campground . . .

And then again that joyous refrain to which we all heartily strained our voices:

Where ev'ry trouble
Becomes a bubble,
And ev'ry day is brighter,
Cares are lighter . . .
Comes the dawn, packs are on, paddle on and portage on . . .
Abu-Abu here we come!

Then and there I witnessed a patent demonstration of the magical power music can sometimes have over the human spirit. As if some kind of pep potion suddenly had been injected into those toiling muscles, every paddler among us was, by the time the song ended, taking longer, deeper, faster strokes and our speed had increased noticeably. The surge was of short duration, of course, but quite pronounced, and the stroke rate soon returned to normal.

We were just rounding a small island off the west shore when Gene's quick eye saw it first.

"Jeepers, fellas!" he shouted excitedly. "Look up there quick! That tall dead tree on the

point . . . about ten o'clock!"

We all stared off left and I saw it about the same time everybody else did, a huge, dark, hawk like bird with a white head, perched majestically on top of the highest tree in sight. You couldn't mistake that bird even if the only one you'd ever seen before was in a picture book.

"Mygosh, Gene," I stammered. "That just can't be anything but a bald eagle!"

"'A' for recognition," he replied. "It's a bald eagle all right . . . and if you need any living proof that you're really deep in the wilds, there he sits proud and free as a cloud!"

For me, as it must have been for the others, my first sight of this beautiful and uncommon creature was a supreme thrill . . . a moment magnificent. If I never have that same experience again--and I doubt that anything in the civilized world can equal the pulse-quickening delight of such a discovery--I shall always know that I was one of the fortunate few of my generation who have had the rare privilege of meeting this great avian aristocrat in his own stamping ground.

How rare indeed was this encounter became poignantly clear a moment later when Gene reminded us of the ominous fate which threatens this stately species.

"Take a good look, everybody," he declared gravely. "This could well be the last bald eagle you'll ever see. They're going extinct, you know. Chemical poisoning . . . DDT. From the looks of things this grand bird is already in an irreversible decline because of our damned bungling with pesticides. It's only a matter of time as the poisonous residues build up through the food chain. So enjoy it. One day soon, when the species has vanished, you can boast that you were there in the eagle's final hunting grounds and actually saw one alive."

By now there wasn't a paddle in the water, and several pairs of binoculars were passing rapidly from hand to hand as eager eyes strained for a big lasting impression. What a noble specimen he was! Through the glasses we could make out clearly the fierce face and eyes, the proud white head and white tail, the powerful talons, clamped upon the tree limb.

Bill Sweasy, thinking out loud, mumbled, "Is it possible we could let a thing like that happen . . . extinction, I mean? What is it with humanity? Has our planet become so small . . . so damned small . . . that there's no room left for the wild things? God, how can men be such wanton fools? Look at that magnificent bird up there. Hasn't he some kind of right too? At least the right to survive? Can humanity itself survive when there is such a disregard for wild life?

"Not a very encouraging prospect, is it?" This from George, whose face actually wore an expression of deep, sad concern.

When at last the bald eagle lifted imposingly on his powerful wings and soared out of sight beyond the roof of the forest, it was a solemn group of paddlers who resumed their journey. Troubled by Gene's account of the eagle's impending fate, we were as mourners returning from a burial, sad and lost in our own thoughts; and it wasn't until we arrived at the next portage that our natural exuberance returned and we were able to put our minds to pleasanter things.

And what could be more pleasant than a patch of plump ripe blueberries? It wasn't a big patch which Tom and Al found near the landing, but it provided another exciting first for the three younger boys--and just enough of a sampling to whet our appetites for one of the truly great enjoyments of the Quetico in which we would be at greater liberty to indulge later on.

"Boy," commented Billy as he stuffed a handful in his mouth, "these are a little smaller than the store-bought kind, but they sure taste sweeter!"

"Looks like a good year for the berries," observed Gene. "There should be plenty where we're going. But just now, we haven't any time to squander, so let's move on."

The portage upon which we now ventured became our first real test of endurance.

Rugged and difficult, it extended upward along an old dry stream bed strewn with boulders big and small and so numerous that simply climbing around them was impossible. It was necessary to move over them, stepping and staggering from the top of one boulder to another. Gene, with his powerful frame and heavy load, seemed to have the least trouble. His boots clomped confidently from rock to rock with such deceptive ease that I wondered why my own feet should feel so clumsy and uncertain. The trick was to maintain a forward momentum, with your weight always falling slightly ahead as you stepped out to the next rock. However, there wasn't always a next rock just where I needed it and I would have to stop or lurch sideways to find one within reach. I couldn't help but laugh at the comic weirdness of the choreography we were required to perform over this difficult stretch. From the sounds and exclamations behind me, I knew some of the others were faring no better than I. With a pack on my back and a canoe on my shoulders, it didn't take much of such exertions to set my heart thumping and lungs heaving.

The boys, of course, with their youthful agility and balance, and burdened only with back packs, made a noisy game of it by playing follow-the-leader all the way up to where the trail dropped over a low rise and then leveled off at the edge of a spongy muskeg swamp.

I was exhausted when I reached the edge of the swamp and I had to lean my canoe against a scrub cedar in order to catch my breath. Al, George, Tom and Bill, all puffing and grunting under their loads, came up one by one and joined me in a brief respite at the cedar. Gene and the boys were filing across the bog.

"Gad, how do they do it?" gasped George as he watched the procession. "They didn't even stop to take a breath. I wish I had all that stamina."

"Well, for one thing they don't smoke cigarettes," Bill commented, obviously intending a not too subtle but friendly hint to George who was a heavy smoker.

"Why, I haven't had a smoke since we left the launch."

"True, but I noticed you did have three <u>on</u> the launch," Al countered with a teasing smile.

"Those were my last three. I'm quitting."

"Just like that?"

"Yup, just like that. I'm using this trip to break the habit."

"Man, that's a big order," exclaimed Bill. "I wish you luck . . . but are you sure you can do it?"

"Quite sure."

"You'll get that old craving, you know . . ."

"I've got it right now."

"Well, you haven't lit up. That's a good show of will power."

"Will power, hell." George's expression now melted into an odd sheepish grin. "It's more like a desperate, helpless frustration."

Al caught it. "Jupiter!" You're not out?"

"Yah . . . I'm out. I left two full cartons back home."

"That takes guts!"

"Not exactly. I just plain forgot to put the damn things in my pack!"

With that, George got back under his canoe and trudged resolutely out over a patch of sedge and sphagnum moss onto the bog. Then he moved out of sight where the trail passed through giant reed grass and only his canoe, seemingly afloat upside down and skimming the tops of the tall plants, was visible. We followed him and were promptly introduced to a new kind of leg-stretching exertion. Just enough water saturated the soft peaty ground to create a suction as our boots sank into it. It was necessary to apply extra muscle power to pull free at

each step. To make matters worse, one couldn't stop to rest. Even a moment's pause caused the feet to sink deeper into the muck, demanding additional effort.

"They should use this place to train football players," commented Tom, puffing loudly just behind me.

The hot sun made the air over the marsh uncomfortably humid and sweat flowed profusely. It cascaded off my forehead, smarting my eyes. And wouldn't you know! This was the precise condition of maximum helplessness which the big pesky northern black horse flies and the smaller but equally pesky deer flies seem instinctively to choose for their buzzing bite-and-run air attacks. It only takes one, banging at your head, and you have a perfect formula for total frustration.

"You know, I can usually stand the mosquitoes," George grunted, half turning around, "but these infernal black flies drive me nuts!"

"Yeah," replied Bill. "And why do they always find you when you can't fight back?"

"That's all part of the strategy," said Tom. "They're pretty clever, don't you think?"

"Cowardly would be a better word, dang it!" exclaimed Al just as he nearly lost his balance trying to evade a particularly persistent assailant.

Tom laughed, and then he swept away all misery, all momentary discontent, with that booming singing voice of his:

> Never sigh,
> Never cry
> When you're bitten by a fly . . .
> On the trail to ABU-ABU . . .
> It's a meager price
> For the paradise
> Of our happy island campground . . .

To the words and rhythms of the refrain which followed, we all plodded forward and were soon back on solid ground. The trail wound around a green shallow pond spattered with white water lilies. Over another low, rocky hogback we climbed, then down through a grove of tall Norway pines to the edge of a broad blue lake. There we joined the others and, anxious to relieve our tired legs, we lost no time getting the canoes back under us.

We headed into a light breeze which, sweeping over quite an expanse of open water, was whipping up enough wave action to add noticeable resistance to our progress.

"Golly, how big is this lake?" queried Billy as we got under way.

"Too big," drawled Mark, yielding to a bit of a lazy streak that especially showed up when he began to tire.

"It isn't that large a lake, really," laughed Gene. "It's just that we're getting low on fuel. It's been a long day. Actually, we're almost there. You see that point about two miles up the east shore? Not far beyond it is our home for the night."

"And we're just barely going to make it," added Tom as he squinted over his shoulder toward where the sun was well into its downswing in the low western sky. "In an hour or so, if the paddlers can hold the pace, we'll be pitching camp."

But holding pace against even this light wave action required a real extra effort. Both my arms felt drained of strength, and the jut of land toward which we now pointed our bows seemed an infinity away. I wondered if the others felt this same dull increeping of fatigue. As if in

answer to my thoughts, Al broke a particularly long period of silence with the assertion that he couldn't remember the last time he'd put forth so much physical exertion in one day.

"Let's not poop out now, Pop," Mike teased.

"Let's have less lip and more paddle," countered his father with feigned sternness. "I can't push this thing all by myself."

Our course lay close along the east shore, flanked by the unbroken green wall of the forest. Al had hardly spoken when Billy sounded off excitedly just ahead:

"Look! Look over there! On the shore! That's . . . that's . . . that's a bear!"

All paddles abruptly came to rest and everybody stared at the big shaggy black animal which was poking about among the rocks not fifty yards away. The bear looked up and stared back at us. He sniffed the air, seeking our scent.

"Ursus Americanus!" George pronounced the words in the manner of a scientist delighted at making an interesting discovery.

"Can he swim?" Billy wanted to know.

"Sure. All bears can swim . . . I guess," answered Mark uncertainly.

"Would he swim out here?" asked Mike.

"Let's not find out," cracked his father. "Push on!"

All of the boys promptly displayed an amazing renewal of energy. Their paddles were in the water at once and, as the bear finally turned and lumbered off into the forest, all hands, tired or not, were making a brisk business of closing the distance to the point.

Tom lightened that phase of the paddling with more impromptu versions of his song. We all laughed and joined in refrain. The verses, though quite on the corny side, did appropriately reflect how we felt:

Muscles sore,
What a chore!
Seems a million miles or more
To the isle of ABU-ABU . . .
Well, we can't stop here
With the goal so near,
Keep a-paddlin' toward that campground!

(REFRAIN)

Like a horse
Full of force
Keep a-pullin' on the course
For the isle of ABU-ABU . . .
Far beyond the bend
At journey's end,
There's a happy island campground.

(REFRAIN)

As we rounded the point, our stopping place for the night came into view. It was a fine small island, canopied by a tall stand of Norway pine several acres in area and lying just off the

east shore about half a mile beyond the point. I well remember what a grand feeling it was, after those many sleepless and strenuous hours, to be within sight of a haven that promised warm cooked food, shelter . . . and heavenly rest.

Like the final spurt a good runner will save for the end of the race, our paddles now slipped into a strong, steady rhythm which did not again diminish until we entered the channel which separated the island from the shore.

CHAPTER FIVE

There comes that welcome moment in the course of the wilderness journey when the waning hours of a long and arduous day weary travelers set aside the toil-honored paddles and stop to sleep their first night in the restful embrace of nature's trouble-free world. For us, it came when we touched the island that would provide our first overnight campsite. Eagerly we stepped ashore. Gear and canoes were quickly beached and toted up the slant rock to a spacious clearing among the trees a short distance from the water.

I marveled at the efficient manner in which our two experts, Gene and Tom, took over the orderly establishment of the camp. As Gene supervised the erection of the tents in a semi-circle along one side of the clearing, Tom was already kindling a fire in a natural rocky depression at the center of the site which made an ideal kitchen area. Using small boulders fetched by the boys, Tom built up the sides and back of the fire pit so that our cooking grill could be set firmly over the flames. This accomplished, Tom got out the food and cooking gear and, humming all the while, busied himself with the preparation of supper.

Meanwhile, at Gene's insistence, the rest of us foraged the island for firewood. Billy and Mark couldn't understand why we should be gathering wood when a plenteous supply already existed, stacked by previous campers in a neat pile just at the edge of the camp.

"Gosh, we've already got all the wood we need," observed Billy. "Somebody else made too much and had to leave some."

"That's just as it should be," explained Gene. "It's an old wilderness custom to leave a wood supply for the next camping party. Somebody we don't even know extended this courtesy to us so we could get our evening meal going without delay. Now it's our turn to provide the same convenience for the next party that comes through here."

"Slick idea," said Billy.

"Does everybody do that?" asked Mark.

"All good campers do. Think of the fix we'd be in if we arrived here after dark or, worse yet, during a rainstorm, and there wasn't a supply available."

"Is wood that hard to find, in a big forest like this" Mike asked incredulously.

"Not in daylight. But when that sun goes down and the mosquitoes move in . . . well,

you'd just better have all your chores done. Besides, who wants to meet up with a bear in the dark? There's only two places to be after dark . . . close to your campfire or snug in your tent. Anyhow, let's get that firewood."

Al, who had been listening, came over to where I was breaking a dry branch from an old fallen pine tree.

"There's a good lesson for the boys," he remarked. "Wouldn't it be nice if more people in the city practiced this simple consideration for strangers?"

There was real substance to that observation and, as I thought about it, I realized here was another example of how the wilderness brings out something basically good in people. A confirmed cynic would find something like this hard to explain. Not only had those who came before us been kind and thoughtful enough to leave that stack of firewood but, as I had earlier noticed, they also had left the campsite so clean that the only evidence of their passing was in the charred residue of their campfire. Would these same travelers behave in a similar manner back home? I was inclined to doubt it. While some may argue that the wilderness attracts exceptional people, it somehow seemed more likely that it compels ordinary people to think and perform in some exceptional way. At least I found it easier to conclude that the extreme differences which exist between congested city jungle and uncrowded wilderness space would generate corresponding extreme differences in attitudes and behavior. It is an observable fact that the city often constricts, while the wilderness expands, the human spirit. I was sure that this kind of concern for total strangers, so common in the Quetico, would be difficult to duplicate in equal degree back home.

When enough rough wood had been gathered into a pile, Mark picked up Gene's axe and was about to chop a long stick into shorter sections when Gene, seeing him, shouted frantically, "Wait, Mark! The sheath! You've got to take off the sheath!"

"The sheath? What . . . Oh, you mean this thing?"

Gene was beside Mark in a flash. Snatching the axe from him, he called Mike and Billy over. "Look here, fellows," he told them, "I know you all will be tempted to use the axe now and then, so just to make sure we don't make any serious mistakes, I'd better explain a few things. First, you don't need to chop a log into shorter pieces. We have a camp saw that does that job a lot faster. The axe is mainly for trimming off branches and for splitting. Second, the axe should always be returned to its place near the wood pile after it's been used. It's very easy to forget and leave it lying where it could become lost." Now demonstrating, Gene continued. "Third, always chop straight down in front of you, with your feet spread apart so the axe goes harmlessly between if you miss; and guide the stroke by starting with one hand near the bit and sliding it up the handle as the stroke descends Okay. You got that?"

"Yeah. Sure. Uh-huh," nodded the boys.

"Now, let's get back to the sheath." Gene pointed to it. "Mark, you were going to chop without removing this. You'd have ruined it . . . right?"

"Yah, I guess so," replied Mark a bit sheepishly.

"Any experienced woodsman knows an axe sheath is a protective leather cover to keep the blade sharp as well as safe. He also knows the sheath should be removed before the axe is used . . . and then immediately replaced after use. Does that make sense?"

Again the boys nodded.

"Now, I'll tell you something else. If you want to disgrace yourself, just forget to remove the sheath when you start chopping wood. You will ruin not only the sheath but your reputation as an expert woodsman. You will be branded as one of those silly asses known as careless

campers. You don't want that, now do you?"

"Gee, no," replied Billy

"Gosh, Mr. T.," inquired Mike admiringly, "haven't you ever . . . not even once . . . split the sheath, in all your years of camping?"

"No sir!" Gene straightened and his chest puffed out. "Not once. I don't mean to brag, but I've never committed that stupid error . . . and that's more than a lot of campers, experienced or otherwise, can claim."

"Has Tom ever done it?" asked Mark.

"Why don't you ask Tom?" suggested Gene with an odd little chuckle.

But Tom, who had been listening to all this as he busied himself with his cooking, changed the subject abruptly with the magic words we were waiting to hear:

"Chow's on! Come and get it!"

For our first supper in the wilderness Tom provided a delightful surprise. Not only did he serve up fresh whole potatoes baked over hot coals, along with steamed green peas and an excellent carrot-slaw salad, but he unveiled a piece de resistance so beyond our expectations that it must be chronicled as one of the truly pleasant highlights of our trip. Imagine how tired, how muscle-sore, how hungry we were as we formed the chow line. Then imagine what our feelings were as each of us turned loose his ravenous appetite upon, of all things, a huge, sizzling T-bone steak! Yes, a T-bone! Oh, what a supper that was! To this day I marvel at how Tom managed to do it, and especially without our knowledge. In the absence of refrigeration he had had to take special measures to keep the perishables, particularly the meat, fresh throughout a long night and an entire day of hot, sultry travel, much of the time in the open blaze of the sun. Tom later explained that the key to it was in starting with solid frozen meat packed in a special insulated wrapping which, despite the heat, permitted only a slow rate of thaw-out. By the time he was ready to cook, the steaks were just right for the grill.

And you can be sure that if to most of us the steaks brought a distinctive pleasure, they brought pure ecstasy to Mike. His happy purring between mouthfuls were a study in perfect gourmet contentment.

"Boy, if this is a sample of w2ilderness eating," he exulted as the last morsel disappeared from his plate, "I'm all for staying up here for a month."

"Don't be too hasty," laughed Tom. "You've just devoured the last of the fresh meat. From now on, if we're lucky, our only fresh flesh will be fish."

"Whadda ya mean, lucky?" asked Mike, suddenly worried. "The legend promises plenty of fish."

"True, Mike. But we've still got to catch them. The legend won't do our fishing for us."

"If the fish are there, we'll catch 'em," concluded Mike.

"Well, then, let’s just hope we can find the place . . . so we can test that promise," replied Tom.

"How sure are we of finding it?" Bill suddenly inquired of Gene.

"Good question, Bill," answered Gene with a shrug, "and I wish I could say I'm absolutely sure of what I'm doing. Some of the old guide's instructions are quite vague, as you know. Several things on his makeshift chart don't match my standard map. And this creates the main problem, because while I think I have the approximate course and destination spotted, there's no clear-cut route indicated."

"Then," observed George, "so far as we now know, we really aren’t sure where we're going. That right?"

Gene, perhaps a little irritated by his own uncertainty as well as having to admit it, replied rather testily, "Not quite right, George. After all, I know most of the Quetico pretty well. It's true I've never been in the isolated part but I've passed somewhere near it and so have a good general idea where to go. So don't get me wrong. Abu-Abu is out there somewhere, and I intend to find it."

I needed that little reassurance. I had by now developed a burning hope not only that we would reach our enchanted island but that somehow from its intriguing "voices" I might learn some of the answers to my wilderness quest. So from that moment on I kept a wary eye on Gene's every change of mood. It would be a reliable indicator of our progress.

The long lingering twilight of a typical northern summer evening had set in, providing Mark, Billy, and Mike enough time to try some fishing along the shore of the island. But while nary a fish showed up, it was Mike, casting near the canoe landing, who spotted much bigger game.

"Hey, Guys!" he yelled excitedly. That bear has found us! Look! Over on the opposite shore!"

We all hurried over to where he stood shouting and waving his arms. Sure enough, just across the channel in a small clearing lumbered a huge black bear. Though he seemed to be foraging for blueberries, he could also, as George made haste to observe, have come to investigate what his keen nose was indicating as some especially good eating possibilities in the vicinity.

"Tom, your magnificent steak supper has attracted a customer," George declared with that warm, shy, indirect way he had of using some special incident to pay a compliment.

"That' one customer I don't need," laughed Tom, obviously pleased by the remark.

"He's caught the scent of our kitchen, all right," reckoned Gene, "but I would be very surprised if he'd attempt to swim across that much water."

"Nevertheless," asserted Tom, "I'm going to stow the food packs under the canoes for a little extra security tonight. At least he'll have to make some noise if he does try to move in on our vittles."

Fortunately, nothing came of it. The bear, seemingly disquieted by the sounds of human voices, sniffed hard in our direction several times and then ambled off into the forest. And though Tom carried out his "security" measures, that was the last we saw of that particular bruin.

As darkness closed in, so did the mosquitoes. One could only wonder how the early voyageurs, as well as the native forest Indians, lacking the advantages of modern chemicals, ever managed to survive the blood-sucking hordes of Culicidae. Whether they even had the protection of mosquito netting is doubtful, and unless they were able to cover themselves completely with some suitable material, they had no weapon but the swatting hand to keep the pests at bay. It is easy to imagine the heavily pocked condition of their skin, particularly hands and faces, resulting from unceasing puncturings by these tiny but relentless parasites. They undoubtedly put up with it because they had to, but this, together with so many other rigors they had to endure in such harsh environment, probably accounts for the fact that few who spent much time in these regions, whether white men or red men, lived beyond their early forties.

Ah, how they would have welcomed our "bomb," that magic little canister with the push-button aerosol valve which could, with but a few light bursts of its deadly spray, render a shelter totally free of insects within a matter of minutes. [Note: Aerosol had not yet fallen into disrepute.] As would be our custom each evening before sleep time, we now performed the fumigation ritual which assured a night of "rest without the pest." With doorway and ventilation

flaps tightly shut, each tent interior was "bombed" with the insecticide and then left closed until shortly before its occupants were ready to turn in. At that time the flaps would be opened, fresh air would flow through the screen netting to disperse the lethal fog, and we could then retire confidently into bugless slumber.

Meanwhile, awaiting the fumigant's effect, and with exposed skins protectively daubed with that other magic chemical, the insect repellent, we lingered briefly by the evening campfire, conversing languidly as the flames cast grotesque highlights across our drowsy faces.

