

The sparks grew with his gentle breath. The red glow moved from the sparks themselves into the bark, moved and grew and became worms, glowing red worms that crawled up the bark hairs and caught other threads of bark and grew until there was a pocket of red as big as a quarter, a glowing red coal of heat.

And when he ran out of breath and paused to inhale, the red ball suddenly burst into flame.

"Fire!" He yelled. "I've got fire! I've got it, I've got it, I've got it..."

But the flames were thick and oily and burning fast, consuming the ball of bark as fast as if it were gasoline. He had to feed the flames, keep them going. Working as fast as he could he carefully placed the dried grass and wood pieces he had tried at first on top of the bark and was gratified to see them take.

But they would go fast. He needed more, and more. He could not let the flames go out.

He ran from the shelter to the pines and started breaking off the low, dead small limbs. These he threw in the shelter, went back for more, threw those in, and squatted to break and feed the hungry flames. When the small wood was going well he went out and found larger wood and did not relax until that was going. Then he leaned back against the wood brace of his door opening and smiled.

I have a friend, he thought—I have a friend now.

A hungry friend, but a good one. I have a friend named fire.

"Hello, fire..."

The curve of the rock back made an almost perfect drawing flue that carried the smoke up through the cracks of the roof but held the heat. If he kept the fire small it would be perfect and would keep anything like the porcupine from coming through the door again.

A friend and a guard, he thought.

So much from a little spark. A friend and a guard from a tiny spark.

He looked around and wished he had somebody to tell this thing, to show this thing he had done. But there was nobody.

Nothing but the trees and the sun and the breeze and the lake.

Nobody.

And he thought, rolling thoughts, with the smoke curling up over his head and the smile still half on his face he thought: I wonder what they're doing now.

I wonder what my father is doing now.

I wonder what my mother is doing now.

I wonder if she is with him.

## 10

HE COULD NOT at first leave the fire.

It was so precious to him, so close and sweet a thing, the yellow and red flames brightening the dark interior of the shelter, the happy crackle of the dry wood as it burned, that he could not leave it. He went to the trees and brought in as many dead limbs as he could chop off and carry, and when he had a large pile of them he sat near the fire—though it was getting into the warm middle part of the day and he was hot—and broke them in small pieces and fed the fire.

I will not let you go out, he said to himself, to the flames—not ever. And so he sat through a long

part of the day, keeping the flames even, eating from his stock of raspberries, leaving to drink from the lake when he was thirsty. In the afternoon, toward evening, with his face smoke smeared and his skin red from the heat, he finally began to think ahead to what he needed to do.

He would need a large woodpile to get through the night. It would be almost impossible to find wood in the dark so he had to have it all in and cut and stacked before the sun went down.

Brian made certain the fire was banked with new wood, then went out of the shelter and searched for a good fuel supply. Up the hill from the campsite the same windstorm that left him a place to land the plane—had that only been three, four days ago?—had dropped three large white pines across each other. They were dead now, dry and filled with weathered dry dead limbs—enough for many days. He chopped and broke and carried wood back to the camp, stacking the pieces under the overhang until he had what he thought to be an enormous pile, as high as his head and six feet across the base. Between trips he added small pieces to the fire to keep it going and on one of the trips to get wood he noticed an added advantage of the fire. When he was in the shade of the trees breaking limbs the mosquitoes swarmed on him, as usual, but when he came to the fire, or just near the shelter where the smoke eddied and swirled, the insects were gone.

It was a wonderful discovery. The mosquitoes had nearly driven him mad and the thought of being rid of them lifted his spirits. On another trip he looked back and saw the smoke curling up through the trees and realized, for the first time, that he now had the means to make a signal. He could carry a burning stick and build a signal fire on top of the rock, make clouds of smoke and perhaps attract attention.

Which meant more wood. And still more wood. There did not seem to be an end to the wood he would need and he spent all the rest of the afternoon into dusk making wood trips.

At dark he settled in again for the night, next to the fire with the stack of short pieces ready to put on, and he ate the rest of the raspberries. During all the work of the day his leg had loosened but it still ached a bit, and he rubbed it and watched the fire and thought for the first time since the crash that he might be getting a handle on things, might be starting to do something other than just sit.

He was out of food, but he could look tomorrow and he could build a signal fire tomorrow and get more wood tomorrow...

The fire cut the night coolness and settled him back into sleep, thinking of tomorrow.

He slept hard and wasn't sure what awakened him but his eyes came open and he stared into the darkness. The fire had burned down and looked out but he stirred with a piece of wood and found a bed of coals still glowing hot and red. With small pieces of wood and careful blowing he soon had a blaze going again.

It had been close. He had to be sure to try and sleep in short intervals so he could keep the fire going, and he tried to think of a way to regulate his sleep but it made him sleepy to think about it and he was just going under again when he heard the sound outside.

It was not unlike the sound of the porcupine, something slithering and being dragged across the sand, but when he looked out the door opening it was too dark to see anything.

Whatever it was it stopped making that sound in a few moments and he thought he heard something sloshing into the water at the shoreline, but he had the fire now and plenty of wood so he wasn't as worried as he had been the night before.

He dozed, slept for a time, awakened again just at dawn-gray light, and added wood to the still-

smoking fire before standing outside and stretching. Standing with his arms stretched over his head and the tight knot of hunger in his stomach, he looked toward the lake and saw the tracks.

They were strange, a main center line up from the lake in the sand with claw marks to the side leading to a small pile of sand, then going back down to the water.

He walked over and squatted near them, studied them, tried to make sense of them.

Whatever had made the tracks had some kind of flat dragging bottom in die middle and was apparently pushed along by the legs that stuck out to die side.

Up from the water to a small pile of sand, then back down into the water. Some animal. Some kind of water animal that came up to die sand