"I'll bet nobody's going to need a sleeping pill tonight," yawned Al as he slowly unlaced a boot. "Do you guys realize it's been two days since we last had a full night's sleep?"

"No wonder my eyelids weigh a ton," drawled George. "I can hardly see through these slits."

"The tents should be ready to air out after ten more minutes," announced Gene. "I'd strongly advise you all to hit those bags as soon as the fumes clear away."

"Really?" quipped Tom, never too tired to tease his friend. "What kind of advice is that? It's like advising a dead mult to stop braying."

"Well, I know one mule who wouldn't know when to stop braying whether he was dead or alive," retorted Gene.

"I suppose it takes one to know one," was Tom's angelic rejoinder.

"Hee Haw!" guffawed Tom.

"Hey, don't you two ever compliment each other?" interposed Al with a chuckle.

"What? And spoil a beautiful relationship?" exclaimed Gene.

"A shocking thought," exclaimed Tom. "And anyway, I don't want those big heavy mitts patting me on the back."

"You see," explained Gene with a wise grin, "you can always trust a friend who dares to insult you. It's the inveterate flatterer you have to watch out for. Not so, Tom?"

"Pretty well put. I really didn't know you had it in you."

"Hah. There you go again. Well, give up. We'll continue this delightful nonsense at another time. Just now, my bleary-eyed comrades, I've had it. I'm going to bed!"

Whereupon Gene shuffled to his feet and clomped over to the tents. There we could hear him zipping open the flaps for the final airing. And minutes later, ten weary adventurers made a general scramble for dreamland by the shortest possible route.

For me this had to be an exception to my usual approach to bedtime. I am, alas, a night owl. When other people are sensibly bedding in for the night, I am usually wide awake, never more alert, and finding sleep about the last thing I want to become involved in. My mind seems to come alive and function better at night than morning, and even my body seems more physically alert and active after sundown. Don't ask me why. if I should retire at the "reasonable" hours of ten or eleven, I will without fail lie restless and wide awake with a head full of wildly racing thoughts and tormented by the uncomfortable feeling that I am wasting time or missing something important. So overpowering has been this tendency toward late retirement that it created the one difficult personal adjustment I always had to make during our wilderness canoe trips. Here where the sunsets invariably bring the mosquitoes swarming and, often enough, a damp northern chill to the air, it is entirely reasonable (if not downright necessary) to maintain a pattern of early to bed and early to rise. Of course, in our case, having early taps simply made it easier to respond to the sunrise reveilles which, under Tom's meticulous breakfast scheduling, make early birds of us all. But because by my nature I would have much preferred chatting in the congenial glow of the campfire until all hours past midnight and then sacking in

for most of the morning, it was something of an ordeal for me to adjust to the camp's sleeping routine. In the evenings I was almost always the last to retire and, even after having tucked myself in, I would lie awake for many more minutes with my rambling ruminations.

Not so tonight, however. I was for once, thanks to the big loss of sleep on the previous night, quite exhausted and as ready as the others to welcome the soothing caresses of Morpheus. Now as I lay comfortably cocooned in my sleeping bag, staring into the night's womb-like blackness and listening to the vast silence, a beautiful but lonely sound pierced the stillness. It was the plaintive call of a solitary loon nearby telling this timeless world of forests, hills, and waters that all was well . . . that peace prevailed and the night was safe for sleep.

CHAPTER SIX

"Hot coffee, gentlemen?"

I awoke to see Tom Manko crouching inside the tent entrance, silhouetted against the soft early light outside, holding two steaming cups in his hands, and smiling like some devoted mother wanting to give her waking children a happy, secure impression to start their day. Gene, snoring in his bag across from me, reared up with a sleepy grunt and sat there squinting at our visitor.

"What sneaky way to impersonate an alarm clock," he muttered between yawns. "Your bedside manner is so charming I can't even give you hell for interrupting a beautiful dream."

"Well," Tom laughed, "if you'd rather I bang a kettle, I'll be glad to oblige."

"No, no. I'll take the coffee."

"Without so much as a thank you?" Tom handed us each a cup.

"Thanks, Tom," I chuckled. "I've never been roused in a pleasanter way. What time is it, anyway?"

"Time to stir. It's five thirty already."

"Already!" exclaimed Gene. "That's the middle of the night. Don't you believe in a good night's rest? I suppose you've got breakfast all ready."

"The bacon's frying right now. Of course, if you'd rather not eat . . ."

Gene grinned at me as he unzipped his sleeping bag and rolled out. "You know we've been outmaneuvered, don't you?" he said resignedly.

We all had a hearty laugh, and on that pleasant note our second day began.

Though there are some who won't agree, I would have to say that an early morning dip is one of the great pleasures of camping. Nothing can awaken mind and body more quickly and completely than a cold plunge at daybreak. The sudden switch from warm sleeping bag to cool water is an invigorating tonic second to none. It isn't exactly an easy switch to make, however. If you give yourself time to think about it, and if you hesitate even for a moment at the water's edge in the night-chilled air testing the temperature with a reluctant toe, you probably won't make it. And, of course, if you chicken out at that point, you had better be ready for some lively singeing by the stalwarts who didn't panic as you did. You should, therefore, if you want to

protect your status in the corporation, learn the sure-fire early morning technique. It is really quite simple. All you need to remember is to maintain a continuous motion from the moment you leave your tent until you are bobbing about, shocked and shivering, out in the water. The best movement is to lope fawn-like over the rocky slope, thinking brave thoughts and shedding your shorts as you go, and to keep loping until there is nothing left to lope on. By that time you are miserably wet, cold, and swimming. It is addedly impressive if you let out a great fearless war-whoop just before you hit the water. After that the sound will be more of a gasp, but you will have done it, and your reputation will have been preserved.

Big Gene was a master at the sure-fire early morning dip technique. He was also a master at needling anybody who failed to lope the full distance. Knowing this, I stayed right at his heels as he bounded from our tent with a roar and hit the water with a resounding splash. I took the shock a split second after he did.

"Wow, that's cold!" I stammered as I came up beside him.

"Hell, yes, it's cold!" He was still roaring and treading water like a bull moose. "But that's what puts the pep back into your system!"

Now making great grunting sounds, and threshing with arms and legs to get the blood circulating, we swam and splashed about. The pre-dawn light was growing stronger and for the first time I was becoming aware of our surroundings. Beyond us the morning mists were rising off the lake. Across on the nearest shore the forest, with only its taller treetops protruding dimply above a low-lying fog bank, looked ghostlike and mysterious. Far up the lake toward its northeastern shore the mists had a strange, faintly pinkish tint that matched the widening band of skyglow above the horizon. They reminded me of the low creeping smoke of a prairie fire. And then I was aware of a good feeling surging through me, an exhilaration of mind and body and a powerful sensation of inner vitality and well-being. For all its initial discomfort, the cool dip really <u>was</u> refreshing. My system had quickly adjusted to the sharp change of temperature and in moments the water had become not only endurable but comfortable.

"Hey, you guys!" Gene boomed his voice toward the tents. "Up and at'em! Last one in does the breakfast dishes!"

That did it. Out they came, all but Tom who had had his dunking earlier and was already cooking breakfast. The boys all charged down but stopped at the edge of the low rock shelf from which Gene and I had taken the plunge. Mike reached down into the water with his foot and immediately withdrew it, wincing as he did so. He was obviously still half asleep.

"Forget it," he protested. "The only thing missing is the ice! I'll wash the doggone dishes . . . that's easier than freezing to death!" His voice shivered at the thought.

"Aw, come on," teased Billy. "You need a bath anyway." With that he and Mark playfully tackled Mike and all three went off the edge in a tangle of writhing limbs.

"Owoooo . . . ." Blop! Mike's desperate yelp was cut off abruptly as the lake closed over them. When they surfaced, they were sputtering and spitting water.

"Hey, Mike, you were right. It <u>is</u> cold," gurgled Mark as he treaded water.

"Y-yeah, it is," stuttered Billy.

But Mike surprised everybody. That husky healthy body of his had recovered almost instantly. "You know something?" he chuckled, squelching their prank. "It ain't nearly as bad as I thought. In fact, it feels good!" Then he swam about nonchalantly as if this were an ordinary midday splash party. Not to be outdone, Mark and Billy quickly got used to it and remained in the water long enough for a short race along the shore.

Meanwhile, Will had dived in like a veteran, as had Bill and Al. George, however,

choosing to eschew the sudden chill, wet himself by slow degrees, a few square inches of skin at a time in what seemed a needlessly prolonged ritual of self-torture, until finally he too was fully immersed and, as Gene put it, "wide awake and rarin' to go." As last one in, however, George did draw the booby prize and later wound up washing the breakfast dishes . . . though not without sympathetic assistance from Bill who opined that, since George did endure the ordeal, the penalty was far too severe.

Breakfast, incidentally, was a hearty repast of cooked dried apricots, sizzling bacon, and stacks of huge golden pancakes with coffee and hot chocolate for chasers. It was at this breakfast that Al and George renamed the pancakes. They called them Mankocakes in recognition of Tom's superb skill as a campfire cook.

Appetites sated, we worked quickly to strike the camp. Within half an hour tents, sleeping bags, cooking gear, and food supplies were packed and loaded into the canoes. Gene checked his map.

"Listen, everybody," he said. "Save your strength as much as possible today. We've got some tough going ahead of us, so pace yourselves and take short rests on the portages when you need to. We're getting into country I'm not familiar with. We've got to take a long portage into another chain and I don't know what to expect. It could be rugged."

"Well, let's go and find out," exclaimed Tom as he stepped into the stern of his canoe.

Now flexing its blazing haunches for the day's empyrean leap, the sun crouched low in the east. As we shoved off, scattered patches of mist still danced phantom-like over the water at varying distances, catching and diffusing the sunlight. The lake lay glass smooth in the calm, cool air. Beyond the wooded shoreline, remnant fog-mists hung low in the shadowy depressions along the ridges.

We rounded the island and slid northward across open water. The canoes, gliding swiftly and smoothly through the thinning vapors, had an unreal, spectral appearance. I could see that Mark, paddling steadily and silently in the bow was watching it all in utter fascination. I wondered what grand imaginings filled his thoughts, for he was looking upon a scene that had all the semblance of some mythical fantasy. Was he soaring somewhere over fabled Lycea high and free among billowy clouds astride silvery Pegasus seeking the dread Chimaera's lair?

After a time, the lake narrowed into a channel between high rock palisades that formed a miniature canyon. The sun's warmth had finally burned away the last morning mists to unveil a fine, calm, clear day. And now, as we passed at the foot of a particularly smooth granite face, Gene pointed his paddle at some strange markings about ten feet above the water.

"Indian paintings," he explained. "Could be hundreds of years old."

"Ah, yes," George replied. "Pretty good evidence that these northern waterways were used long before the white men came . . . probably by nomadic Indian hunting tribes following their food supply."

"Or maybe Indian war parties," suggested Billy.

"Well, they weren't very good artists," observed Mike. "We drew better pictures than that in kindergarten."

"It's remarks like that that make me wonder how you ever reached the first grade," quipped Mike's father. "These people didn’t have that kind of advantage. Their drawings are really remarkable. Primitive and simple, to be sure, but they tell us something of the humanity of those wild wanderers of long ago. They probably weren't as different from us as we might like to think."

"They certainly seem to have had the same inclination of advanced civilizations to leave lasting memorials of their exploits," replied George. "We're probably looking at the record of a successful hunt. That four-legged animal figure could be a moose, and the two-legged figures the hunters. This must have been a well-traveled route to their hunting grounds."

"Notice how high up the figures are," observed Tom. "If they were painted from a canoe, it would indicate the water level was considerably higher at one time."

"Either that or the paint brush had a long handle," Gene interposed jokingly. "Anyway, we'd better be moving along. Tonight's camp is still a long stretch ahead."

All paddles quickly resumed a brisk cadence as we proceeded up the narrow channel. After about a quarter of a mile, the passage curved sharply to the left, then widened as we entered another lake. Picking our way among a cluster of small islands, we finally came upon a wide expanse of calm open water.

As we glided along, I would get an occasional feeling that all this was a fanciful dream, something unreal and merely imagined. Everything simply seemed too nearly perfect, as if an illusion that hung upon the telling of an impossible legend were unfolding impossibly with each dip of the paddles. here we were, somewhere in the great northern forest, our canoes slipping silently over primeval waters, leaving no more trace of their passing than did the pioneering voyageurs whose paddle trails were the first by whitemen to penetrate this exquisite, lake-studded wilderness.

In a sense we were a reflection and a continuation of that early adventure in which stalwart French fur traders challenged the unknown and braved untold peril and hardship in their own kind of wilderness quest. We could well imagine, in some ways at least, that we were the modern counterpart of those long-ago travelers--rugged explorers still--fulfilling in our own search one of the grandest traditions of the American dream.

And while the wealth of this wilderness was once the beaver pelts it yielded to the daring few, today it was the <u>wilderness itself</u> we sought, and those far richer treasures which it bestows abundantly upon all who come this way. For here in the uncluttered space and beauty of this wild, blue-green country, mind and body could partake freely of nature's special gifts of renewal.

Soon we made another landing and on this occasion it was my turn as last man in the line to see that nothing was left behind when we headed up the portage. The path angled slightly upward over bare rock in such a way that I was able to see the entire party, laden with gear, passing single file up the sunlit trail and silhouetted against the bright sky. The men carried packs on their backs and canoes on their shoulders. The boys toted packs, as well as sundry loose gear carried in hand, while I brought up the rear with the heavy cook pack and a tube of fishing rods.

It was an impressive procession, a sort of portage parade in which all our duffle--food, tents, sleeping bags, cooking gear, clothing, paddles, tackle, and our entire means of transportation--was being borne along by our combined muscle power.

Beautiful scenery, ever present, ever changing, ever new and enchanting, made one easily forget how strenuous and sometimes thoroughly exhausting some of these portages can be. While Duluth packs are ingeniously designed for balance and ease of handling, they also are large and can be loaded to weigh in excess of sixty pounds. On a long portage, up a steep incline, in soggy bog or over scattered boulders, they can make the sturdiest legs buckle. So can a canoe when the trail is anything but level and clear of low branches and underbrush. Perhaps the most exasperating predicament a portager can encounter is a long trek over low swampy terrain where he is so busy trying to slosh his way through muck and vegetation that he can't do a

thing about the swarm of mosquitoes which has found him underneath the inverted canoe he is carrying on his shoulders. This is, admittedly, one of the rare times when a man may wonder what in the hell he is doing way out here in the middle of nowhere giving free blood transfusions to a horde of bugs! Yet, once the ordeal is over and he is again afloat with a cool breeze in his face, he is soon under the spell once more.

As we progressed, the trail suddenly ascended sharply and meandered alongside a steep, tumbling, foaming rapids which might better be described as a series of small waterfalls. The water, rushing so boisterously toward us from the lake we were approaching to the lake we had just left, got me to thinking of th4e limitless energy with which nature is endowed and of the many marvelous ways in which that energy is constantly being released and transformed. Just to watch this endless flow of force and to contemplate it seems somehow to reveal one's own inescapable involvement with it. One senses that the same force which pulls the waters of a rapids downward along a streambed is the same force that keeps us properly fastened to the earth's surface. It is the force which makes a heavy burden of a backpack and causes an unsupported tent to collapse. It is the force that brings down the refreshing, life-giving raindrops from the heavens even as it holds the global waters firmly in their basins. It is the force that causes the tiniest dust particle or snowflake to drift inevitably to earth; that carves out the canyons and the valleys; that disrobes the crimson vestmented maples in autumn; that keeps the planets in their orbits and regulates the harmony of th4e stars.

How simple and obvious all this becomes when its manifestations are unobscured by the superficialities with which we surround ourselves in our civilized environment. Perhaps here is another part of the answer to our quest. Perhaps we are drawn to the wilderness because we need some kind of reaffirmation of our strength and meaning in terms of the nature which works within us and which is the total physical substance of our being. Perhaps the link between such realizations and whatever may be our concept of God is essential to any real understanding of our existence and purpose as human beings.

But if force was one of the apparent qualities of that rushing rapids, beauty was even more so for we were constantly immersed in a luxury of scenic splendor. Even such common objects as the round, smooth boulders which jutted upward and split the rushing water into separate serpentine forks of white foam gave immense pleasure to the eye. Something about the fast moving water and the rocky formations which adamantly resisted and altered its course presented a strong, ever-varying picture that was pleasing and exciting. Add to the rocks and waters the multi-hued greens and shapes and shadows of the ubiquitous forest background and the result was a never-ending supply of aesthetic nourishment for the feasting of the soul.

What a grand adventure for us all, and especially for the boys. Again recalling my own early years, I well knew what they were absorbing through all their senses, and I was reexperiencing through them the piquant boyhood joy of new discovery.

On a particularly difficult stretch of the upward trail, it was a delight to see my young nephew Mike plodding happily along under his load, occasionally practicing with Mark and Billy their imitations of a loon's cry or pausing to snatch a few blueberries out of a patch beside the trail. I remember Tom Manko calling out to Mark from under the canoe he was toting:

"Ho, Mark . . . do you think this beats loafing on street corners?"

"It beats anything I can think of back there . . . except maybe my Mom's apple pies," Mark replied without hesitation.

"Or my mother's beef roast," added Mike.

It was good to see the wilderness working its wonders in such a simple but positive way.

There was something here that tied in with all that was basic in our proud heritage. America was born out of heroic struggle, and the adventurous spirit of its pioneer builders is deeply rooted in our national character. Daily living, travel, even survival, on the advancing frontiers required great human endurance and ruggedness. Perhaps this is why activities demanding stamina, self-reliance, and physical skill have always been elemental in wilderness recreation, and why the American boy, like his father and grandfather, is drawn naturally to the woods and the water and the free space which the city, with all its incessant din and congestion, can never give him.

Soon we were on another lake, a beautiful little gem as round and smooth as a saucer and not more than a quarter of a mile across. The tall forest rose from its very edge, enclosing lake and sky--and us--in a broad circular corral. To be in a canoe gliding on such a still surface, with the bright sky reflected beneath as well as shining above, is to feel strangely weightless and feathery and soaring--like a bird suspended in space. One seems to be afloat on a sea of nothingness, and the reaction brings a feeling that is pleasant, airy, yet not without a trace of uneasiness. One gets a sense of extreme detachment and freedom on the one hand, countered on the other by an absence of something solid and familiar within easy read. The illusion could be frightening to someone not prepared for it. You glance downward, forward, alongside, and behind your canoe--and you are staring into a bottomless abyss of shining azure space! You look upward and find more of the same. The only thing in sight with which to identify is the wide green strip of forest which encircles you like a floating band. And even this, because it appears to be detached and adrift in the same blue void, seems to offer nothing substantial to grasp onto. The entire sensation is only momentary, but it leaves a lasting impression. Fleetingly, you have had a rare and psychic experience which inwardly has drawn you into a marvelous harmony with the world of nature.

At the next landing, Mark and I were the first ashore. As soon as we had our gear unloaded, I flipped the canoe to my shoulders and took the lead up a portage that followed the base of a steep curving bank along a dry, rock-strewn streambed. Except for some occasional mossy overgrowth, much of the bedrock lay exposed and weather-smooth. A few dwarfed cedars and red pine, their roots desperately (and, I thought, courageously) clinging to cracks and fissures for what little moisture might be available, were a mute reminder of the tenacity of life and, too, of the delicate, precarious balances between survival and extinction. I had always marveled at the ability of the northern pine forest to exist, and even thrive, upon these vast rocky barrens where, because of the scarcity of moisture-storing soil and humus, the supply of available life-giving water is a sometime thing, as unreliable and unpredictable as the weather.

As I made a half-turn between two stunted cedars, I was suddenly arrested by a pair of spruce grouse and their four half-grown chicks swaggering along directly ahead of me, so close I could have dropped the bow of the canoe on their4 heads. Did they flush explosively with a whirring roar in the manner of their larger cousins the ruffed grouse? Not these haughty sultans. They just stopped and stood there, cocking their heads from side to side with the inquisitive but aloof look of curious bystanders watching a stranger pass, and imparting such an air of innocent indifference that I am sure I was more startled than they. They obviously were not in the least afraid of me, and I felt somehow pleased to be recognized as friend instead of foe. To be trusted in the wild by <u>any</u> living thing must be one of the rarest compliments on can receive. I realized, of course, that the spruce grouse is unique in this respect, being one of a very few wild creatures having little or no fear of humans. Considering the predatory dispositions of some hunter-type

humans of my acquaintance, I could see why the spruce grouse must depend upon protective wilderness isolation for survival. Anywhere else, this species, once described by Tom Manko as "foolishly trusting," would soon pay the supreme price for its all-too-tame and gentle manner. And the thought struck me that this kind of fearless credulity, this gentle innocence, is astonishingly rare in the "civilized" world of man. Nature was insinuating something I was reluctant to admit: that I myself possessed little of the solid confidence and sublime serenity of the spruce grouse, and that, indeed, I couldn't safely dare to show such unquestioning faith toward most of my fellow humans. Under the codes and systems and standards by which the lifestyle of my generation was cast we have all-too-painfully learned that he who is a trusting grouse is also a sitting duck.

One could wish it were otherwise--wish that the qualities of faith and integrity and mutual trust were as sacred to mankind as are its golden idols. But man, the tireless prospector lusting endlessly for nuggets, will exploit his friend, cheat his neighbor, and ravage his bountiful earth for earthly gain, yet never pause to recognize or harvest the abundant treasures nature lays at the threshold of his hungering spirit.

Here, surely, was such a treasure. I watched these beautiful wild relatives of our domestic chicken, and they watched me. I wanted to linger, to absorb if I could some of their sweetness and to prolong the wonderful, almost mystical elation which filled me. But now my comrades had come up noisily behind me.

"Hey, what's holding us up?" Gene's voice boomed from the rear.

"A fine little family of friendly fowl," I shouted back. "Come up here, boys . . . quietly . . . come and see some spruce grouse!"

Mark, Billy, and Mike scrambling in a manner that was anything but quiet, were beside me in a flash. The birds, now a bit restless, waddled a few yards up the trail and then stopped again and watched us.

"Jeepers, aren't they afraid of us?" Billy queried excitedly. "You could walk right up and catch them!"

"Yeah, you could," Mike agreed. "Are they good to eat?"

"I'll bet they are," chided Mark. "But who'd want to break up a cute little family like that? Gosh, aren't they super?"

Everybody had to get a look. Our entire party, loaded down with backpacks and canoes, stood in a tight semi-circle enjoying the pleasant encounter.

"They're a welcoming committee come to greet us," Tom said softly. I caught a hint of warm reverence in his voice. It was on rare occasions like this that Tom's deep love of nature surfaced in this subtle way to disclose a gentle, beautiful, sentimental side which he ordinarily kept under canvas.

"Even royalty couldn't ask for a finer reception," Bill declared. "Aren't they a picture?"

"They will be," replied Al, aiming his ever-ready camera and clicking away.

"How come they don’t get scared and fly off?" Mark wanted to know.

"Maybe because they haven't had enough experience with hunters to have developed a fear of humans," Gene surmised.

"It's probably just in their nature," George commented. "But I do wonder how anything that tame could survive. They must have plenty of predacious enemies . . . but I suppose they can instinctively tell when real danger threatens."

"Well, anyway, they sure are good photo subjects," Al said simply as he snapped a final shot.

By now the adult birds had begun a soft clucking to which the chicks responded by gathering near the hen. After one parting look at us they began a slow march toward a thicket off to the right of the trail where they disappeared from view.

Finishing the portage, we were quickly on another lake, long and narrow, the west shore of which we followed closely. Gene was now watching the forest wall very carefully.

"This is where the going gets tough," he warned. "The main route continues over a portage at the other end and on along the chain we've been following. But we now have to jump over to another chain that's seldom used and we've got to go cross-grain to get there. From here on, we're off the beaten path."

"So we're looking for a different portage?" Al queried.

"Yup. If there is one, it has to be right up along this shore. It won't be as conspicuous as the ones we've been on. Not used much. Could be overgrown and hard to see. Hah, maybe we're in luck. See that blaze mark on that big Norway? That could be our landing."

Our navigator had put us smack on the target. We scrambled quickly ashore and, as Gene had guessed, the trail we now ventured upon showed none of the wear and tear of heavy boot traffic so characteristic of the main portages. A barely legible pathway wou7nd gradually upward through the forest. Low overhanging foliage and dense underbrush pressed in on it, resisting our progress and making real toil out of what otherwise would have been an easy passage. The canoes were especially burdensome when toted over this kind of trail, for they had to be literally plowed along through the heavy vegetation like so many unwieldy wedges. It was a noisy affair with the loud screeching of boughs along their sides and the frequent banging of their prows against low branches. In such density, no cooling breeze could stir, and the sultry air quickly had us sweat-soaked and panting.

I noticed there was little conversation along this stretch. We were too hot, too busy, and--if the others felt as I was beginning to feel--too weary to talk. The sustained exertions of the trip thus far were already beginning to tell. The brisk pace of earlier portages had diminished to a slower plodding gait. Rest stops became more frequent. On one of these, George, who had sat down with his backpack propped upon a windfall beside the trail, wiped his dripping brow with a soggy shirtsleeve and broke the silence.

"I swear somebody has been slipping rocks into this pack," he groaned. "It gets heavier each time I put it on. Makes me wonder if I'm cut out to be a voyageur."

"Cripes, I hope we don't waste a lot of time just traveling," mumbled Mike who had come up and joined George on the windfall. "I'm all for setting up camp on the next lake so we can stay put for awhile."

"You mean forget about Abu-Abu" exclaimed George.

"Sure, if it's gonna take us forever to get there. Gee, how do we know we'll ever find it?"

George laughed as he suddenly realized what was really bothering the boy. "Ah, I get it, Mike, he replied in an assuasive tone. "It's just that you'd rather be chasing big fish than wild geese . . . and a rod in hand is better than a paddle . . . right?"

Mike grinned as he drawled, "Something like that."

"Well, don't lose patience, Mike," George advised. "After all, it's only our second day. Abu-Abu or not, we'll get plenty of fishing, I'm sure."

"Yeah, if we're not too pooped out by then to enjoy it."

"Now, there you have a point. I noticed a few of our butts are already dragging. For city slickers like us, this kind of adventuring isn't just another stroll in the park."

At that moment Al came crashing out of the underbrush. As we were blocking the narrow trail, he halted and leaned his canoe against a tree. His sweat-soaked shirt clung pastily to his body. Unbuttoning it, he peeled it away from his skin to let in some cooling air.

"What!" he exclaimed jokingly. "You guys loafing again?"

"Oh, we just stopped for a cold beer," replied George.

"Boy, I could use one about now." Al removed his hat from atop a twisted mass of sweat-soaked hair and fanned his face. "Gads, I've never before been so stiflingly, uncomfortably, burning hot! This is worse than a sauna. You know, I'd much rather paddle steady all day over open water than suffocate in this sweltering jungle for one miserable minute. I hope to hell the next lake is just beyond that rise and ten miles long!"

No such luck. Beyond the rise the dense vegetation gave way to an open, scattered grove of tall tamarack trees standing in a boggy, sphagnum-carpeted depression about fifty yards wide. The moss looked treacherous . . . and it was. With Gene leading and cautiously stepping his way forward, we kept close together as we filed across it, picking as best we could the most solid looking footing. Despite all care, someone's boot would occasionally break through the sphagnum and plunge down into black, oozy mud.

"Damn this blasted suck-muck!"

It was George's voice, high-pitched and irate, just behind me, and I turned to see him down to his hip in the sticky stuff, looking very much like a one-legged hiker sitting flat on his prat. His left leg had disappeared entirely beneath him, leaving his right stretched straight out lengthwise. He was trapped. Had ther4e not been others to help him pull loose, I doubt that he could have extricated himself. Serious as it was, it somehow reminded me of how nature has provided us with well-preserved fossils through an entrapment process similar to this in which many creatures long extinct floundered in the tropical mudflats of an earlier earth.

"You know, George," I remarked as I set down my canoe to give him a hand, "as one deeply interested in science, you shouldn't overlook this as an opportunity to experience first-hand how Tyrannosaurus must have felt when he got stuck in the muck back there in the Jurassic."

"Never mind!" George shouted anxiously. "Get me out of here! Besides, it wasn't the Jurassic . . . it was more likely the Cretaceous. Cone on, pull harder!"

Tom and Billy, being closest, had taken one of George's arms and I the other, and we were trying with little success to tug him free. Having no safe standing room of our own, we were all in danger of bogging down until our inventive wizard, Tom, came through with a most ingenious solution.

"Here," he commanded, "drag that canoe over next to George. We can stand in it without danger of sinking."

I slid the canoe into position. It worked. With the solid footing thus afforded we were able to draw George out of the mire, though not without a considerable amount of "prodding, prying, puffing, pushing, and pulling," as Billy, who had observed the entire operation, later described it.

"If that's what happened to dinosaurs," George remarked to me when we finally reached firm ground, "I can see why they didn't have a chance."

Beyond the tamaracks the trail climbed over a low rocky hogback, then wound around a small pond. Disappointment swept among us when there was still no indication of a lake ahead.

"Gene, wouldn't your map indicate the length of this portage and the location of whatever

lake we're trying to reach?" Al inquired.

"It should," Gene replied. "But you can't depend on it. Sometimes these secondary, cross-country portages are just barely indicated, and they're anything but accurate. That's especially true when you're crossing over into a remote, seldom used chain like the one we're trying to reach. We'll just have to follow the trail and see what happens."

Always, when we needed a lift, Tom could add the touch that helped us dispel doubt and discouragement. Now the troubadour in him took over and he once again brightened our lagging spirits with a few familiar verses of our wilderness song. And just when we thought we were singing the final rousing refrain, he threw in an amusing new musical memorial to the incident just past:

> George got stuck
> In the muck,
> But his buddies brought him luck
> On the trail to ABU-ABU . . .
> We were there in time
> To free him from the slime . . .
> So he could reach our island campground.

At the far end of the pond we were heartened by the discovery of a small beaver dam and a narrow but navigable stream channel leading off through low marshy terrain. The portage trail ended abruptly at the stream. This puzzled Gene, and we gathered around him as he checked his map once again.

"All the chart shows is a vague portage with a few slight turns. There's no stream indicated. Do you suppose this line is just a short local drainage system leading to this small lake off to the right?" he asked Tom.

"But the trail line doesn't touch that little lake," observed Tom.

"Right, but I've seen that on maps before. Sometimes a line is shown just to indicate there is a portage. It could vary from the actual route."

"Well, since there's no passage beyond here except the stream, I'd say we'd better follow the water and go by compass. At least we'll be heading in the right direction."

The quiet, meandering little stream upon which we now embarked provided not only welcome relief to weary limbs but a pleasant diversion from the sweatsome, plodding pace of the portage. Its channel, flanked by low sedge tussocks and occasional patches of reeds, twisted through a wide, open swampy dale bordered by spruce forest. At intervals it would widen into lucid, lily-dappled pools and then narrow again.

"Hey, those are like javelins dropped from the sky!" Billy shouted at one point. He was referring to the bare poles of dead tamarack trees standing here and there throughout the swamp. "How'd they get there?"

"Grew there," explained Tom. "Probably died out when beavers flooded the area with their dams."

"Gosh, those beavers can sure change the looks of a place," replied Billy.

"Lucky for us they changed <u>this</u> place," smiled Tom. "Otherwise this stream would be too shallow to navigate."

As it was, some trees had fallen into the stream and formed sunken barriers across its channel, making it necessary for us now and then to step out of our canoes and drag them over

the deadheads. The same boot-soaking process was necessary to slide the canoes over a large beaver dam which suddenly appeared before us. Thanks to Will who stood waist deep in water at the foot of the dam to steady the canoes as they came over, we surmounted the barrier without mishap.

Once again we were on easy water. The stream channel meandered down the middle of a wide shallow marsh. Off to the right a redwing blackbird, its crimson wingpatch simulating a flaming dart, landed atop a tall cattail where it swayed prettily and trilled the brilliant rippling notes of its cheery marsh song. Further ahead an American bittern's pumping dah-oonk could be heard, and it reminded me of my country cousins of long ago whose name for this bird was the "slough pumper." As we approached it, it suddenly flushed and flapped away. From somewhere near the edge of the forest a hermit thrush heralded its presence with a medley of lovely bell-like tremolos delicately voiced and solitary, yet not without an airy brightness befitting the sunny midday scene. how could anyone think the wilderness a lonely place, I asked myself.

Arriving at the far end of the marsh, we found the stream swerving eastward and narrowing between dense alder growth until we were single-filing along a green-walled gap that cut straight through a stand of spruce. Impressed by the high forest ramparts hemming us in, Tom was moved to remark:

"Gentlemen, we are now sailing down evergreen alley."

"I suppose that would make any Canada Lynx in the immediate vicinity some sort of an alley cat," quipped Gene.

"Did that brilliant observation come out of you?" teased Tom.

"Yes it did. I just wanted to point out an absurdity. How can you compare such pristine beauty as this to a dirty old city alley filled with trash, junk, and garbage cans?"

"Did I do that?"

"That's the way I look at it."

"Well, if that's where you keep your mind . . . in trash heaps and garbage cans . . . how could you possibly take it as I meant it?"

"How did you mean it?"

"Ever hear of a bowling alley?"

"I don't get the connection."

"Oh, I was just bowled over by the unique beauty of this narrow lane. Does that strike you as meaningful?"

"Ah, spare me, Tom. You're having a ball at my expense!"

"You don't like to be pinned down, hey?"

Such was the corny nature of the conversation at times between these two when they felt the need to liven the duller moments. They had a way of playing with puns and running on and on with nonsensical chatter which served to cut the monotony of long hours at the paddles and in general keep up the spirits of the crew. I noticed that they got into these verbal exchanges whenever the pace slackened and there was danger of a serious lag in our progress. The device worked fairly well. At least it got our minds off our work and the effects of encroaching fatigue.

Tom's ":evergreen alley," so narrow it seemed almost a tunnel, extended in a slight curving course for about a quarter of a mile. Then it hooked sharply left, and as we made the turn we found ourselves gliding onto the open water of a small beautiful lake distinguished at its north end by a long, low, reef-like point with a solitary, weather-gnarled cedar dominating its tip. Gene paused to check his map.

We were right, Tom," he said. "The map is incomplete and actually misleading. But we are on a route that seems to be going somewhere. I'm pretty certain now that if we follow the flowage out of this lake it will lead us into the other chain."

Moments later, as we plied the west side of the lake about thirty yards off shore, Mark suddenly lapped his paddle and shouted excitedly: "Dad, did you see that? That big heron over there just flipped a fish up in the air and then caught it on the way down and swallowed it!"

Glancing to where Mark pointed, I spotted the great blue heron standing as still as a stump in shallow water, its head poised slightly forward and ready for the strike--a posture that is often held for hours at a time in wait for a meal to swim by. It was one of the few times I have ever seen this species in the Quetico. I was surprised, for we were at the very northernmost limit of its vast continental range, and its presence here would have to border on the unusual. But there it was, a welcome and pleasing sight indeed. The great blue heron was an old familiar acquaintance of mine, having become something of a special friend under circumstances I shall shortly relate.

Mike, reacting to Mark from the canoe nearest us, opined: "Aw, that can't be so. Birds don't juggle their food by flipping it around in the air. Isn't that right, George?"

"It may seem a bit strange," replied George. "However, I don't know enough about herons to say whether they could perform a stunt like that. I've never seen it, that's for sure."

At this point something crackled in my memory and I was realizing an interesting coincidence. Mark's observation had triggered the recollection of an identical experience I'd had as a boy.

"You know," I broke into the conversation, "I've just remembered something that verifies what Mark claims he just saw. It happened when I was a kid angling with my father for panfish at our favorite lake. We were anchored not far from shore and I was pleasantly adrift in one of those wonderful boyhood daydreams when I realized I was watching a huge long-legged bird wading nearby. It was a truly handsome, stately bird with a long, thick, curved neck and a long, powerful-looking beak. A conspicuous tuft stuck out from the back of its head. It was my first great blue heron, and I couldn't keep my eyes off it. I watched it for many minutes. Then I saw it do very much the same thing Mark is saying he's just seen. Only in this case I swear it speared its victim. With lightning swiftness the bird's bill shot down into the water and came up instantly with a hand-sized sunfish impaled upon it. What seemed even more remarkable to me at the time was the next move. With a deft flip of its head, that heron whipped his bill upward so that the impaled fish flew off and into the air above. As the fish twisted and came down head first, the heron simply opened wide its gaping beak and added another morsel to its craw. I could even see the lump travel down the neck as the fish was swallowed."

"Gee, Uncle Cliff," exclaimed Mike, "how can you remember so much from that long ago?"

"I'm not sure, Mike. But the memory is suddenly quite vivid . . . perhaps because of that impressive performance on the very first time I'd ever seen old 'Mr. Stilts.' I've never seen him do it since, although I've often enjoyed his company while fishing my old favorite bass bay on Big Fish Lake . . . where blue herons abound."

"Isn't there a colony of herons near there?" George asked.

"Right. Between Cold Spring and Rockville there has long existed a huge rookery in a big woods along the Sauk River . . . where large numbers of blue heron have nested high in the treetops for as long as the settlers around there can remember. Those big nests so high above the ground are quite a sight. But that first time . . . seeing that big bird flipping that fish . . . that was

something else . . . a truly exciting moment of discovery . . . and, for me, one of my earliest moments magnificent."

A shallow inlet about the width of two canoes gave us entry from the lake of the heron onto a picturesque beaver pond where scattered clusters of gay white water lilies smiled bravely despite having to share their home with a dismal array of dead birch trunks standing starkly white in the quiet water. Off to the right towered a dense grove of the tallest tamaracks I have ever seen, addressing the sky with a majestic sweep and asserting their dominance by keeping much of the pond in permanent shadow. Along the left edge of the pond extended a long massive embankment that made me think of river levees I'd seen in the South. It was obviously the work of beavers, and it explained the presence of the drowned birches.

It also provided a singular surprise. For as we paddled near this dyke we were startled to see the ground beyond it fall away so sharply that we actually were looking down through treetops at another broad pond some thirty or forty feet directly below! It was a strange sensation to glide along the edge of this typical, ordinary looking wilderness pond only to realize it was perched on the very brink of a high shelf where it was held in place by nothing more spectacular than a simple beaver dam. We followed along the dyke to where it joined a slight, rounded outcrop of the underlying rock.

Here we witnessed a fascinating example of the beaver's remarkable engineering ingenuity. The long dyke had been built up to and slightly higher than the granite outcrop, so that the outflow from the pond was directed over the solid rock instead of over or through any part of the dam itself. This eliminated any deterioration caused by running water and assured a strong, permanent impoundment.

The outpouring water slid smoothly over the granite lobe and then rippled downward in a thin film across a wide face of rock that dropped sharply away at an angle of about sixty degrees.

Peering out over the top of the fall, and along the steep ledge that extended as far as we could see to either side, Gene shook his head. "I don't believe it," he exclaimed, suddenly worried. "Now don't tell me there's no way to get to that pond below."

"Are you sure you want to get down there?" asked George.

"We have no choice. We're still on the flowage and that's what we've got to follow. But I'm danged if I can see anything but a steep scarp all along here."

Tom stepped out of his canoe along the dyke. He walked a short distance along its top studying the edge of the shelf. It fell away precipitously. Presently he was back. "There's no way," he said grimly. "The wall is even steeper over that way. Seems to be along sharp ledge that's somehow part of this entire ridge."

For a long moment we all sate there staring at each other blankly, perhaps just a bit stunned by the sudden incongruity. We'd been able to handle every eventuality so far, to keep forging steadily ahead. Then this. It seemed almost ludicrous that we should have come this far without undue hindrance only to be stopped dead in our tracks by such an unseemly barrier. If we were to be turned back, prevented from completing our quest, the impediment ought at least to be something more dramatic. I had fleeting visions of failure, of having to retreat over back-breaking portages without ever fulfilling our mission, without ever learning if ABU-ABU was more than just a dream. Then Mike spoke up.

"Why don't we just toboggan the canoes right down the waterfall?"

I couldn't tell whether he was in earnest or simply resorting to a boy's way of making light of a grave situation. The other boys chuckled uncomfortably. Another thoughtful moment

of silence followed. Then Gene, suddenly a-burst with inspiration, boomed out with decision and authority.

"Why, of course! By golly, Mike, you've hit it right on the noggin! This fall is the only place clear enough all the way down to see what we're doing. It's steep, but there's enough angle so that we might just be able to slide the duffle down."

"Slide it down? You're kidding," I stammered. I honestly thought he was suffering from the heat, or overexertion, or something.

"Gene, you can't be serious," said Bill with a dubious stare.

"Look, fellows," Gene reasoned. "I'm sure we could find some easier way to descend into that pond down there if we want to take the time to back-track and spend a precious hour or two exploring. Or, if we tried to go back the way we came, it would be dark before we got to a decent campsite. We need all the time we can save in order to get out of this crossover and into the other chain where our chances of finding a good place to camp will be much better. I say we should stick to the flowage, and we should go right down this spillway. It'll be damn hard work, but it can be done."

"You're the captain," said Al who, like all of us when the chips were really down, knew that if we couldn't give full confidence to our leader we had no business being here. "Let's get to work."

Tom meantime had quickly anticipated what Gene had in mind and by tacit agreement was already opening one of the packs. From it he removed a coil of strong nylon rope.

"Good, Tom, we'll need that," sake Gene. "We'll leave the canoes fully loaded. The weight of the packs will keep 'em hugging the rock surface. Everybody help check to see that all small, loose gear is secured. We'll lower the canoes one at a time, using the rope to ease 'em down slowly."

"Somebody should be down below," prompted Tom.

"Right. George and Bill, we'll need you two at the bottom to handle the canoes when they arrive and float them out of the way. Looks as if the best place to climb down is alongside the spillway. Al, Tom and Cliff stay up here with me to handle the rope."

Using the rope--the top end of which Tom, Al, and I held--George and Bill simulated mountain climbers as they worked their way down to the foot of the fall.

"All right," directed Gene. "The next job is for you boys. You'll get plenty wet but we need you on the spillway to help stabilize the canoes. Try to get good footholds in the rock at different levels. The main thing is to steady the canoes and hold 'em on their keels as they slide by, keep 'em from tipping over, and make sure the packs aren't shifting. Will, you stay closest to the top; Mike, spot yourself about half way down; and Mark and Billy, you two work together about three-quarter way down. Got that straight?"

"Yeah, sure. Let's go!" chorused the boys, sensing adventure. In a few minutes they were at their appointed stations, the water gurgling merrily around and under them. Pits and cracks in the rock provided what little foothold they could find. We were now ready to send the first canoe down the chute.

I noted that had there been any greater volume of water over this fall, we would not have been able to attempt such a hazardous descent. As it was, we were exposing the canoes to considerable risk. Any slip, any loss of balance or control, could result in serious damage. I had visions of smashed canoes and of our being helplessly stranded in this utterly wild and remote place. I glanced back at the tall brooding tamaracks across the pond and felt strangely uncomfortable under their silent stare. Did they resent this noisy disturbance of their repose, this

invasion of their privacy? I wondered if my companions were experiencing the same uneasy sensation of suspense that suddenly took hold of me.

With one end of the rope fastened securely to the mooring-ring in its stern, Gene carefully inched the first canoe over the edge. Tom, Al, and I braced ourselves as we grasped the rope. We weren't at all sure that the sixty degree angle of the spillway would allow the heavy packs to remain snugly wedged in place. So we watched in breathless silence as the canoe teetered on the brink and Gene carefully and ever so slowly tilted the prow forward and downward.

"Keep that rope tight!" he directed. "And for God's sake, don't anybody lose his grip!"

Down, down went the bow as the stern countered in an upward arc. And then gravity took over. The canoe slipped awkwardly downward several feet. Gene almost went with it.

"Hang on! Hang on!" he commanded as he scrambled back from the slippery edge and added his two strong hands to ours on the rope. Everything held. The canoe now rested keel and bottom against the face of the spillway, slightly atilt to its right side. Its prow was just out of Will's reach. The packs stayed in place. We strained mightily to keep the rope steady.

"Okay, Will . . . grab it and keep it even on its keel as we let it down," Gene directed. "Keep the bottom skin away from the rock as much as possible."

"Looks as if we'll have to leave some aluminum here," observed Al, noting the metallic scrape marks left by the canoe on the top edge of the spillway. "Is that why you want it to ride down on the keel, Gene?"

"Right. The keel can spare the loss better than the skin can."

We were now easing the craft down as gently as possible. Despite his difficult footing, Will was able to balance it on its keel as it slowly slid past him. Soon it was under Mike's guidance and finally it passed Mark and Billy on their lower perch until its prow was safely in the hands of Bill and George. Standing in water up to their hips at the foot of the fall, they kept the prow from dipping under while the stern came down to level position. The canoe was then stashed in a nearby patch of reeds to await the others.

After much tense and strenuous effort, the fourth canoe had completed its descent and we were beginning to congratulate ourselves over the successful execution of a difficult task.

Then came canoe number five. And trouble. It proved to be the most heavily laden and at the same time the most poorly balanced. We knew we were in difficulty the moment Gene got its bow down over the brink. It nearly slipped away from us at once, so quickly did it lunge downward, and it was only with Gene's added strength on the rope and a quick restraining grasp by Will as it reached him that we were able to bring it to a stop. A further complication developed as the prow, instead of heading straight downward, began sliding over the right.

"Not enough weight toward the bow," groaned Gene. "She's top-heavy at the stern. Any chance of shifting some of those packs forward, Will?"

Will suddenly was too busy to answer. His left boot had slipped from its foothold and he was frantically struggling to recover his balance. He let go his hold on the canoe and, using his hands to grasp whatever small clefts and protrusions he could find, managed to clamber to the safety of a small ledge at the side of the spillway. The canoe meanwhile began sliding slowly, its prow continuing to swerve further toward the right as if caught on some unseen diagonal fissure. By the time it reached Mike's precarious position the canoe was sliding almost sidewise. At that moment the prow became lodged in a crevice off to the side and the canoe began to tip over. Mike, making a frenzied effort to steady it, lost his footing entirely and seized the gunwale to save himself from a fast bumpy slide to the bottom. The canoe promptly rolled over, dumping

its cargo. Four large packs tumbled downward. one rolled right over mike, flattening him to the rock, but he miraculously hung on.

"Watch out below!" Gene shouted. "Let the packs go! Save yourselves!"

Mark and Billy, who were directly in their path, dodged wildly as the packs missed them by inches, then both boys slipped from their perches and joined the duffle for the rest of the trip. Down the watery chute they shot, adding two more falling objects for George and Bill to duck away from. The packs splashed into the pool between the two men, followed immediately by two very startled boys. Thoroughly dunked, the boys were quickly on their feet helping to get the packs out of the water.

"Gol, what happened up there?" Billy wanted to know.

"Just discovered a quicker way to lower the gear," drawled George. "You boys get any bumps or bruises?"

"Naw, that was cool," replied Mark. "I'd like to try sliding all the way from the top."

"Too steep an incline," objected Bill.

"All we need is a broken arm or leg to cancel out the whole expedition," added George. "Let's hope we've seen all the sliding there's going to be."

From the top of the fall we held the empty canoe in place with the rope while Mike worked along it to the edge of the spillway, from where he was able to climb down the remaining distance. Then with a tug of the rope we easily disengaged the lightened canoe and lowered it to the bottom. Minutes later, after using the rope to help ourselves down the escarpment, we were all finally safe and sound at the foot of the fall. Tom, as the last man to descend, demonstrated his scouting rope lore by using a sheepshank (a knot that holds only while tension is on it) tied to a deadhead to let himself down. Reaching the base of the wall, he simply gave the rope a quick snap and the loose knot parted to release all but about a foot's length off the upper end of the rope.

"Hey, Tom, when do we eat?" Mike's hunger was flaring up as usual, but this time he was speaking for all of us. The morning's labors had left us famished.

"Coming right up," came the crisp response.

Fortunately, thanks to the pool which softened their fall down the spillway, the packs escaped without damage. And thanks to Gene's insistence at the start of the trip that all our packs were properly equipped with strong, waterproof plastic liners, none of their contents got wet.

A small grassy clearing at the edge of the pond provided space for everyone to stretch out for a brief rest while Tom opened a food pack and served up a quick lunch of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, dried beef jerkeys, raisins, and three squares each of semi-sweet chocolate--all washed down with plenty of Tom's "nectar of the gods," a flavored sweet drink made out of Kool-Aid and pond water.

"Yikes! There's a big green bug in my juice," Mike exclaimed suddenly. He almost gagged as he sat staring into his drinking cup.

"Well, don't just sit there," admonished his father. "Fish the poor thing out before it drowns!"

"Eeeish! I'd have swallowed it if I hadn't been looking."

"Happens quite often up here," Gene said matter-of-factly. "Every bug has its own distinct flavor, and it gets interesting to see which flavors are preferred."

"You mean people eat them?"

"Pretty hard to avoid. After all, we are out-of-doors, our 'vittles' are constantly exposed, and, as you've undoubtedly noticed, the insect population really thrives in the wilderness." I noticed Gene wink playfully toward Al.

"Yup," added Tom, struggling hard to maintain a serious expression, "every time you lift a forkful of food in the wilderness, there's a fair chance you'll find some frightened little creature staring you right in the eye."

"What if you did eat some bugs?" Billy wondered. "Would it make you sick?"

"Probably, if you ate enough of the right kind . . . which isn't very likely," replied Gene with a reassuring smile.

"Yeah, most bugs are pretty small," observed Mark. "I bet you'd need a thousand mosquitoes to make a mouthful."

"Eeish! Do we have to talk about it?" exclaimed Mike, wincing.

"Seems as if there's more insects than anything else in this world," observed Billy. "I guess we just have to put up with 'em."

"I wonder why there's so many," said Mark.

"I guess that's one of nature's marvelous mysteries," George replied. And then, drawing upon that amazing mental reservoir of scientific minutiae which gave him his very special charm, he added, "Most insects have an incredible rate of reproduction. They would soon engulf the earth if nature didn't have ways to keep their numbers in check. Why, in just one summer a single common housefly would produce a hundred and nine billion billion descendents . . . if they all lived."

"Golly, what keeps 'em in check?" queried Billy.

"Mostly their appetites. A lot of bugs eat each other. And a lot of other creatures, especially birds, feed on insects."

"Well, I wish these damned deer flies would feed on each other instead of on me!" exclaimed Gene, slapping his neck. "Let's eat up and get out of here!"

As we finished lunch, Tom quickly put things away and buckled the straps of the food pack. "Into the gondolas, men," he prompted.

In moments we were afloat again, gliding among broad patches of white and yellow water lilies and green lilypads. At the opposite end of the pond we encountered another beaver dam, a short low obstruction over which we were able with our paddles to pole-skid the canoes without disembarking. The stream beyond meandered through a wide meadowy stretch over so erratic a course that it brought a bemused reaction from Mike.

"There's so many twists and turns that you meet yourself coming back," he shouted to Mark as our canoes passed each other moving in opposite directions on the two legs of a sharp horseshoe bend.

At length, after much strenuous winding and pushing and dragging along a channel sometimes narrowing to less than the width of a canoe, we came to the end of the meadow. There the water diverged into shallow tricklings as it percolated through an accumulation of boulders along the streambed, forcing us to proceed on foot. Dense vegetation and rough terrain on either side confined us to the streambed and thus imposed upon us what proved to be one of the most grueling exertions of the entire trip. Treacherously loose, wet stones cluttered the way, testing weary muscles to the limits of endurance. A slimy coating of algae made the rocks as slippery as wet ice, putting an added strain into every cautious step and reducing progress to a snail's pace. We literally had to shuffle our way over the smaller boulders and around the smaller ones, and this slow motion, sustained for what seemed like an eternity under the

oppressive weight of our burdens, drained off most of what physical stamina we had left.

As for myself, I found the heat stifling and felt my legs gradually weakening as I advanced until finally I had no control over them. It was then that my boots slipped out sideways from under me and I found myself kneeling on bruised knees in four inches of water, my canoe tilting awkwardly forward from my shoulders and its yoke pressing hard into the back of my neck. I rolled the canoe off to the side, stretched out my legs and just sat there in the cool water in a sheer ecstasy of relief. It felt so good that I lay back full length to get the full benefit of its soothing effect.

Meantime, George had been staggering under the weight of two packs not far ahead of me. Now as I sat up and began to ladle handfuls of cool water over my head and face, I glanced at George just as he lost his footing. In his case, his feet slid out forward and he fell backward--luckily, as it turned out, for the backpack cushioned his fall. However, he was pinned to it by the weight of the front pack which now rested on his upturned chest and made him resemble nothing so much as some kind of jumbo sandwich. He too seemed in no hurry to move, preferring to take full advantage of his sudden escape from the throes of overexertion. He was content, for the moment at least, simply to remain in his sandwiched position between the two packs.

Then Al came tottering by and caught sight of us from under his canoe. "I'll be damned!" he exclaimed. "What an odd way to take a rest break. Are you guys <u>that</u> tired?"

"Naw," drawled George. "I'm not really tired. I'm paralyzed."

"That's a poor excuse for goofing off," kidded Al. Then he glanced at me. I was still wallowing in cool delight. "And that's a poor place to swim, Cliff. Why don't you wait till we get to a lake?"

"I wasn't sure I'd ever see a lake again," I replied. "My God, Al, aren't your legs about ready to cave in?"

"Yah, they are," replied Al. Whereupon he let down his canoe in the shallow water. His legs buckled as he did so and, willingly or not, he joined me sitting in the water. "Ahhh," he sighed contentedly. "This is really living!"

Bill and the boys had now come up from behind. Bill, too, lowered his canoe, but, managing to stay on his feet, he simply set it upright, climbed into it, and took his rest on the stern seat.

"You fellows sure like to carry things to extreme," he commented. "How come all the soaking?"

"It wasn't really by choice," I explained. "We just fell into it. But it certainly feels refreshing."

"You guys look awful funny," snickered Mike.

"Look, aren't you tired?" asked his father.

"I'm more hungry than tired."

"That figures. The boys get hungry; the men get tired. There's your <u>real</u> generation gap," laughed Al.

Gene, Tom, and Will, who had led the way, had moved out of sight around a bend just ahead. Minutes later we heard Gene shouting from not far off:

"Hey, hustle it up, you guys! It's just a short distance past the bend. We've got to keep moving!"

Everybody slowly dragged back into action--except George. In striving to get to his feet, he inadvertently rolled over sideways between his packs and was even more helpless than before. He lay there emitting sundry profanities until the boys, with their lighter loads, moved over and

helped him up. They likewise helped Al, Bill, and me get back under out canoes and soon we were all once more toiling wearily over and among the slippery rocks of the toughest trail of all our travels--a trail which, for later recollection, the boys adequately named "Slimy Portage."

Thereafter, even big Gene seemed no longer as strong and nimble as he ordinarily was on the portages, nor did the lively boys scamper like squirrels across the boulder tops and hogbacks. From here on, fatigue stalked us relentlessly, and for the first time I wondered if we hadn't taken on more than we could handle.

At that point from which Gene had called to us, we found easier footing along a high, dry granite outcrop which skirted a treacherous looking quagmire, the mud-filled remnant of a defunct beaver pond through which the stream imperceptibly filtered its way. On limbs numb with weariness w plodded around it. When again we picked up our waterway, at its outlet from the mud swamp, we were much relieved to find it had the appearance of a stream again, navigable and leading off promisingly through a break in the forest. Amid great sighs, gasps, and grunts we lost no time in ridding ourselves of our burdens. I was too exhausted to lower my canoe in the usual gentle manner; I just dropped it. The resulting bang echoed loudly through the surrounding forest. A startled blue jay scolded from a distance.

Though anxious to hurry on so as to assure finding a good campsite before nightfall, Gene and Tom nevertheless thought it expedient that we have a fifteen-minute rest.

"We'll take a breather before going on," Gene announced, "a sort of coffee break without the coffee."

As it turned out, it became a "berry" break. About thirty yards down the stream bank the boys discovered a clearing fairly a-burst with huge, ripe blueberries. Everyone immediately invaded the patch on hands and knees, plucking and gulping the berries by the handful.

"I've never known blueberries to taste so good," rhapsodized George. "Either I'm awfully hungry or it's just that the berries do something to relax these cramped muscles."

Tom had another way of expressing his delight. "Mmmm . . . Mother Nature has spread out for us a free feast on the forest floor. Now that's what I call hospitality."

In their haste to consume as much of the feast as possible before time ran out, the boys stuffed away the juicy morsels with a gluttonous fervor that left their mouths and chins stained a livid blue. They joked and giggled over the resulting comic expressions.

"I would have to say," remarked Gene, "that this is the greatest blueberry year I've ever seen up here. There've been summers when you couldn't find a berry. But apparently temperatures, rains, and sunshine have occurred in the proper balance to produce a magnificent crop this year. We've found them at the very peak of their ripening on the bush, and they're as sweet and juicy and succulent and big as nature can grow them."

Watching my companions, especially the boys, thus happily replenishing themselves, I marveled at how quickly they could forget fatigue and discomfort in the enjoyment of so simple a pleasure. Surely this was part of the magic of the wilderness, made manifest in yet another of nature's priceless and bountiful treasures . . . unguarded . . . unrestricted . . . free for the taking. Here in the pure simplicity of nature's own garden lay another part of the answer to my quest. For, behold, there were no worldly riches here, yet somehow in the mere gulping of a few handfuls of blueberries we had become immeasurably enriched!

"Is it true that too many blueberries make you wacky Billy inquired through a cheek-puffing mouthful.

"Could be," Gene answered with a chomping grin. "All I know is that they are very difficult for me to resist. I know that once we get settled and the time allows, I am one guy who

is going to spend an afternoon wallowing in a blueberry patch and eating himself into at least one magnificent bellyache."

"That's a lot of ache," quipped Tom. "Filling that big pot of yours will take more blueberry patches than you'll find in any given square mile."

Gene merely laughed as he crammed another handful into his mouth.

"Count me in when you do, Gene," uttered George between gulps. "That's one gorging orgy I don't want to miss."

"It's a deal. But anyway, it can't happen here and now. We've got to get moving." Gene suddenly was all serious business as he sprang into action. At his goading, though reluctant to leave the blueberries, we quickly reloaded the canoes and were soon dipping paddles down the stream.

We had proceeded about half a mile when the channel widened and deepened noticeably, indicating, as it turned out, that we were approaching a sizeable lake. The forest receded gradually to either side and then we were meandering along the channel through bur-reeds and cattails so tall and dense on all sides that we could see nothing beyond them.

"Great place for waterfowl," I hear Al remark to Mike when a pair of black ducks flushed from cover. Several times mallards and mergansers passed in flight. And when the welcome call of a loon signaled big deep water in the near distance, Gene, though we were still screened-in by the reeds, called out exultantly:

"We've made it, boys! We're out of that damned obstacle course. We've reached the inner chain!"

"Finally!" sighed Mike softly in the canoe directly behind me. "Hallelujah!" shouted George. "Now if you can just keep us skimming over open liquid, Gene, instead of staggering and sloshing over those god-awful portages, I'll pick your ticks at the next dip session."

"Now don't tell me you'd rather paddle than portage," guffawed Gene.

"Any day of the week," George replied emphatically. "I guess I just prefer doing my work sitting down."

"Ay-men . . . ay-men to that," Tom concurred, voicing the words in a kind of sing-song chant.

"Hey, Dad," Mark exclaimed suddenly. "I can hear a lot of birds squawking up ahead. Sounds like seagulls."

"Yup, I hear 'em," I replied. "Great sound . . . a sure indication of a fine lake coming up."

I'd hardly got the words out when we burst from the reed patch into full view of a beautiful, broad expanse of calm, open water. In a wide bay extending off to the left, and looking like a small fleet of green galleons lying at anchor, rose a cluster of five pine-crested isles. Straight before us on a low, narrow reef of dung-whitened rocks, an unusually large number of roosting gulls chattered in garrulous concert. Some took flight and circled noisily as we glided around them.

"Sounds like a political convention," comment3ed Bill.

"Probably electing their chief mo-gull," punned Tom dryly.

"For a weak brain-blurp like that, you should get the gull-otine," chided Gene.

"And for such impudence you should do a stint as a gully slave," cracked Tom in quick rebuttal.

"Gad, Will boy," Gene grunted to his son in mock disgust, "I don't know how I get into these <u>stupid,</u> these <u>ridiculous</u> exchanges of verbal trivia with that contentious old coot of a camp cook!"

"You wouldn't if you weren't so fond of him, Dad," Will smiled softly in that wise, mystical, quiet way of his.

Ignoring all this, Al had swung his and Mike's canoe close in on the birds for a few quick shots with his ever-ready camera. As he clicked away, the gulls prattled uneasily like fidgety matrons all a-fuss at having their pictures taken.

Beyond the reef we grip-rafted our canoes and rested our paddles while Gene took another look at his map. He squinted against the sunlight as his keen eyes scanned the western shore to the far end of the lake.

"We probably shouldn't gamble on finding a camp further on," suggested Tom, glancing at the mid-afternoon sun. "We've a much better chance of finding a good campsite on a lake of this size."

"Just what I was thinking," agreed Gene. "We've already had a rugged run today, and we may be smart to encamp early and assure plenty of rest for everybody. I've a hunch tomorrow could b4e another really strenuous day."

"Another?" exclaimed Mike. "Geeze, aren't we ever going to get to Abu-Abu?"

"Yeah," chimed Billy. "How can we have any fun being on the move all the time?"

"How far do we still have to go?" asked Mark.

"Oh, not too far . . . I hope," Gene smiled understandingly. The boys' impatience was no surprise to this seasoned leader who had guided many a troop of youthful explorers into the wilds. "You boys will get your chance at those warrior bigmouth soon enough. Meantime, finding a campsite is the first order of business."

"I'm all for that," interjected George. "Shall we grab the first likely looking piece of shore we see?"

"Actually, from the appearance of the rock formations," Gene replied, "that northwest shore seems the most promising. You see those outcrops and open spaces of rock near the water's edge far up the lake? Generally, the possibility of a campsite is good where you can see a lot of low exposed rock like that. Looks like the better part of an hour's paddling from here . . . but I think it will be worth the effort."

Promptly we set our hands to the paddles and pointed our prows toward the distant end of the lake. An absence of wind and wave action made that final paddling stint of the day unexpectedly pleasant. After the earlier exertions, such effort as was now required seemed hardly any effort at all. Canoes become marvelously light and responsive on calm water, and we were, fortunately, experiencing some of that stable weat5her common to this period of the summer in which, though temperatures may soar, the air will upon occasion remain fairly still for several days at a time. To the canoeist such weather is murder on the sweltering portages, but it is a joy on the water. There is always something special about slipping over a body of water that lies glassy smooth from shore to shore. In this instance it was a combination of the physical and the picturesque: the easy, almost restful pace of the paddling and the utter serenity of the scene. Green islands lifting from the lake's sky-blue lacquered surface toward the east shore gave soft perspective to a bay beyond them, making the lake seem larger than it was.

On such water, when paddles are lapped for a brief rest and the canoe glides effortlessly forward of its own momentum, two thin emerald riffles curl transparently outward from the bow, spreading away in the wake and capturing the dreamer's eye in a mesmeric spell . . . filling his searching spirit with a tranquility that approaches the sublime. For such a moment, though it can never provide more than a fleeting, uncapturable glimpse of what heaven must be like, it would be impossible to set a price. Yet to the venturesome soul hungering for such moments and for

the rare and beautiful fulfillments they can bring, the price is little more than the time and effort it takes to wander for awhile in nature's ever-beckoning retreats.

Rapt in such musings I hardly noticed that we had quickly closed the distance and were now cruising along the rocky shore Gene had pointed out. Tom and George were out ahead of the rest, and as their canoe rounded a turn into a small cove, Tom shouted back:

"Campsite! We're going in."

"Ah, we're in luck," commented Gene as he and Will made the turn and scanned the cove. "That clearing at the other side is made to order."

CHAPTER SEVEN

And indeed it was. Even from the water we could discern an excellent landing area at the foot of a granite shelf which slanted gently upward from just above the water line toward a flat spacious opening along the forest edge. Part of the shelf was obscured at the nearer side by a narrow patch of dense shrubbery, mostly sweetgale, and several dwarfed cedars, extending down close to the water. Tom and George, skirting this shoreside thicket, were first to approach the landing. Just as their canoe touched the shelf, George, who was in the bow, suddenly went into such frantic gyrations he almost fell out of the canoe. With his paddle he shoved violently away from the rock and in a frenzy stroked backward as he blurted out:

"Damn the torpedoes! Full speed in reverse!"

Only then did the rest of us see what had caused this astonishing reaction. Two huge bears, which had been hidden by the foliage until George had met them literally face to face at the landing, stood there staring out at us, appearing quite as startled as we were.

"Geeze, let's get out of here fast!" squealed Billy, jabbing the water wildly with his paddle.

"Holy cow, we can't camp here," shouted Mark. "What do we do now?"

"Hold it, everybody!" commanded Gene as he and Will quickly moved in toward the landing. "Keep your canoes well out in the water but don't panic. We've got to find out if those buggers are afraid of us."

The boys watched with great amazement and not a little trepidation as Gene and Will carefully edged close to the shelf. Then, waving his paddle in the air, Gene let loose such a formidable burst of thunder from those big lungs of his that I almost felt sorry for the bears.

"Get out of here, you big shaggy devils!" he roared. "Go on! Haroomph! Beat it!"

Meantime Will banged out a loud drum beat with his paddle on the side of the canoe.

The bears took the hint. After one bewildered look, away they fled, disappearing quickly into the forest.

"Keep the canoe handy," Gene admonished Will who was holding the craft flush with the landing. Gene cautiously stepped ashore, paddle in hand, and slowly crossed the clearing toward where the bears had gone out of sight. He waited awhile, listening, and then returned to the landing.

"This is too good a campsite to surrender it to a couple of wandering bruins," he announced. "I think they respect us, however, though we'll have to take precautions. It should be fairly safe once we get the tents up and a hearty fire going."

"Okay, men," Tom called out, noting our hesitation as we sat out there in our canoes visibly stunned by the prospect of wild bears running loose so near our encampment, "everybody ashore!"

"Dad, is it safe?" asked mark, suddenly very much the little boy I had so often lovingly held and comforted in the trials of his younger years, and needing now to place his trust on that one ultimate reassurance which only a devoted father can give. For a fleeting moment he seemed so precious, so much a part of me, so needful still of my paternal strength and protection, that impulsively I wanted to cuddle him like the infant son he once had been. But of course I realized he was already so much a budding young lad that any such show of affection would be an embarrassment to him. A growing boy wants love, but he wants it only in the knowledge3 that it is there. So, I have it to him in the way he would want it, in a simple man-to-man expression of my confidence:

"I'm sur3e it is, Mark. Gene isn't one to take foolish chances. You can trust him and Tom to know what they are doing. Even with bears on our hands, these men can handle the situation. As long as you stay near camp, and especially out of the woods, you have nothing to fear. So . . . come on. Let's go in and get ourselves settled."

Reluctantly, amid such misgivings as would only be normal under the circumstances, our weary crew landed and proceeded quickly to set up a tight camp. Anxious, bear-wary eyes kept the surrounding forest under constant surveillance as we hustled to make everything secure. The tents were erected close together in the middle of the clearing in a semicircle surrounding a central fire pit, with the boys' two tents snugged in between those of the adults. An ample stockpile of firewood was gathered by the boys from a plenteous supply of beached driftwood scattered along the nearby shore. Al, Bill, and George laid the canoes end to end close by the tents to form an enclosure around part of the camp.

Meanwhile, Tom busied himself with the cooking, singing away in his accustomed manner as he worked. As might by now be expected, he had a new version of his Abu song to spring on us, designed to suit the situation and to ease some of the tension brought on by the bears. It served its purpose, for it put everyone, the boys particularly, back in a relaxed and cheerful mood. Tom treated the matter of the bears in this light:

> If a bear
> Comes to share
> In our meager bill-of-fare
> On the trail to ABU-ABU . . .
> Let him have his wish;
> We can live on fish,
> Till we reach our island campground.

And in the follow-up refrain, sung with gusto by the crew as usual, the boys recovered their boastful bravado to the extent of threatening to lasso the next bear they saw and tie him to a pine tree.

With everything in order, we all took a cooling swim and got into clean dry clothing before mealtime. Tom had a fine hot supper ready for us, consisting of vegetable soup, fried

spam, baked beans, mashed potatoes, green peas, bread and butter, apple sauce, coffee, and hot chocolate.

As we sat around the campfire enjoying our meal, I noticed that the three younger sons, though ordinarily quite restless and ranging about even while eating, were content to huddle cross-legged inside the circle in comfortable, and safe proximity to their sires. And, of course, their excited chatter was mainly about bears.

"Do you think the bears will come back during the night?" Billy asked Tom.

"I wouldn't rule out the possibility," Tom chuckled. "We'll have to take the special precautions, in any event."

"What precautions?"

"You'll see . . . after supper."

"Are they really dangerous?" asked Mike.

"They must be," volunteered Mark. "Otherwise, why would people be so scared of them?"

"Are they dangerous?" reiterated Mike, glancing at Gene.

"Well, I suppose we should get things straight on the bear situation," replied Gene. "First I should say I don't know a good reason why people should be afraid of black bears. I've never heard of an instance of a human having been attacked by a black bear . . . except perhaps in the case of a female instinctively protecting her cubs. But the truth is, bears are afraid of humans, and will usually avoid them."

"You mean we can chase them?" asked Mike.

"Don't misunderstand. If bears come, don't get brave. Keep out of their way. It's foolish to take risks with any wild animals, especially big ones. Just leave the chasing to those of us who know what to do."

"How much do bears weigh?" asked Billy.

"They look bigger than they actually are because of their heavy fur," George hastened to answer in that quick, computer-like way he had of popping out with the wanted information. "Though they can get up to over four hundred pounds, the average is around a hundred and fifty."

"Wow! That's almost twice my weight," exclaimed Billy. Then admiringly, "Golly, George, how do you know so much?"

George acknowledged the question with that pleased, easy, appreciative, almost shy smile with which he always accepted a compliment and which made the giver feel somehow complimented in return. A less gracious, less sincere man might create the impression of an egotistical know-it-all when butting into a conversation with such authoritative data as George seemed always to have at his ready command, but in his case one quickly realized it was never a matter of showing off what he knew but rather a sincere driving urge to share his remarkable gift of factual knowledge with others.

"Yeah," Mark commented, 'kids our size wouldn't have much of a chance with a bear!"

"Just remember," said Tom, "that the only reason they'll come into a camp is to get at the groceries. They're not after people. They're simply looking for free vittles. That's why you should never keep food of any kind in your tent."

"What would happen if you did?" queried Billy.

"You might find your tent pulled down on top of you and ripped to shreds and the bear crawling all over you in his frenzy to find the tasty morsel his nose tells him is there."

"Would bubble gum attract 'em?" asked Mike, suddenly concerned.

"It might. Why do you ask?"

Well, because I've got some in my ditty bag. I sure don't want any bear messing me up over that!"

"Ho!" Gene cut in. "You'd better get that gum out of your tent right now and put it in the food pack. That goes for anybody else who might have gum or candy stashed in his duffle."

To the amusement of their elders, all the boys except the older, wiser Will jumped up and bee-lined into their tents. After some noisy groping they returned to the circle, each with his personal supply of chewing material . . . which Tom stored away in the food pack.

Not yet ready to dismiss the subject of bears, George spoke up in a slow thoughtful drawl. "You know, I'm surprised there are still bears to be seen up here. I don't know about Canada, but below the border in Minnesota there's no protection for them. There just aren't any hunting restrictions on bears. They can be hunted all year 'round. You'd think they'd be wiped out by now . . . especially because they're big game and interesting, as well as very good eating. I hate to see this happening to old bruin." [Note: Restrictions on hunting bear in Minnesota have since been imposed.]

"A bear is just too noble an animal to be killed and wasted," opined Tom. "I don't care how many camp kitchens he raids, he's a beautiful creature that should be protected."

"Even when he's such a nuisance?" asked Billy, somewhat surprised at such favorable sentiment toward a beast he still regarded as anything but friendly and useful.

"When it comes to animals . . . to <u>all</u> wild creatures," Tom replied, "even those you don't like or which are ugly or bothersome or even dangerous, you have to look at the bigger picture. They are all part of the plan of creation, or they wouldn't be here. They are all necessary to balance out a very complicated pattern of relationships among all living things. Our very existence depends upon that balance, for even we, as human beings, are part of it whether we realize it or not."

"So we put up with 'em and chase 'em away instead of killing 'em . . . right?"

"Right, Billy. And therein lies the core of a simple but vital wisdom that humanity has yet to learn and apply."

At that point Gene arose stiffly, groaningly from the effects of a low hard rock he had been sitting on during the meal. "I don't mind telling you," said he, "that I am bushed . . . really bushed . . . and I suspect that everybody here feels very much as I do. So . . . let's get everything done that needs to be done as soon as possible . . . to allow whoever wants it to get some early shut-eye. Cliff and Bill, I think you have the K-P duty this evening . . . and while you men do the dishes, the rest of us will batten down the camp."

"What about bear precautions?" asked Billy.

"That will be part of the battening down," explained Tom. "Come on, my hearties, let's get to work!"

"Cliff," Bill inquired as he dropped a stack of cups and tin plates into a kettle of hot water, "I've heard you mention the term <u>moments magnificent</u> on a number of occasions . . . which I understand you use to describe certain important events in your life. I find this very intriguing. Do your <u>moments magnificent</u> relate mostly to the outdoors or do they cover a broader field of experience?"

"I'd say they cover a pretty wide range," I replied as I began scrubbing and rinsing the dishes one by one, "though I suppose this whole thing started when I was a kid getting my first wide-eyed introductions to the wonders of nature in my mother's garden . . . where she acquainted me with a good many fascinating living things . . . insects, birds, plants, the whole bit.

For instance, I remember vividly how we would spend many happy moments observing busy ants tending and 'milking' their flocks of aphids. The first time I watched this . . . seeing the ants actually domesticating these tiny sap-sucking plant lice and using their sugary fluid secretions as food, in somewhat the same manner as we humans use dairy cattle . . . I was utterly captivated. Somewhere along the line I began to refer to all such grand experiences as my moments magnificent. Most of them, of course, did relate in some way to some memorable discovery or involvement in the world of nature, but eventually the term became a symbol for any truly significant milestone or experience in my life."

"Well, you know," said Bill, "I've never pinpointed or labeled these things as you have, but I too have experiences, just as I suppose everybody has, many such moments magnificent. I think it's a very appropriate term. I hope you won't mind if I borrow it and apply it to my own 'milestones,'" he said with an imploring smile.

"I won't mind at all, Bill," I replied. "I'm flattered that you would think the term a useful one."

"You know," Bill continued, "it would be interesting to have a definition for it. Have you ever described just what makes a moment magnificent?"

"Well, I find it's usually a happening accompanied by a sort of profound spiritual excitement that is very real and meaningful to me . . . a kind of inner glow that I actually feel in a very intense way."

"What were some of your greatest?"

"My marriage . . . and the births of my four children."

"Ditto for me," responded Bill. "But those would be super-important occasions regardless. Such moments magnificent would be the same for most everybody."

"Yes, you're right," I agreed. "I suppose another qualification for the kind of thing we're talking about would be that it was not the same for everybody but rather uniquely different and quite personal . . . some grand event or experience that stands out unforgettably, which by some special essence or insight becomes one's own moment magnificent."

"What would be a really good example? Tell me of one of your own unique personal experiences."

"Well, let's see. One that comes readily to mind has to do with a childhood mystery that haunted me for many years. As a young boy, I was privileged to spend most of my summers out in the country, at the farm of an uncle. It was a bustling, beautiful place, teeming with life and happy activity in great variety. To accommodate the huge work load . . . which included the tending of a veritable menagerie of sheep, cattle, pigs, horses, chickens, turkeys, ducks, pigeons, honey bees, dogs, and cats . . . Uncle Frank and Aunt Hattie had prudently brought forth a fine, big, resourceful family. On this particular summer, three sons and six daughters were living at home. I have never seen a better example of rural sufficiency. Work was a way of life. Everyone, including the youngest of my cousins and myself, pitched in according to age and capability. Because work meant survival, it was taken for granted, performed happily and willingly, and had priority over all else. The farm, superbly harnessed to nature and managed according to nature's simplest requirements, was a complete community within itself. And, young as I was, I could help with such tasks as watering and feeding the livestock, fetching oats for the huge work horses, taking a hand at turning the cream separator and butter churn, gathering eggs, shocking grain in the fields, and picking vegetables and berries in the spacious garden . . . and apples and plums in the orchard . . . for meals and canning. What a simple, interesting, wholesome, joyful life it was . . . living and laboring so intimately with nature and

sharing so fully in her bounty.

"Not that it was all work. There was ample time for rest, time for play, and, for us younger sprouts, time for rambling and exploring and adventuring out at the pond or in the nearby woods. one of our favorite diversions, usually after chores and the big country-style supper which capped off the day, was to take an evening walk barefooted along the section road that ran between a big stretch of woods and the north boundary of the farm. After a hot day, the fine soft dust of the road would be warm and soothing to the feet and I can still feel it sort of oozing up between my toes as I walked. On one particular evening, feeling a bit lonesome for my home and family in the city, I slipped away from my cousins and went quietly down the dusty road alone. The evening was warm, still, and humid. As I came opposite the densest part of the woods I heard an owl hooting from a distance and stopped to listen. The silence, broken only by the occasional 'hooo-hooo' of the owl, gave me an uneasy feeling and I decided to rejoin my relatives with the greatest possible haste.

"Just then, from very nearby, I was startled by another, much louder call that, as I later remembered it, sounded like an indignant inquiry . . . 'Who are <u>you?</u> Who are <u>you?</u> Who are <u>you?'</u> Repeated at short intervals, sometimes from nearby, sometimes from farther away, it had a strange, haunting, insistent quality, seeming at one moment to be scolding and interrogating me, at another to be lamenting the loss of the dying day. The underlying note was melancholic and, for me in that spooky moment, eerie. Oddly, though I was alone at the edge of a brooding forest with darkness rapidly closing in, I was as fascinated as I was frightened. My boyish imagination quickly had me surrounded by a host of unfriendly spirits shrieking menacingly, 'Go away! Go away! Go away!'

"I panicked then, and go away I did, as speedily as my legs and fright could propel me . . . back to the shelter of the farmhouse. My cousins subsequently told me they knew of this wild evening bird and had heard its call at certain times, but they hadn't the slightest notion as to its name, habits, or appearance. They had never seen it, and its song was just another of many strange sounds in the night. Like so many country folk who lived close to nature all their lives, they took the sound for granted. It was such a familiar part of their environment that wanting to know more about it just never occurred to them. Since it had no pragmatic bearing on their lives, its identity was of little importance.

"However, to me, anything that could give me such a scare was important. So, whenever I could persuade any of the other children to go with me, we'd hike over to the woods and listen. Thus I managed to hear my twilight ghost several more times that summer, always well after the sun had set, when too little light remained to permit a sight of it. I also visited the woods in the daytime, never knowing what to look for or where, and the results were what you might expect. I finally gave it up and, in typical boyish fashion, soon found other mysteries to occupy me. Not again through many years of outdoor excursioning did I encounter that weird beguiling sound.

"But the story didn't end there. It climaxed many years later in the darkening dusk of a quiet summer evening in an isolated little camp clearing at the wildlife refuge and tree plantation my brother Al and I owned and operated in the sand dunes region of central Sherburne County. I had come to this wild woodsy place late in the day with the County Agent, Enock Bjuge, and the State Tree Nurseries Director, Ray Clement . . . two close friends with whom I had fought side by side in many a bitter conservation battle during the critical resource years of the '40s and '50s. In those early years of emerging resource awareness, <u>conservation</u> was an unpopular word among many sportsmen's clubs and certain civic groups who associated it with restrictions on hunting, fishing, and other flagrant resource exploitation . . . and among many farmers who

resented being told they were unwittingly destroying their soil through wasteful agricultural practices. Ecology was then an esoteric term seldom heard outside biologists' laboratories, and pollution was dismissed as the war cry of fanatics and alarmists.

"I should say that the three of us had worked together as part of a small group of dedicated conservation crusaders who led the fight for legislative enactment in 1947 of the historic state tree nursery program which eventually was to transform our lands and restore Minnesota to prominence as a strong forestry state. Certain large commercial nurseries had bitterly opposed this legislation out of an unfounded fear that it would put the state into competition with them. The bill, which we three . . . together with the great George W. Fredrich who before his death was known as Minnesota's 'Dean of Conservationists' . . . had originally helped draft, proposed that the state establish and operate large nurseries to supply low-cost conifer seedlings in great quantities to fill the vast demand existing throughout much of the state. The important original need had been that of farmers wanting protective windbreaks and shelterbelts to prevent disastrous wind and water erosion of their vital croplands. Through a series of hard-headed confrontations before legislative committees, and an extensive statewide publicity campaign which I had had the privilege of spearheading as spokesman and publicist for the group, the tree nursery program was finally pushed through despite all opposition.

"Since that time, we who fought that difficult battle have seen our dream realized. Across much of the state stand thousands of woodlots, windbreaks, and shelterbelts as dramatic evidence of widespread soil and water conservation improvements. Many miles of winding Minnesota highways are attractively bordered by verdant roadside plantings . . . the trees already standing tall enough to have screened out many of the old ugly billboards. Vast northern scrublands whose original pine forests had been stripped clean by the early lumber barons have since been replanted and an entire new evergreen forest is well on its way. in addition, there has been an unexpected economic bonus. Today a whopping annual $60,000,000 Christmas tree industry flourishes in the state, all made possible by that original tree nursery legislation.

"And so, here we were, the three of us, long after the great primal conservation wars, gathered together like a pride of aging generals to celebrate the victory and to reminisce over the old battle campaigns. Having already enjoyed some fine charcoal-broiled steaks which Ray had prepared, we now settled down around a cozy campfire for some leisurely conversation. I remember Ray was particularly elated that evening because his state nurseries had for the first time achieved an annual yield volume of 55,000,000 tree seedlings. Enock likewise was pleased to announce one of his most successful years as County Agent. He had finally broken down much of the stubborn resistance to change and had persuaded many of the poor farmers struggling for mere subsistence on the silty barrens of the Zimmerman-Orrock region to switch from unprofitable crop farming to the raising of Christmas trees. That light acid soil, while unsuited to the growing of corn and other grains, had been found to be extremely hospitable to conifers . . . and those farmers who had turned to tree raising were enjoying the best incomes they'd ever realized off their sandy acres.

"What a fantastic conservation breakthrough the tree nursery program had proved to be! In reviewing its results we realized we had played a singular part in literally changing the face of our state. The millions upon millions of tree seedlings which had flowed out from the nurseries to beautify and enrich the lives of so many of its people were becoming a permanent heritage . . . a wealth of protection for our soil and water reserves and our wildlife, of added economic growth through forest-based industries, and of immeasurable scenic charm and recreational opportunities for populations yet unborn!

"This realization . . . this proud and gratifying knowledge that I had given part of myself to a cause infinitely more important than any personal concern . . . was for me one of my most memorable Moments Magnificent. To be able to share with these faithful friends the joy of such an achievement, and to relish it leisurely under the spell of glowing campfire and woodland setting and evening calm, just had to be one of those rarest of human satisfactions."

Now, as I paused, Bill stood thoughtfully by as I stacked tin plates. Finally he spoke. "Gee, Cliff," he said, "I wasn't aware that you had a hand in helping establish the state nurseries. That was a terrific forward step. How come you haven't spoken of it before?"

"Well . . . maybe because it's the sort of thing that gives you such deep inner contentment you just don't talk about it. Anyway, I haven't quite finished my story."

"That's right. you started way back there on the farm as a boy. I suspect there's a connection."

"There is," I continued. "That fine evening of shared memories with Ray and Enock had a marvelous climax. We were sitting around the fire in the early darkness, chatting and joking happily about what unsung heroes we were, when all of a sudden there burst upon the quiet air a soul-stirring cry that filled the night with glory.

"'Who are you? Who are you? Who are you?' it called with haughty insistence. The sound startled me. It was my petulant mystery bird of long ago . . . calling across the years and instantly transporting me back to those fascinating evening walks along the powdery country road. I was again standing barefooted before the darkening woods, and I could feel the soft warm dust oozing soothingly between my toes. The smell of fresh cut hay was heavy on the humid air, and far off in a pasture a cow bellowed. So real did this flashback seem, and so carried away was I that Ray's voice seemed strangely hollow as I heard him exclaim:

"'By God, that's the first whippoorwill I've heard in a long time. He's right out there at the edge of the clearing!'

"And then the bird called again, this time jolting me back to reality. So that was it. A whippoorwill. As simple as that. I'd waited more than twenty-five years for a repeat performance and the identity of the performer. The whippoorwill had made me a child again, and it was with a childish excitement that I told my friends of that first encounter. Though I had forgotten the boyhood incident entirely, this evening's sonorous visitor had brought it all back, vividly, and with it another Moment Magnificent.

"And that's the way it is. A little moment, a little event, suddenly assumes a significant meaning in your life. I think of the whippoorwill now as having parenthesized a most enriching chapter in my life . . . from a happy boyhood spent close to nature, to the successful culmination of a long, hard period of dedicated serviced to conservation.

"I can tell you that I brought my family and friends to the tree plantation many times that summer to hear at twilight the haunting call of my mystery songster. And it was a keen disappointment to me when he failed to appear the following year. That was the end of it. I have never again heard the song of the whippoorwill, though I find myself wistfully listening for it whenever I chance to be near a likely woodsy habitat at twilight."

"Is the whippoorwill that rare a bird?" asked Bill.

"In most areas, yes," I replied. "He's a ground dweller, and requires the wild, undisturbed forest floor to nest on. There are few such undisturbed woods remaining . . . at least in my part of the country."

By this time the dishes were done, the kettles rinsed, and everything properly stacked away. Bill took out his pipe, filled it and lit up.

"Well," he said after a few puffs, "I must say I've enjoyed this. Who knows? Perhaps before this expedition is over we may add a few more moments magnificent to the collection."

"I'm sure we will, Bill," I replied as I brought out my own pipe and joined it with his in the warm glow of our wilderness friendship.

Puffing contentedly, we walked over to where Gene and Tom, with the help of Al and George, and under the fascinated scrutiny of the boys, had been setting up Tom's "bear precautions." The two large Duluth packs containing our food supplies had been bound securely together in a compact bundle, wrapped in a protective plastic tarp and suspended over the clearing from a long rope stretched between high branches of two tall pines at opposite sides of the camp. The sight of our entire stock of provisions dangling in mid-air some fifteen feet above the ground bordered on the bizarre. And indeed it was enough to evoke a number of fittingly ludicrous reactions.

"Nothing short of a giraffe could reach it," chuckled Al, readying his camera in a habit pattern that was almost as automatic as the blink of an eye.

"Hey, my bubble gum is up there," piped Billy.

"It'll keep," said Will.

"What if the rope breaks?" queried Mike.

"We'll have a smorgasbord," replied Tom jovially.

"Don't anybody stand under it," cautioned Gene.

"Why not?" asked Mark.

"I just wouldn't trust that rope."

"If that thing dropped on your head it would drive you knee deep into the rock," bantered Al as, with view finder to his eye, he maneuvered for angle and for what illumination remained in the fading twilight.

"Boy, I want a copy of that photo," drawled George, watching Al snap the shot. "It'll not only prove to my civilized friends back home the complexity of the food storage problem up here, but it will be graphic evidence of how things can get up in the air on an extended canoe trip."

"Now comes the most important gimmick of all," announced Gene as he brought over one of the canoes and positioned it on its side directly beneath the hanging food supply. Another canoe was propped beside the first by Tom in such a way that the two craft would topple against each other with a loud bang at the slightest disturbance. On top of these Tom stacked an array of kettles and cook pans, so precariously balanced that, as Tom explained, "even a mosquito could send them crashing to the ground."

"That, my friends," announced Gene with professorial pomp as he made a final inspection of the device, "is what is known as a bear alarm. If by chance you should hear all this come tumbling down in the middle of the night, you will know we have visitors."

"Big shaggy visitors with big appetites," added Tom, enunciating ominously through a mischievous grin.

"Now, Will," directed Gene, "if you'll just bring up some paddles and lean a few beside the entrance of each tent, we'll be all ready to entertain any company that may arrive."

"What are the paddles for?" asked Mark with a worried look.

"Weapons," replied Gene.

"Gee, what good are weapons like that?" exclaimed Mike in a thin, squeaky voice that betrayed genuine anxiety.

"Let's hope we never have to find out," replied his father. "Anyway, that chow looks

pretty safe up there."

"The question is," Bill pondered between pipe puffs as he gazed upward at the food pack, "will that contraption really hold off the bears?"

"It won't if they figure out what's keeping it up there," replied Gene gravely.

"Whatcha mean by that?" gulped Mike.

"I mean bears are expert tree climbers. See how we've run that main cross-over rope between those high branches in the two trees and tied the ends lower down where we can reach 'em? The trick is to hang the food from that rope over this space midway between the trees, so the bears will be so occupied beneath the pack which is just out of their reach, that they won't go near the trees. If it ever occurs to them that the trees and the ropes are the solution, you can expect one hell of a calamity."

"What could the bears do even if they climb the tree?"

"That rope, to a bear, is like a flimsy piece of spaghetti. Get the picture, Mike?"

"Yeah, I sure do."

"Well, anyway, it's worked before," consoled Tom with an air of confidence intended to reassure us. "As for me, I'm going to hit the sack. Better all try to get some rest tonight. See you in the morning." With that he left us and disappeared into his tent.

Soon most of the others followed his lead. The boys, apprehensive and quieter than usual, were not long in finding their sleeping bags. Gene, Bill, and Al lingered briefly by the fire, then one by one they, too, called it a day. That left George and me.

"Cliff," said George after a thoughtful stare at the flames, "pooped as I am, I know I'll not be able to sleep if I retire this early . . . especially not having my usual cigarette for a nightcap. So . . . since you're a night-owl like myself, how's about some good old campfire confabulation before bag time?"

"You sure have me figured," I laughed. "Suits me fine. I was just hoping somebody would be as reluctant as I to pass up their beautiful evening. These nights up here are really something to stay awake for. There's a slight breeze now and it's cooled off for a change . . . just right for a cozy fireside chat."

"Well," George asked as he stirred the blaze with a stick, "what do you think of the trip so far? Are you as beat as I am?"

"I sure am, if you mean do my muscles ache all over," I laughed as I stretched out before the fire.

"Gad, I haven't even reached the aching stage yet. At the moment, I'm just sort of numb all over. But that's the price one pays, I suppose, for letting the sedentary city life flab up all those unused sinews!"

"Oh, that's to be expected. This is quite a drastic change from our usual pursuits, you know."

"Don’t you think Gene's been pushing us pretty hard?"

"A little. I'll admit I'd prefer a more leisurely pace, but I know he's anxious to get there . . . as I'm sure we all are."

"I wonder how many more days we'll have of this grueling grind. I sure hope Gene isn't just chasing a rainbow." This hint of George's sagging confidence surprised me until I remembered his cigarette situation and realized the difficulties he must have been struggling under at not being able to reach for his nicotinic relaxer in his moments of stress.

"I hope so too," I replied. "I'm really looking forward to Abu-Abu. It's been on my mind so mu h it seems terribly real to me, and I don't want to be disappointed. Yet somehow, I know

it exists . . . and I know we're going to find it. I just know it."

George seemed deep in thought. he stirred the fire again and fed it a gnarled piece of driftwood which we watched awhile in pensive silence as the flames began to consume it. Finally he spoke.

"Cliff," he said, "do you believe it's possible to be both a cynic and an optimist? I mean, can cynicism live in the same skull with optimism?"

"Are you asking that because I appear that way to you?" I asked.

"Yes, I'd have to admit I am. There are times when I get the feeling you have a strong cynical outlook, and yet for the most part you seems to be a terribly optimistic person. One has to be exceedingly trusting of people to be a true optimist, yet here again I know you aren't naive enough to think you can trust everyone you meet. This mixture in your outlook puzzles me."

"Well, George, it puzzles me too. I know I want to look at life positively, yet I find much to discourage any real fait5h or confidence in anything involving human goals and motives. I know I have a very impatient, cynical attitude about certain things. I find especially repugnant a lot of the petty hypocrisy that permeates all levels of our national life . . . especially when it involves people I've known and trusted . . . and I certainly deplore the negative thinking I see in so many of the people around me and some of the damnable things they do, especially to each other. however, I also see all of this as the normal fallout from a kind of growing-pains ordeal which our slowly evolving species seems to be going through . . . but out of which man with his smoldering intellect somehow at some time is going to flare up into greatness. in that respect I feel extremely optimistic. It just seems to me from everything I have ever learned or observed about nature and life in general, despite many irritating and discouraging indications to the contrary, that there is this evolutionary tendency toward an on-going improvement of the species. If that be true, the, of course, we have every reason to be optimistic. And I do think it's true. I believe we just simply will, by a natural process of gradual growth and improvement, overcome the flaws and weaknesses still inherent in human nature and actually transcend to a higher level of perfection. I believe this is not only possible but that it will ultimately happen."

"I can buy some of that, Cliff, and I feel much the same about the basic possibilities. But what dampens my own optimism is the fact that I'm not at all certain that man isn't going to utterly destroy himself, or at least, blast his higher civilizations all to hell, before the improvement process can materialize."

"Yes, I know what you mean. There is, of course, this growing concern among thinking people today about where humanity is going and whether it can check the stampede before it reaches the edge of the abyss. However, I am strongly inclined to suspect the existence of a grand creative power or cosmic intelligence running the universe according to some sort of creative design."

"And this is your concept of God?"

"In a way, yes"

"Your reference to a <u>cosmic intelligence</u> doesn't exactly reflect the <u>Biblical</u> idea of God."

"You're quite right. It doesn't. I'm afraid I find the old Biblical concept much too limiting . . . hardly adequate to account for all the marvelous phenomena and the vast, mysterious interplay of mass, energy, space, time, and organic life that seems to go on harmoniously throughout the universe. There has just got to be more to it . . . much more . . . that the human brain at this stage of its development simply cannot fathom."

"So, for want of a better term, you prefer these other more general expressions instead of the word <u>God?"</u>

"No, I don't prefer them. God is still central to me. God is these other things. But because of the blurry, indistinct personal notion most people have of God, there is always the danger of falling back into the old restricted spiritual vaguities which obscure the broader vision."

"The broader vision?"

"Yes. The vision of an Omnipotence that permeates the natural world as well as the supernatural. So much emphasis has been given to a God of the spirit that we tend to overlook the presence of the almighty in the physical. yet when we recognize that the basic unit . . . as we know it . . . of all the power and energy and matter in the universe is a very minute physical particle called an atom, it is no longer possible for me to accept the narrow concept of a purely spiritual or supernatural God. All of the known forces and materials which constitute a living organism are physical, working within fixed universal physical laws. Any God . . . or Creative Power . . . or super-intellect . . . or call it what you will . . . that has built such a fantastic physical universe would have to be somehow intrinsically involved, physically, in that creation."

"Cliff, I begin to understand your deep love of nature . . . your concern and reverence for living things," George smiled. "You really do see God in a termite or a tarantula or a pebble, don't you?"

"As surely as I se God in the essence of a kindness or the smile of a child, or the love of a mother."

"In other words, you see this super being present in some way in absolutely everything, tangible and intangible, and you think it impossible to walk, to live, to think, or to be, outside or apart from its divine influence?"

"You might put it that way. But here's where we get into semantic difficulties again. That word divine has some strong archaic connotations I try to avoid. It puts us back among seraphic angels hovering on heavenly wings above a bearded, patriarchal God seated on his celestial throne . . . a sublime but rather meaningless figure that comes to us from Isaiah's vision. It is a figure of a type that repeats itself many times in the early annals of mankind. Notice how similar were the deific visions of the ancients, the Greeks and Romans especially. All of their gods and goddesses were given various familiar human characterizations. In their limited knowledge of the universe, they had little but superstition and fear of nature's mysterious forces by which to interpret the unknown. it was only natural that they would people their Olympian and Elysian worlds with humanized figures. But this humanization of the God concept is precisely what led mankind up a blind alley and prevented the opening of the human mind to broader possibilities. The Hebrews and finally the Christians did settle for one single all-magnificent, all-encompassing God . . . but they fell into the same habit of visualizing God in human form, concerned mainly with human values and human conduct, dealing out immortality to deserving mortals, demanding the same deference and worship and blind obedience which serve the mortal conceits of kings. Can you see such a God having any meaning . . . or use . . . in the space age?"

"Hardly. It's as absurd as trying to compare that mysterious universal intelligence . . . which has created all and knows all things . . . with man's puny rudimentary human intelligence . . . which knows little and has created nothing." George paused and thought for awhile. "But then, Cliff," he resumed, "if we're looking for a more befitting God concept, what are we actually after? Is it anything we can identify with?"

"Maybe not, George. maybe we're not ready. This supreme being . . . God, if you will . . . may yet be beyond our understanding. But the God that makes sense to me would have to

exist in a dimension and as a quintessence not presently within the capacity of the human mind to comprehend. I'm satisfied that the evidence is there, that there is a creative intelligence at work, and that creation is unfolding in an orderly manner according to some grand universal design."

"And therein lies your optimism?"

"Of course. Surely the architect of the universe and all that is in it must be capable of achieving the ultimate cosmic perfection . . . despite anything mankind may blunderingly do to impede the upward movement. Anything as marvelously complex as life . . . and especially the human brain . . . would not seem to have been established in the first place without a purpose. So, regardless of what humanity may do in its folly to try to destroy itself, I simply believe the creator will not 'let it happen.'"

"Despite the present nuclear concern?"

"Right. Somehow man will be stopped short of any kind of total self-annihilation he may attempt. That doesn't mean that humanity as we see it today could not greatly retrogress for a time, even to the point of decimating its populations through some huge self-inflicted calamity. But there would be survivors, I'm sure, and undoubtedly a host of mutations, some of which might even generate a higher form of humanity, and there would be the process of starting all over again until there would finally emerge at some time in the distant future the full, glorious creature intended in the creative design."

"You really believe there is such a design?" George used his sticks to rearrange the glowing embers of the fire.

"Yes, George, I do."

"What do you base it on?"

"Well, at least in part on an observation by Lecompte du Nouy in his book Human Destiny, in which he points out the statistical impossibility of an accidental origin of life. he demonstrates that mathematically such a marvelous and complex event, with all its variations, just could not happen in the known universe by mere chance alone. he is saying, of course, that there had to be something behind it . . . some intelligence, some plan, some inexplicable force or power which within the scope of our limited senses we simply cannot comprehend but which exists somehow, underlying the whole process of the creation and evolution of life."

"Well, all right," mused George as he shifted slightly to avoid a flow of smoke from the fire, suddenly fanned his way by the breeze. "Suppose there is such a creative power and suppose there is a design. Wouldn't you think such a fantastic creator would have the ability to give man a more powerful and effective mind with which to comprehend the true nature of things?"

"That's just it. The act of 'giving' man such a mind is very much in process. What we forget is that time means nothing in the unfolding of the universe. Time is strictly a human concept. In the whole world of nature a billion years could be but one sweep of the creator's hand. It is quite possible that what would seem to our time-oriented consciousness an extended system of trial and error, of slow, gradual growth through evolution, is but a split instant in cosmic duration. Despite the observable growth that has occurred in the human brain in a few thousand years, we are in the very embryonic stage of the brain phase . . . certainly nowhere near ready to imagine how perfection is to be accomplished. We hardly have enough mental power to comprehend the simplest phenomena in the universe . . . if we do at all . . . so how can we possibly conceive what is really going on?"

"You believe then that this slow on-going evolutionary process is the method of

creation?"

"For want of a better interpretation, yes. The evidence of such a process is too impressive to be ignored. Here we are, sitting in front of one of man's oldest inventions . . . a campfire . . . the discovery of which launched the human animal on his grand upward march from primitive obscurity to dominion over all other living things. Yet for all his achievements, he is only beginning to unravel some of the great mysteries which have perplexed him through the centuries. Note that I said: he is only beginning. I cannot believe that this is the place in time and space for man to be bowing out. Before us lies the great adventure, the great destination, the great age of man triumphant . . . the fulfillment of the Creator's master plan. We are part of that plan. We are here for a purpose. We have a mission, a rendezvous with destiny. And, falter though we may along the way, that's a date we're going to keep."

"Sounds great, Cliff, if indeed such a grand design is at work and we are involved in it. The future would look far less promising without such dreaming. But I hope you realize it is just a dream. We can't be sure of all this. We can only hypothesize the possibility if not the probability. I agree you're onto something well worth pursuing, but until we have more meat on the skeleton we're only looking at bones."

"There goes your scientific punctiliousness, George," I laughed. "Nevertheless, I'll stick to my dream . . . as you call it . . . until something better comes along. It helps me see beyond myself and brightens the prospect of the future."

"Nothing wrong with that," George smiled wryly. "I only wish I had your kind of faith. In my case, I've just about written off the human race as being little more than an irritating rash on the skin of an otherwise beautiful planet."

"How so?"

"Oh, I guess I let people get me down. While you're looking at future human betterment, I'm bewailing the present reality . . . which isn't exactly encouraging. Doesn't the bad side of the human picture bother you, Cliff? The orneriness, the cupidity, the ignorance, the indifference, the corruption? The pestilence of greedy exploitation going on all abut us? How much more pleasant and satisfying life could be for everyone if everyone had just a little more kindness and decency . . . just a little more common sense about the real important attitudes and feelings and behavior we ought to show toward one another. What we have, actually, is a jungle of half-civilized creatures struggling and conniving and abusing and using each other in a mad scramble for all the dubious advantages the jungle has to offer. It's all a bloody botch. And it's pretty hard to look at all that sordidness and not be anything but cynical and pessimistic."

"I'm only too painfully aware of what's going on in the human swarm, George," I began. But George, with a sudden flare of anger in his voice was off and running.

"Hell, you know damn well that in many ways this is a crummy, cruel old world. I hate to be a complainer and a fault finder, but a man sometimes comes to the limits of endurance and then all sorts of bitterness spills over. I just can't stomach a lot of what I see in our world today . . . probably because it makes me feel so uneasy and grubby, like a guy who's visited a leper colony and wonders if he's caught the disease. There's so much negativism in our society, and it makes people utterly, disgustingly inhuman. It sucks away all the good positive human ingredients that make life worth living."

"I know, George, but you can't let it get you down. You've just got to believe that there are some people . . . maybe not many, but some . . . who are above mediocrity, who have a real concern for others, and who are more interested in raising the standard of life than the standard of living. You've got to realize that despite our failures, despite all human folly, we've come

pretty far."

"Not nearly far enough, and not in the right direction! We're only fooling ourselves if we think otherwise. We can't just close our eyes and imagine that we have no problems. My God, our world is in a super crisis!"

"Aw hell, George. So what else is new? Crisis is just another name for challenge . . . and we've never been without it."

"Okay, so how do we meet it? We're like a gifted actor who consistently gives a lousy performance. I mean, we're not living up to our full potential as a so-called advanced civilization. How we're squandering our resources and poisoning our environment in one blind, massive onrush of greedy exploitation is pretty obvious. But what vexes me even more is the insidious moral deterioration that's been spreading through our national life like a creeping black plague."

"George, I get the feeling that something has happened recently to get you riled up like this. Am I right?"

"Well, something's been said. Didn't bother me at first when used by several of my business acquaintances . . . I could expect such a statement from them . . . but when my own doctor used the term most unbecomingly and then I heard my boss use it, it began to dawn on me that it's more than a stupid meaningless saying . . . it's a widely accepted way of thinking. What a shock for any decent man to learn that the attitude of so much of the business and professional world, as reflected in such an expression, practically eliminates him from any fair chance to succeed."

"Are you planning to tell me what the expression is, George?" I asked jokingly, well aware of his round-about way of priming his listener for the clincher.

"Oh, yes, of course. The saying is this: The nice guys come in last. I think baseball's Les Duroscher first used it. I'm sure you've heard it before."

"Yes, I have. But do you accept that, George? Do you believe what they say, that the nice guys . . . the good guys . . . come in last?"

"It's not whether it's true or not, Cliff. It's what that kind of thinking signifies. I've heard it too often and seen it in practice. Now just consider the really terrible meaning behind that expression. It reveals a horrible moral sickness that is rampant in our society today. It's evil, and it's deadly. It could strangle us."

"By golly, I've never seen you so riled up, George. How do you arrive at such a gloomy conclusion?"

"God, man, take a good look at it. The nice guys come in last! That is as much as to say that if you aren't some kind of a dirty, crooked son-of-a-bitch who has no compunction about screwing his brother and his neighbor, you have no chance of becoming successful in any field of endeavor. You have to be prepared to literally 'kill off' any person or group or business that stands in your way. Either that or kiss a lot of behinds on the way up the ladder. If a virtue is a hindrance to success, throw it out. How can a civilization hope to survive on a principle like that? Whatever happened to such nice things as human dignity, simple honesty, moral integrity, mutual trust, consideration for others . . . or goodness, for God's sake, just plain, ordinary, everyday human goodness?"

"There's still a lot of goodness around, George. Aren't you stretching the bad out of proportion to the good?"

"Hell, no! If we are to assume, from the implication, that the bad guys are therefore the ones who come in first . . . and there are many in high places who apparently operate on that

premise . . . and if we are to assume further that this kind of thinking underlies the successes of so many men and so many businesses and professions, we can only conclude that the foundations of our society are ready for a major collapse. It seems that all we can be absolutely certain of finding in the basic fabric of our American system is a preoccupation with taking care of Number One, no matter how fair or foul the means. What scares me is that big retribution payoff that is bound to come sooner or later. Evil begets evil and its grandchild is disaster. That, according to overwhelming historical testimony is one of the obvious lessons of human experience we can rely on. History, which sure as hell does repeat itself, tells us that the collapse of every great civilization has been the result of humanity's failure to prevent the insidious moral deterioration which weakens the minds and corrupts the behavior of men."

"Suppose you're right, George. Suppose the good guys come in last and therefore the bad guys run the show. Do you believe we could be where we are if most of the thinking in our society were based upon such a negative idea?"

"It's possible that's precisely why we are where we are. The question is: just where are we? Are you honestly satisfied with where we are . . . with the superficial values we've been brainwashed into believing are essential to the ideal way of life? Is our achievement so great, burdened down as we are with crime, drugs, ghettos and poverty in the midst of plenty, corruption in government, privilege, prejudice and discrimination, high taxes and wasteful government spending, job boredom, tension, unrest, public apathy, inflation? . . . I could go on and on. You just show me where all that <u>good</u> is that you'd like to think is blooming all around us!"

I laughed then, perhaps a bit uneasily, for, as fired up as George was at the moment, I knew him to be a person of integrity and dedication, And I respected his keen mind. I wanted to think that he was just blowing off steam with the typical bluntness and overstatement of such spontaneous eruptions and that he believed only a fraction of what he was saying. Yet I knew I would be hard pressed to counter his "bads" with an equal amount of "goods." Not that there weren't a lot of good things about our way of life, but there was the question of degree . . . of whether even the good things were as good as they could or ought to be. And so, rather feebly, I nodded assent and then replied:

"All I can say, George, is that I do have a job, a home, and a family that's eating regularly and getting and education . . . and we all enjoy more personal freedom and more comforts and conveniences than similar families in any other country in the world. That doesn't eliminate the bad things, of course, nor should we let it blind us to what's happening to our country or what we ought to be doing about it. We will lose all the blessings we have if ever we make the mistake of taking them for granted. I know that. I know that the bad things could quickly reduce or even destroy the good things . . . if we are foolish enough, and unconcerned enough, to let it happen."

"Well, we <u>are</u> foolish and unconcerned and dead on our butts . . . and it <u>is</u> happening," George responded gravely. "You know, I have a theory about the good and bad in people. Lord knows we all have some of both. But I find the common people generally a lot more honest and friendly and uncomplicated than those in the higher levels of our society. They have less to hide, less to protect, less to worry about, and less need to make the big impression. Most people want and try to be good, I'm sure. But the more involved they get in the big game of <u>Take or Be Taken,</u> the more they forget their manners and their good intentions. The pressures of the struggle we call "getting ahead" or "keeping up with the Joneses" bring out the aggressive and acquisitive instincts and sets up a whole chain reaction of slow moral erosion. Right and wrong become matters of rationalization and compromise, and wrong-doing is all right as long as one

can get by with it. So . . . I have this theory."

"Sounds interesting. Let's hear it."

"It's this: The humanitarian quality of the individual diminishes in proportion to the degree of power, wealth, and influence he accumulates."

"George, you've got to be kidding!" I exclaimed, not merely surprised but perhaps puzzled by such a loaded statement out of this friend whose mind I so admired. "Are you saying that success is a corruption . . . that leadership and achievement are somehow linked up with evil?"

"Now wait. Don't grab onto that too fast, Cliff." George had a disarming way of reacting to his own bombs with such a sincere, boyish expression of shy innocence that it could make you wonder if you weren't terribly stupid and unkind to question anything he said. "Please note," he continued, "that I did not use the words 'success, leadership, and achievement.' You did. The words I used were 'power, wealth, and influence.' I'm sure you'll agree there's a world of difference between these two groups of words. ordinarily they don't equate or coincide, although in certain ideal circumstances they could. My group, unlike yours, carry dark connotations and can have very adverse effects on a society. Also, I didn't imply corruption or evil, although these too are there. My point has to do with the humanitarian aspect of wealth and power."

"Okay, I read you. But how do you account for this loss of 'humanitarian quality,' as you call it, among the high and the mighty?"

"It's the inevitable by-product of any real rough struggle for supremacy. Considering the amount of hanky-panky and outright barbarism that attend so much of the struggle for high position and material gain, I would say that rare indeed are those at the top who have any true humanism left in them. I'm sure there are some rare exceptions. But because that kind of so-called success in our society demands toughness, the aspiring climber is forced to discard one-by-one all the sweet qualities he may have started out with that made him a blue-chip member of the human race. Humility, that grossly misunderstood virtue, is one of the first to go, and compassion goes with it. There can be no genuine compassion, or empathy, or understanding in the absence of humility. So . . . with these qualities out of the way . . . avarice, ambition, the lust for power take command. Because the climber must compete with other climbers, and he knows they will strike him down if he doesn't strike first, he grows a thick armor-plate of hard, callous insensitivity and develops whatever aggressive weaponry he needs to muscle his way to the top. Once at the top, the strong ones use their advantages to subdue and manipulate and dominate and suppress the weak, and to perpetuate their power by controlling the political and economic life within their sphere of influence. Obviously, where the public interest is in conflict with their private interest, you know which interest those in power are most likely to favor. So . . . let's not look for the enemies of our society only in the underworld. We have them in the overworld as well, where, hiding in high places behind masks of respectability and trust . . . in government, in business, in the professions . . . they are the more danger4ous because their damaging erosive influence mostly goes unnoticed, like the slow debilitating effect of termites in the woodwork."

"That's all very interesting, George. I can certainly see where your theory would apply in the world of politics especially, but . . ."

"Very much so. I'll tell you one way it applies. We are deprived of much good leadership because of the dehumanizing effect. Our politics is such that many of our wisest and most competent people simply refuse to have anything to do with seeking public office. Political rivalry has become such a corrupt kind of game that even those good, honest men who do become involved must constantly resist pressure to compromise their personal integrity in order

to survive in the political arena. When you consider all the favoritism, the pork barreling, the name smearing, the dishonesty, the buying and selling and trading of favor, the bribing and the coercing and the threatening that goes on in the name of political expediency, you can see why a lot of good, decent men and women are reluctant to expose themselves to the moral wear and tear of political contention. Many a person with honest principles would have to say, 'I don't know how to play dirty, nor can I make false promises just to get votes, therefore I could not hope to win.' Such people are potentially the good guys who come in last. They intuitively fear what the struggle for office would demand of them, and they want no part of it. So who loses? We all do."

"But George. You can't say, therefore, that all who run for office, and especially those who win, have lost this humanitarian quality you speak of."

"Of course not, Cliff. But many do lose it . . . too many. You don't have to look very far to find plenty of leaders in politics, business, even in education and other professions, who subscribe to the good-guys-last philosophy. But that's not the worst of it. You see, such an attitude has at its roots something far more sinister, for it reflects a deadly, corrosive human greed that invariably puts personal wealth and power before the security and welfare of the nation. So I would say this: if you want to find the betrayers . . . the ones who would not hesitate to drag our society down if it served their own selfish purposes . . . look for those who exploit their fellow men, who build power and fortunes on the unrewarded efforts of others, who connive and manipulate to create despotic economic monopolies under the sacred banner of free enterprise, who appropriate unto themselves the precious natural and human resources, who are masters at circumventing law and justice, and who influence more things with payola than the people do with votes. Now, you can't tell me this kind of rampaging immorality isn't leading us downward and that its perpetrators are not guilty of some kind of high treason whether they realize it or not!"

"That's pretty strong language, George," I cut in. "You seem terribly intense about this thing, as if it has affected you personally."

"It has. In my job. But let's not get into <u>that.</u> I really feel very serious about this . . . and I only wish more people felt the same way. Any person or group that operates on the notion that the nice guys finish last is working against all those beautiful aims and principles that made this country of ours a haven of hope for all humanity. Such negative people in our society are the assassins of our national dream . . . and if that doesn't make them traitors, by God, I don't know what the hell else you can call it!"

Though much impressed with what George was driving at, I was nevertheless aware that he was touching upon something far more complicated than he made it appear, something that tied in somehow with all those deep, mysterious, seemingly irresistible inner forces which determine so much of the nature and behavior of people. Wondering about this, I said:

"George, what you're saying may have a certain validity. But I'm somewhat confused by your choice of terms. Treason is a willful, premeditated act with a purpose. You can't ascribe it to something that just happens because human nature is the way it is."

"Greed is still treason. It betrays us all."

"Greed betrays no one so much as its possessor, George. But it is not treason. We can condemn greed until our lungs burst, but that won't make it go away any more than denouncing an ulcer will oust it from the stomach. And truly, if you think about it, if greed were treason, then in varying g degrees we would all be traitors. However, I don't mean that as a justification but rather as an indication of what we are up against. If we could only determine for sure how

greed somehow springs from the baser instincts and is therefore inherent in the nature of all human beings, then we might at least understand how and why it dominates so much of our lives and why the cure is so difficult. If we could just glaringly expose it somehow, see it for what it really is, make it shamefully obvious wherever it occurs and treat it in all its destructive ugliness as the deadly spiritual disease that it is, maybe then we might better control it. We might then be compelled to change some of our basic thinking and sharpen our moral awareness to a point where human beings could without fear or suspicion fully trust and respect one another. Only then could tat evasive blessedness we call love emerge as a dominant force in the affairs of men."

For a few moments George sat quietly flicking wood chips upon the embers and watching them pop into sputtering little flames. Finally he looked at me and said:

"If, as you seem to imply, greed is rooted in the instincts, then we have a contradiction. For greed is rooted in the instincts, then we have a contradiction. For greed is not in the animals . . . it is strictly a human thing."

"Yes, George, human because it rises from a mind that thinks. But it is instinctive acquisitiveness and aggression nevertheless, and only the more dangerous and far-reaching because it can commandeer the power of the human mind to extend and strengthen its influence. Perhaps greed is simply the result of man yielding his thinking power to instinct . . . or, perhaps more likely, the result of man's thinking power not having yet sufficiently evolved to be able to subdue the instincts."

"But I still can't see how we can assume that men who prey upon each other are merely responding to instinctual forces which are beyond their comprehension and control. Are men animals first and humans second?"

"Good question."

"Isn't our humanity, our intellect, enough to offset the instinctual pull?"

"It should, George, but is it really?"

"No, I suppose not. But it's a strange and disturbing paradox. All forms of life must by nature feed off other forms of life to survive . . . and man is no exception. But there is a startling difference: thinking man who should know better also feeds off his fellowmen. Not that men devour each other for food . . . but they damn well use and abuse each other for everything else. no other living creature has man's capacity for doing-in others of his own kind in order to get what he wants. Look what the noble Spaniards did to the Aztecs and the Incas . . . and what other 'civilized' white men did to the North American Indians and to the black people. And of course these are merely the large-scale, classic examples. But individual men are no better. The more civilized and complex the human society has become, the more sophisticated and accepted have become the ways that men satisfy their greed at the expense of others. They prey upon and sometimes even destroy each other freely and openly, often under the very protection of their own laws . . . and they can sanctimoniously pass it off under such high-sounding terms as freedom of enterprise!"

"Well, then," I interrupted, "what greater proof do we need of the powerful hold our instincts still have over the fledgling intellect? We are fully aware of the evils of greed and aggression, yet we let these dark forces dominate much of our thinking and behavior."

"Ah, but Cliff, how are we to deal with it? Do we shrug our shoulders and accept our miserable lot, or do we try to find a way upward?"

"Oh, I think we are making some forward progress, however slowly and painfully."

"I wonder. The things we've relied on in the past . . . religion as expressed essentially

through Judeo-Christian influence in our society, along with the archaic educational systems that have grown up and calcified within this influence . . . have failed utterly to flush out these evils from the hears of men. If present forms of religion and education cannot do the job, if they can't change and upgrade themselves and climb aboard the Twentieth Century, maybe it's high time they be scratched off and replaced by something that might work."

"Don't you think, George, that one of our greatest problems is our confusion, our lack of fundamental understanding, our failure to learn what the truth really is?"

"There you've hit it! It is absolutely tragic and criminal that so much ungodly charlatanism is foisted upon the mentality of the world in the guise of truth, while the real truth is constantly avoided, ignored, overlooked, or kept hidden. Look how religion has stifled and distorted scientific discovery in the past. Every great new advance in human knowledge has had to be sneaked into the minds of men through the back door . . . often while religious bigotry and sometimes political oppression kept a heavy guard at the front door. Truth has had one hell of a time gaining a foothold in the human brain."

"Well, George, I must admit that while I don't see the picture quite in the same way you do, I do share your concerns. As I've said before, I believe humanity will eventually stumble out of its many dilemmas. Certainly some great changes are needed, and I do believe a vast reassessment of our whole body of thought and learning is long overdue. I'm sure it is just such a need that underlies the widespread uneasiness and unrest among so many of our younger generation today. They seem to sense the short-changing they're getting and are suspicious of some of our outmoded customs and traditions. They are especially fed up with the phoniness of a soul-less dog-eat-dog system based upon nice guys coming in last and your loss is my gain. Yes, and they're sick of finding so little of real quality and beauty in the stifling, hopped-up paper world of materialism. They don't want a life pattern dominated by its meaningless values. They're hungry for fulfillment that is satisfying to the whole person . . . that transcends the physical and enriches the mind and spirit as well,"

"One thing for sure, Cliff. If humanity is going to stumble out of its dilemma, as you say, it won't be our foolish generation that will lead the way. Any really great improvement will have to come at the hands of these enlightened youth who are beginning to see that the world we gave them is far short of the world they want. When they learn, as our generation did not, that it is more important to live fully than merely to live well, they may fashion a better way. I hope they do."

"Yes," I replied, "and it remains for those who have seen the bigger dimension to pass this vision on to the young. We must show them, if we can, that their discomfort is real, that their disaffection with the bourgeois values of the consumer society we have bequeathed to them is justified by the emptiness of our gift. For it has not only separated them from nature and her vast benefits and enrichments but has insulated them against her edifying influence."

By now the fire had dwindled to a few tired red coals already half slumbering beneath a little mound of powdery ashes, reminding us it was time for sleep.

"Well," said George as he slowly rose to his feet, "I've enjoyed this, Cliff, and especially appreciate the chance to compare notes and blow off a little steam. We've had quite a rambling and interesting talk. But now I'm ready for some shut-eye. What you say we turn in?"

Moments later I had zipped open the screen flap of my tent and stepped inside. I heard Gene mumble something as he shifted in his sleep. undressing quickly, I slipped into my sleeping bag. As usual, I lay awake for some time ruminating over the day's activities and

conversations. I was just dozing off when I thought I heard what sounded like the soft shuffle of footsteps outside the tent. There was, too, the strong, eerie sensation of a large presence out there in the night just beyond the thin canvas wall. It could have been as near as an arm's length from my head. And yet, so slight was all this, and so close to sleep was I, that it seemed more like the vaporous impressions of a dream. Nevertheless, I was immediately wide awake and listening, or trying to listen above the sudden loud thumping in my chest. I caught myself wondering what I would do if a bear abruptly ripped its way into our tent. I thought about waking Gene who was snoring peacefully in the darkness, but, being not at all certain that my imagination hadn't been playing tricks, I decided not to disturb his rest. The moments wore on and on and, hearing nothing more, I finally fell asleep.

And then it cam! With startling suddenness there burst within that black silence a resounding clatter that put the entire camp into mild panic. There was no need to shout an alarm, for I could hear excited voices in the other tents. Gene was out of his bag in a flash, fumbling about in the darkness and slipping into his boots.

"Just as we expected," he exclaimed hoarsely. "Those damned bears are after our grub!"

In the dark I could hear him slowly unzipping the tent flaps.

"Careful, Gene! Careful!" I managed to stammer, groping for my flashlight and trying hard not to appear as flustered as I felt.

"Stay near the tent," cautioned Gene. "When I holler, Tom and I will rush them with our canoe paddles while you and the others shine your lights on 'em. Keep the beam in the bears' eyes if you can. We'll do the rest."

I crawled out of the tent and crouched in front of it with flashlight ready. The thumping had returned to my chest. My mouth felt dry. My whole body was tense.

"All set, Tom?" Gene whispered.

"All set," came Tom's reply from nearby.

"Okay, men," Gene commanded, "light 'em up!"

Four bright beams shot out simultaneously toward our dangling food supply, revealing at once our unwelcome visitors. Atop one of the overturned canoes one of the bears was rearing up on his hind legs and trying in vain to reach our high-hanging larder with his forepaws. The other, with its snout pointed upward, was lumbering in a circle beneath, a picture of baffled frustration. Distracted, the bears quickly turned and gazed bewilderedly into the lights.

"Charge!" roared Gene, whereupon he and Tom, though keeping a safe distance, rushed part way toward the shaggy marauders, the while whooping like attacking savages and noisily banging the ground and the nearest canoe with the blades of their paddles. The racket seemed startlingly loud in the stygian stillness, especially Gene's booming harangue. I remember wondering, despite all the excitement, at how many decibels he was capable of generating. The bears may have wondered too. utterly dismayed, at least for the time being, they dashed off in such haste we could hear them crashing through the underbrush moments after the forest had swallowed them up.

"Holy toadfish!" exclaimed Al after we had all gathered around the tipped canoes. "That was some commotion! I wish I could have got a picture of it!"

"Yeah, and a tape recording," laughed Bill. "You could sell it to Hollywood for sound effects in a wild west movie."

"I'll bet those bears are still running," giggled Mike.

"You hope," corrected Billy uneasily.

"Good lord, Gene, where'd you get such a powerful set of pipes?" marveled George. "I'll

bet you scared those bruins so bad you could track 'em by their droppings."

Gene chortled uproariously at that. "I wish you were right," he replied. "Maybe then they wouldn't be tempted to come back and try it again. But if I know anything about bears, we haven't seen the last of them."

"Well, what are we waiting for?" exclaimed Tom as he raised one of the canoes onto its side. "Let's reset this bear alarm and try to get some sleep."

"At least we know the contraption works," chuckled Al as he and George lifted the other canoe into its tottery place against the first.

"Doggone! Those burglars are depriving us of some much-needed rest," observed Gene as he set the pots and pans in place. "I wish there were some way to keep them out of the camp."

"How about a bonfire?" suggested Mark as he worriedly scanned his flashlight along the dark edge of the forest.

"Somebody would have to stay awake and watch it," objected Gene. Then, jokingly, "Would you like to volunteer?"

"Forget it," replied mark, wincing at the thought.

"Anyway," observed Tom, "We haven't near enough firewood. We'll just have to hope the bears have given up."

"Well, I give up right now," drawled George with a yawn. "I'm gonna get this body back in the sack."

That was hint enough. Within minutes every member of our weary band was back in his sleeping bag. Once more the vast silence of the northern night settled over the camp. For a while, as tired as I was, I lay awake with ears straining, nerves tingling . . . wondering if the others also were staring suspensefully into the darkness, waiting, listening with bated breath for that electrifying clangor which might at any moment pitch us into another slumber-spoiling encounter with our impetuous prowlers. Silence. Not a sound out there. And then I slept.

But not for long. This time just one sharp, loud crash of falling utensils announced the return of the bears, followed by immediate quiet. By the time we were out of our tents with our lights playing over the area, the raiders had vanished!

"By the jeepers, they're gone!" shouted Gene, glancing about in surprise. "Just like that!"

"How come they cleared out so fast?" inquired Bill.

"Probably didn't want to hang around for the sermon," chuckled Al.

"You mean Tomlinson's taunting tirade?" laughed George. "You can't blame those poor beasts for not wanting to go through all that again."

From the casual laughter which followed, it was evident that the suspense had eased considerably. much relieved at the effectiveness of our food protecting system, we could now take a more relaxed view of the situation and perhaps even salvage a little precious rest before the coming day forced its new exertions upon us. At least, after drowsily assembling our warning device for the third time, we were able to return quickly to the important business of sleeping.

The bears made one more try. They came as the first grey light of dawn filtered dimply into the clearing. This time the initial clatter failed to frighten them off. Instead, perhaps out of sheer anger and frustration, they launched a noisy attack on the tinpans and kettles which had thwarted them. They rushed about tossing and battering and rolling our cookware over the rock in a confused frenzy. When Gene and Tom cautiously undertook another roaring, canoe-banging assault against the animals, that, together with some unexpected loud support from the rear, was enough to send the bears scurrying into the woods. The boys, impressed by the raucous manner

in which these two had routed the bruins after the first foray, had let go (from the safety of their tents, of course) with a wild chorus of shrill yells accompanied by a charivari of clanging tin plates.

"This time I think we've convinced them," grinned Tom when the noise died down. "I doubt that we'll see those beggars again."

Just the same, we gathered the scattered utensils and reset the alarm. Fortunately only two of the kettles had suffered damage. Both were dented and one was bent enough to require some pounding with a hand axe to straighten it out.

"Maybe you're right, Tom," declared Gene, glancing at the slowly brightening sky. "Maybe the bears will let us alone now. Anyhow, it's still early enough to allow another hour or two of sleep. Lord knows we need it, so let's everybody turn in."

We did so, and the bears did not again disturb our slumber.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Sunlight was gilding the upper fringe of the forest's face across the bay when Gene and I, carrying in our hands the cups of steaming coffee with which Tom had without fail awakened us, emerged from our tent. In the pit a lively fire chattered merrily. The food packs, which Tom already had lowered from their "sky ride," sat nearby. Leaning over a griddle loaded with sizzling bacon and browning flapjacks, our cook was singing "Dixie" to a flashy little chipmunk that scooted about, crumb hunting at his feet.

A mingling of pleasant aromas--of conifer, wood smoke, and bacon--titillated the nostrils. A fish splashed offshore. From the shrubbery behind us a white throated sparrow whistled a loud, cheery greeting. Far out on the lake bey0ond the bay a few plumes of mist lingered. Such a lovely morning had dawned, blending into the tranquil scene such a magical cast of delicate green-gold light and captivating woodland sounds and fragrances that I found it difficult top believe the night just passed had been anything more than a fitful dream. This was going to be, I felt strangely certain, a day of joy and beauty to be long remembered.

Nevertheless, the night of the bears had taken its tool and it was a tired and sleepy crew that finally gathered for breakfast. The boys, usually among the first in line for the morning meal, were the last to drag themselves out of their tents. Even after a quick cool dip most of us felt sluggish and only partially rested. Also there were the familiar complaints of constipation, a common difficulty for some (including myself) during the first two or three days of a canoe trip brought on quite probably by the abrupt change in diet, drinking water, and type of physical activity. Tom's standard solution for this problem--and usually a very effective one--was a potent portion of stewed prunes served with the rest of breakfast.

Gene, eager to resume travel, ate his meal hurriedly and then, leaving us to strike the camp, took his chart and compass and hiked a short distance up the shore in search of the portage trail which would lead us to the next lake. By the time he returned we had the tents down and packed and were ready to move.

"By golly, you know something?" he said somewhat concernedly as he strode across the camp clearing toward the edge of the forest. "I haven't spotted any kind of a trail anywhere nearby. Do you suppose our portage is right under our noses?"

"You mean right here somewhere near our camp?" asked Tom, tagging behind him.

"Wouldn't we have noticed it?"

"Not necessarily . . . especially with those bears pinning us down. It just didn't occur to me that this very spot might be the portage landing. No signs of traffic on this bare rock. I did think it was further up the shore, but I find we're already near the extreme north end of the lake, and our next lake should be just west of us."

"What does the map show?"

"Nothing much. Doesn't even indicate this little bay . . . just a gradual eastward curve of the shoreline."

By now we were all stamping about in the surrounding thicket looking for that thin thread of pathway we needed to proceed on our way. Once again I felt a twinge of anxiety. So intent was I upon our reaching Abu-Abu that any indication of uncertainty on Gene's part filled me with misgivings that we might fall short of our goal. Not that the alternatives were all that bad. Anywhere at all within this wild wonderful region would be paradise enough for any man. But Abu-Abu had become something terribly special, a goal in itself, and nothing short of an encampment on the enchanted island in the fabled Lake of Echoes would satisfy me now.

What a relief it was, therefore, when suddenly the three younger boys, who had worked their way some thirty paces down the shore, could be heard all shouting at once:

"Here it is!"

"We've found it!"

"Here's our trail!"

Upon reaching them we saw that they had indeed stumbled upon the portage. We also saw why we had not noticed it before. Instead of entering the forest directly from where we had pitched our camp at the landing, the trail led off through a narrow glen along the far side of a rugged hogback that was just high enough to conceal it from view. From the landing it had to be reached by climbing a slight rocky incline very close along the shore.

"Nice work, you guys," commended Gene after a careful inspection. "It's our trail all right . . . so, let's load up and see where it takes us."

Thus began the third day of our wilderness journey. With Tom, Gene, and Will in the lead as usual, we were soon trudging up and over a low, densely forested hill. Though partially obstructed by some patches of underbrush and an occasional windfall, the t4rail gave us little difficulty and brought us presently to the edge of a new body of water. Before us lay a long narrow cove which widened at its far end onto a fairly large lake. "Ah," observed Al in anticipation of a long easy stint ahead. "Looks as if we'll be paddling for a while instead of plodding."

"Enjoy it then, while you can," laughed Gene.

"Well, there’s no use kidding ourselves. We're not yet over the hump. Just don't anybody waste his strength today," Gene admonished us all. "It's usually about this phase of a trip that the grind really catches up top you . . . and last night's interruptions didn't help any. So take it steady, but don't overexert."

Soon we were afloat and heading out of the cove onto a broad open lake. Already the humid air, hanging heavy with little more than the slightest breath of a breeze, was so oppressively warm and sticky that shirts and trousers quickly darkened into patches of sweat. Almost at once a plodding sluggishness attended our efforts. And yet, though our paddle strokes had lost some of their crispness, we managed to maintain a constant pace that kept us moving closer and closer . . . we hoped . . . to our goal.

By habit I watched the shore, for I had found that the wooded fringes which edge these

wilderness lakes, though they seem at first glance to have a certain general sameness of appearance, will upon occasion reveal some interesting new aspect of the forest's character. And now I suddenly noticed that along one stretch of low shoreline extended a lengthy stand of cedars bearing the distinctive "browse line" which marks a well-grazed feeding ground for deer. The lower limbs of the trees had been cropped away up to a height of from six to eight feet, the approximate extent to which the animals are able to reach for food. The resulting dark opening between the ground and where the foliage resumed its normal density created a conspicuous shadowy band parallel with the ground, running for perhaps a half mile, which could be seen clearly from some distance out on the lake. Here, I thought, was an example, along with the dams of the beaver, of how nature's own creatures can significantly modify an entire wilderness landscape.

The five canoes, gliding along on gently rippling water, their stanch crews paddling steadily, presented by their forward motion the only reminder of time's unceasing flow. All else about us, the massive, weathered rock of the shoreline, the brooding green ridges of pine and spruce enclosing the lake on all sides, and overhead the huge blue sky and blazing sun, seemed locked in a timeless mold. An eternity of mass and matter, organic and inorganic, surrounded us, appearing little changed from what it must have looked like eons ago. It was a strange feeling to realize that here it mattered not at all what century we were in, so completely detached were we from the measured pace of civilized living. I had experienced this weird sensation of timelessness in nature before during previous wilderness trips, and I had long suspected that time--or, rather, man's civilized concept of time--has much to do with the deep-set anxieties which plague our highly developed society. Our utter subjection to the tyranny of time makes bondsmen of us all. We are creatures of the clock, programmed and scheduled in tight capsules of minutes, hours, days weeks, months and years. Our time is our life, no more no less. It begins with the microscopic union of a sperm and an ovum and ends with the final throb of a mortal heart. Between these two extreme events for each of us lies all the time we shall ever measure or know. We can waste it, use it, sell it, enjoy it, but mostly we will be bound to it, regulated by it, restricted by it, dominated by it, frustrated by it, dependent upon it.

Does not then the desire for an escape from this tyrant--an escape which can never be anything but temporary--underlie the powerful attraction of the wilderness? Does not the timelessness we sense in nature explain that grand feeling of freedom which is so much a part of the wilderness experience? Is not freedom from worldly concerns mostly freedom from time?

Across the immensity of the sky not a single fleck of cloud was to be seen. Yet something in all that searing, shimmering blue--perhaps it was the heaviness of the air, and the general haziness--hinted ominously of weather change. To be caught in a rainstorm in the wilderness with your tents down is one of the most dismal of all camping calamities. I'd experienced just such a predicament enough times in the past to be keenly sensitive to the slightest indication of a storm's imminence and now I found myself worrying that a sudden tempest might delay us, pin us down, send us ashore seeking shelter. Often through this toilsome day I scanned the horizon expecting at any moment to see the swift, black, angrily seething frontal wall of a thunderstorm swooping down on us. Fortunately, it did not immediately materialize, but the possibility filled me with a lingering uneasiness.

Our next portage led at once through a charming glade shaded by a high leafy canopy of birch and aspen. These trees, forced by competing conifers to stretch upward for sunlight, had grown inordinately tall and spindly. As we passed among them, sunbeams filtering through the

high foliage mottled the scene with such an enchanting lacework of shifting gleams and shadows that it was difficult not to stop and linger and simply become involved in the pleasantness of it all. However, we moved quickly through the grove and beyond it, broke into the open sunlight . . . and the humid heat.

A steamy swamp lay directly in our path. The dim trail led down into it to an odd little stream with a narrow, shallow, twisting channel. Then a hungry squadron of black flies discovered us. The pests were for some reason uncommonly numerous and they attacked us mercilessly as we struggled through the swamp. The small waterway, which at first seemed promising, proved to be of so little help that we might have fared better without it.

"It's what you call a two-by-two," remarked Gene.

"What's a two-by-two?" queried Mark.

"Two feet wide and two inches deep," explained Gene with a grunt of disgust.

"I get it," responded Mark, squinting in the heat. "Too little water for canoeing and too much for walking."

"Right on, Mark. It means we're in for some really heavy work."

And so we were. We had no alternative but to skid the loaded canoes along the small channel as best we could by pushing and pulling and lifting and dragging as we sloshed along the soggy stream bed on foot. We were often up to our knees in muck which sucked us down at every step. The deer flies kept us in a hand-slapping frenzy and, despite our repellents--which were quickly diluted and washed away by our own perspiration--succeeded all too frequently in drawing blood from our exposed skins. Occasionally boulders and deadheads blocked the way. At one point we literally had to hack our way through a patch of twisted alders that straddled our course. It was slow inch-by-inch progress, requiring the most strenuous physical effort. The sticky mire held back the canoes, pulling at their bottoms with suction-cup tenacity. For one fleeting moment I had a heavy, desperate sensation of being hopelessly trapped. That was when George, happening to choose the worst of all possible occasions, revealed that he had been sharing some of my apprehensions about the weather.

"All we need now," he mumbled between gasps, "is a sudden rainstorm."

"Come on, men," came a cajoling note from Tom some distance ahead of us. "It's oozy, but it isn't quicksand. Keep a-pluggin' . . . every step is a step closer to Abu-Abu."

"Where every trouble becomes a bubble!" shouted Mike with playful sarcasm, mimicking our song.

"And cares are <u>lighter!"</u> added Billy with a sudden giggle.

We all had to laugh in spite of the strain. The spirit was still there, still strong. But the flesh, that was something else. We huffed and puffed and tugged until our backs ached and our legs wobbled. We would rest, struggle some more, and rest again. It got so we even gave in to the flies, ignoring their tortuous onslaught, too tired to fight them off. Not one of us escaped their bites, as was later confirmed by the welts we all wore.

After what had begun to seem like an eternity of misery, we suddenly found relief. The channel abruptly deepened and widened just enough to float the canoes above the mud. A short distance further, solid ground was under us once again. We were out of the swamp.

"I guess now we know why so few people come this way," groaned Gene as he dropped wearily to his knees and then sprawled out full length on a patch of grass. "Let's everybody take a ten-minute siesta."

Surrounded as we were by the very wildest, remotest, most unfrequented region of the Quetico, and having for two days seen no signs of any recent travelers, it was beginning to dawn

on us how truly separated we were from the rest of humanity. But if further proof of our wilderness isolation were needed, it came while we rested there on the green sward where the forest met the swamp. Billy, Mike, and Mark, never satisfied to stay put for even ten minutes and seemingly possessed of inexhaustible boyish energy fired constantly by unquenchable boyish curiosity, were soon searching the forest fringe for blueberries. It was then that, in scanning back over the swamp, they sighted the massive bulk of an enormous brown-black animal grazing in a pool of lilypads at its upper edge. And it was Billy's startled, high-pitched shout of mingled alarm and surprise which brought the rest of us scrambling to our feet.

"Holy cow! What kind of a monster is that?" he stammered.

"That thing's as big as a horse!" gulped Mark.

"Geeze, don't you guys know a moose when you see one?" chided Mike.

"Ha! You boys have hit the jackpot," congratulated Tom as we joined them. "A moose it is, by golly . . . and the biggest one in the Quetico, I'll betcha!"

Strange how quickly fatigue can be forgotten in the jubilation of a thrilling discovery. It's one thing to see a moose in a photo picture of a movie film, or even near the crowded highway of a national park, but to see this magnificent ruminant in its native habitat, far removed from any sign of civilization, wild, alive, and monarch of an entire unspoiled, uninvaded wilderness domain, is one of the most nerve-tingling, heart-warming, mind-boggling experiences yet to be found in nature's secret hideaways.

"Ahhh . . . that's just great!" Bill exclaimed, his usually calm voice tense with emotion. "I've seen moose before . . . but there's something extra special about this one. Maybe its just the realization of how privileged we are to be able to look at such a rare and beautiful creature in such a rare and beautiful place."

"Yes, and to share a thrill like this with our boys . . . that makes it super special, don't you think?" murmured Al with an uncharacteristic softness of tone that revealed an inner sentimentality which anywhere but in this wild setting would never have been permitted to surface so spontaneously. "You know, I've just got to go over there and capture that big old beast for the family album." He already had his camera in hand and moments later was working his way along the boggy rim of the marsh toward where he might get some good close shots.

"Geeze, isn't that kind of dangerous?" squawked Billy as we watched Al slowly sneaking up on the moose.

"Well, a moose is herbivorous if that's what you mean," George answered with a reassuring smile.

"My hunch is the big fellow will completely ignore the intrusion . . . unless Al gets too close," opined Gene with that knowing confidence of one who has been through it all before.

"What then? What if he does get too close?" asked Mike, suddenly concerned for his dad.

"I reckon this time of year that moose would simply hit for cover, big as he is," replied Tom.

"What do you mean this time of year?"

"Oh, he's peaceful now. It's mostly in mating time . . . probably early fall . . . that he gets mean and dangerous. Anyway, he's down in the marsh where he can't move fast, and Al is up at the edge near trees and high ground. Pretty safe odds, I'd say."

We watched, fascinated, as Al reached a slight outcrop dominating the marsh some thirty yards from the animal. There, from behind a clump of sweet gale and dogwood shrubs he carefully aimed his camera and clicked away. If the moose saw him--and I'm sure it did--it

simply ignored him as Gene had predicted and went right on with its feeding, making frequent thrusts of its great antlered head beneath the water's surface in search of waterlilies and other aquatic plants. The head would come up with a cluster of dripping stems held by the big overhanging snout and, after a casual devouring of the plants, would plunge again for another helping.

"Is that all they eat . . . just water plants?" Mark wanted to know.

"Oh, that's a favorite diet," George cut in. "But they'll often browse through the forest grazing on soft twigs, willow, birch, spruce, alders. They also like mosses and lichens. A big animal like that has to be able to eat a wide variety of vegetation to survive in the forest environment . . . especially through the long winters."

"Boy, he is big," commented Gene. "I'll bet that old bull is seven feet tall if he's an inch."

"And I'll bet his rack has at least a six-foot spread," added Tom admiringly.

Hmmm . . . think of the steaks he'd make," drooled Mike.

"Ah, now you've made me hungry, Mike," Gene chuckled. Then, with typical abruptness, he lifted a backpack and slipped his shoulders under the straps. "Come on, men, it's time to move. We'll lunch at the end of the portage." Adding a canoe to his burden, he hesitated for a moment, let his eye pick up the vague trail where it angled up into the forest, then quickly followed it out of sight.

Not far behind him plodded Tom with another pack and canoe. By the time Al returned with his moose "neatly stored" in his camera, only Mike and I remained. We quickly loaded ourselves with the remaining duffle and headed in the direction of the others.

For a welcome change, the trail, though it meandered briefly through several bushy thickets, was firm and fairly level underfoot. It would gradually around a low scarp, then sloped gently downward among tall columnar pines over a thick, brown carpet of fallen needles flecked with small ferns, clintonia, bunchberry, bluebells, and other delicate flora of the forest floor. A short distance ahead, the bright shimmer of blue water beckoned through the trees.

There is no describing the joyous sensation of relief which climaxes the completion of a particularly difficult portage. I especially remember our arrival at this landing for it provided at once a marvelous dividend--a sort of unanticipated gift of revivification addedly enhanced by a setting as tranquil as it was beautiful. A broad, smooth, slightly rounded expanse of shining clean granite slanted gently from the forest opening downward into the lake at just the right angle to provide an idyllic swimming place. The water seemed so clear and inviting that within the brief time required to get ten sets of shirts, pants and boots off, it contained ten laughing, shouting, splashing nudists whose wild antics might well have caused an observer to wonder about t5heir sanity. It was such an utter relief to be rid of our sweat-soaked clothing and to feel the soothing wash of liquid coolant against our reeking skins that we could not restrain our joyous exuberance. A strong sense of freedom and renewal was being magically imparted to our weary bodies. Happily we swam and splashed and dived and dunked each other, the fathers no less boyishly frisky that the sons, and we sensed beneath it all the vast goodness and purity of nature as its friendly waters caressed and refreshed us.

Swimming out over deeper water, the boys found a huge submerged boulder at a depth of about fifteen feet. It was clearly visible in that bright crystalline world beneath the surface where, as we dived and played about it, filtering sunlight dappled the gray marl bottom with shimmering gleams. I found it a strange, silent, weightless world, cold at the lower depths, yet beautiful in its brown-gray austerity, and mysterious. We made great sport of springing with our feet from atop the boulder and shooting up to the surface. Tiring of this at length, I switched

over to what I most enjoy in the water, simply floating about on my back, completely relaxed, with my eyes closed and the sun in my face. Ahh . . . this was better, softer than lying in a bed or a sleeping bag . . . and so much less confining. If I wondered why since my earliest boyhood I had always found swimming in the nude something special, so much more satisfying that when hampered if only slightly by the accustomed habiliment, the answer was suddenly quite obvious. It had to do with freedom, of course . . . that rare, pure freedom which is entirely without restriction or inhibition and is yet without ugliness . . . a gusty, lusty freedom that is at once as spiritual as it is physical, and throbbing with its own dynamic vitality.

I already had enjoyed in this wild environment an extraordinary sense of disengagement from time and worldly concern. And now the feeling of freedom came in still another form as I drifted nakedly, effortlessly in liquid suspension: an exhilarating sensation of freedom from gravity . . . that inveterate counter-force which demands so much of our daily energy. It occurred to me that the experiencing of so many seldom realized freedoms in such a singular concentration had required nothing more profound than the mere immersion of my total raw self in a raw, remote wilderness lake. It would be difficult to imagine a closer, more intimate involvement with nature than this.

And then that vague sensation I have often had before of having previously been here intruded once more upon my consciousness . . . and this time it took shape in a hazy, fleeting recognition of another watery medium which once had surrounded my nakedness. Was it the primordial sea, or the amniotic sea of my pre-birth? Was I, in this strangely blissful moment, being reminded of long-forgotten origins? Or of beginnings yet to come?

Listening to my boisterous companions, who so lately had been on the verge of exhaustion, now disporting themselves with surprising vigor and vivacity, I wondered. We were receiving something out of this bathing binge which somehow had put the spirit back in command and brought to the surface an amazing reserve of hidden strength not normally utilized. Revived and renewed as we surely were in this brief immersion, were we not, whether we realized it or not, tapping into some great regenerative power source which nature seems to have ready for our use if we but know the combination for its release? As I floated thus, contentedly preoccupied with a stream of such random thoughts, I failed to realize I had drifted out beyond a reasonably safe distance from shore.

Suddenly Mark was swimming beside me.

"You're out pretty far, Dad," he cautioned. "You better get closer to shore."

"I guess you're right," I replied, immediately alert and pleased at his concern Here was an interesting reversal of our roles. Son taking care of father, warning him of danger. "But how about yourself? You shouldn't have followed me out here. You're stretching the safety rules, you know."

"So are you, Dad."

"I admit I am . . . but quite as much."

"How come?"

"Well, with my buoyancy I can lie back and rest if I need to. But with your young unpadded skin and bones you've got to be paddling every second to stay afloat. You could get tired all of a sudden . . . and you'd not be able to rest as I could."

"Aw, I feel okay. I'm not an old man, you know."

Ouch! Such a thing to imply. Haughtily and with more firmness than usual I replied, "Nevertheless, we're both heading for the beach . . . right now!"

"Okay. I'll race ya!"

"Oh no you don't! Keep it slow and easy. I don't want to have to tow you in."

"Hah!" Mark laughed, a bit cockily, I thought. "But just make sure it's not the other way around . . . and me having to tow you in."

There were many times on this trip as on others when I felt marvelously close to my son, but never more so than now as we leisurely swam side by side toward the shore. I had to smile when I noticed that Mark maintained a position from which he could keep a protective eye on his reckless old dad. I could sense his concern and it gave me a warm wonderful feeling. Actually he was more right than I cared to admit. Our recent exertions had made extra-heavy demands, and the distance, which ordinarily would have required no great effort of any good swimmer, was suddenly more than my tired muscles could handle on a sustained basis. If it hadn't been for my bodily buoyancy which permitted me to roll over on my back and rest my limbs several times, I might have been in real trouble. Mark did not, as I had pointed out to him, have this advantage, and he did begin to show signs of weariness just before we reached shallow water. However, I pretended not to notice it. With a good second effort he made it on his own, and I was proud of him. That little guy I'd coddled in my arms a few years back was growing up fast. Soon he'd be big enough to coddle . . . or throttle . . . me! The thought gave a strange, gratifying lift to my fatherly ego.

Ravenous appetites put quite a dent into Tom's cold lunch supplies after the swim. While the meal consisted mainly of the usual plain peanut butter-and-jelly and cheese sandwiches, raisins, beef jerkeys, cookies, and "bug juice," it evoked all the happy chatter and enthusiasm of a full-course banquet. The boys, especially Mike, seemed to have bottomless pits to fill, and Tom jokingly warned them to leave some room in their insides for proper breathing.

Mike was a delight to watch at mealtime. His bright freckled face, seeming to glow under a shaggy mop of red hair, wore such a contented cherubic expression as his lower jaw chomped away between his two puffed cheeks that it gave every repast an air of special importance and had the contagious effect of causing the entire crew more thoroughly to enjoy their eating. He still kept a wary eye on the bug juice, but that did not prevent him from gulping down his share with typical zest.

He was, of course, along with Billy and Mark, an interesting contrast to the older Will who, in his strong, wise quiet way, and with his considerable outdoor experience and general know-how, was extremely mature for his age. As I was to note later in the trip, the youngsters looked up to Will, respected his leadership and, in their boyish affinity with him, relied upon him more than upon the adults for information, explanations, and instructions. He enjoyed the role and spent much of his time showing the boys all the endless 'tricks of the trade" about camping and woodsmanship, and later was to become their guide on various separate fishing and exploring expeditions. Just now, Will had eaten quickly and was already loading the canoes, readying everything for embarkation. By the time lunch was over, we needed but to find our seats and our paddles and to shove off. Everyone seemed noticeably revived and in good cheer, eater to resume travel.

Once afloat, we moved steadily up along lake, not very wide, which soon narrowed between high, lichen-spattered, pine-crowned palisades to form a picturesque canyon that extended about half a mile. The grays, greens, and weathered rusts of the walls repeated their varying hues on the mirrory water surface, creating the illusion of a deep gorge between the steep sides of which we drifted as if in some magic state of suspension. Quickly we slipped past the palisades and onto a wider expanse of water. As we headed for the upper shore, still a mile

or so away, I felt again a fleeting intuitive premonition of rain on the way, and thought it must be only a matter of hours before that bright open sky would be filled with the sound and fury of a storm. Even in the canoes, where the proximity of water normally tends to mitigate the heat, the air was heavy, sultry, uncomfortably hot.

As we paddled along minute after minute, sometimes talking, sometimes singing, but more often just thoughtfully enjoying the scenery and listening to the rhythmic dipping and the melodious rippling of the water streaming along the gunwale so close you could touch it, I often marveled at the contrast between our pr4esent situation and the city life we had so recently left behind. Certainly not one of us would so willingly undertake in the city the kind of physical exertions demanded here. Neither the steady paddling nor the toting of heavy packs and canoes over rough portages in stifling heat is an easy labor for muscles seldom called upon by the pursuits of urban living. I recalled what an effort it took to "persuade" Mark to do such routine tasks as mowing the lawn or shoveling snow from the driveway back home. Yet here, under a sustained physical effort that was as strenuous as it was necessary, Mark and the other boys toiled away with such cheerful enthusiasm one wondered where they'd suddenly got all that ambition and energy. It was an amazing transformation. And the reason for it, of course, was obvious.

What else but the wilderness could turn them on like that? What else but the wilderness, with its haunting secrets and its promise of adventure and discovery, could so magically convert the most wearying toil into fascinating play? And there was ever before us, of course, the prospect of ABU-ABU. That very name seemed to put special power and purpose into our endeavors. As for myself, I was constantly spurred by that hope of finding some deeper insight into the mystery of nature's attraction for man. My mind seethed with speculation, my senses were alert and expectant, and ABU-ABU continued to be an obsessive symbol of my quest.

Gene had said it would be along way and difficult to find, which meant not only more paddling and portaging than usual but even a chance that we might miss it entirely. Already we had traveled far along a little-used and difficult route into the Quetico heartland, determined to explore the farthest by-ways if necessary just to find, if it existed at all, that fabled place visited by few men where, near an island surrounded by indescribable beauty, even the fishing was beyond belief.

And so we plunged on hopefully as heat and fatigue continued to slow our exertions if not our spirits. As often happens when patience begins to wear thin under continued stress, some of us may have begun to wonder if the place we sought were truly real or whether, like so many fishermen's dreams, it was but an illusion that was luring us, as the spinner lures the fish, to disappointment and defeat.

Still we went on, over yet another portage and across another lake, until at last we drew close to a shore that was all boulders and thick vegetation.

"Stand by," shouted Gene. "There's got to be a landing here somewhere." He was studying his map--worriedly, it seemed to me--and watching the shoreline as Will, in the stern seat, paddled their canoe close in along the rocks. They had gone about a hundred yards when we saw Gene point shoreward and then grab his paddle. They quickly disappeared behind two great boulders standing in the water just off shore, and we saw nothing more for several long, anxious minutes.

Then both their voices sounded at once. "We've found a trail! This way, everybody!"

We all hurried over and even before we had our packs and canoes high and dry, Gene gave us the first indication that he wasn't sure he had brought us to the right place.

"You know," he said, "I hate to tell you, but it's been so long since I've been anywhere near this part of the Quetico that I can't be absolutely sure we're on the right trail. Pierre's party years ago went in from the north side, and it's a sketch of that route that I've had to work from. Either his map is inaccurate or incomplete, or I'm one lousy navigator."

"What about the portage?" I asked.

"That's just it." He wiped the sweat off his brow. "There's a faint trail leads out of here . . . which could be a portage . . . or just an animal trail. There's no sign of any canoe party coming through here lately, that's for sure."

"Well," Tom spoke up, "no sense loitering here. Let's have a look at it." With that he and Gene disappeared into the forest. The rest of us followed close behind.

"Hold it," Gene called back. "Somebody's got to stay behind with the duffle until we're sure this is a trail we can use."

"I guess you're right. I'll stay," volunteered George.

"I'll stay too," Mike announced. "I'll do a little shore fishing till you get back."

"Okay. Keep an eye on the food packs," Gene cautioned. Nobody had to ask what he meant by that.

This was indeed anything but the usual kind of well-marked, well-used portage trail. At times Tom had to stop and study the ground. Dense foliage crowded in on every side. Yet there did seem to be a kind of obscure pathway and it now suddenly led sharply upward along an ascending fissure in the face of a high, bare rock outcrop. Loose boulders and damp thick moss made the going difficult, and I wondered how we would ever get our gear up here.

On top of the outcrop, which must have jutted upward nearly a hundred feet, we found a flat stretch of exposed rock forming a clearing beyond which the silent forest again presented its green facade.

"Doggonnit!" exclaimed Manko. "How do you follow a dim trail over bare granite?" He moved to the edge of the clearing and, stooping low, examined every little opening in the thick vegetation.

It was now mid-afternoon, hotter than ever, humid, with not the slightest breeze stirring. Our clothes were soggy with perspiration. Bright sunshine made the outcrop so uncomfortably "sizzly" that we all took advantage of as much shade as we could find. Even in the cooler shadows the black flies found us and zoomed at our heads incessantly. I knew Gene was becoming concerned about the time, for we still had to find a campsite of some sort, get our tents up and cook supper before darkness brought on the mosquitoes. I'd noticed there was not a proper camping space on the shores of the lake we had just crossed, and this meant we simply had to find something suitable ahead. I thought I detected a real note of relief in Tom's voice when he finally announced:

"Oh, ho! here it is. We have a trail again, gentlemen!"

The boys hardly seemed like gentlemen as they charged excitedly into the thicket in the direction of his voice. We were off again, moving steadily upward over the gradually rising forest floor, the rest of us trudging single file in Tom's wake. he was walking faster now, more sure of himself.

"The trail's better here," he announced. "But still climbing. This certainly is a high ridge."

"By golly, it is," Gene exclaimed. "You know, that's a good sign. Abu-Abu is in high country. if this ridge is the high ridge I think it is . . ."

Just then we broke into another clearing. And this was a clearing I shall remember to the

end of my days! For it opened abruptly onto a high rounded knob of gleaming granite and, out beyond it, a sight which stopped us all in our tracks. There it was! . . . cradled in quiet saphirine splendor, like the blue sky inverted, hidden in a deep green basin surrounded by sharply rising high forested ridges, the loveliest lake I had ever laid eyes upon, and, toward its far end, stately and serene, a green jewel of an island, pine-crested and seeming by some strange illusion suspended between sky and water.

We were spellbound. We could but stare speechless at the view. It was Gene who finally broke the spell, and his voice shook with mingled triumph and relief.

"There it is, boys! There it is! You're looking at the place of the legend. We've found the Lake of Echoes and the Isle of Abu-Abu!"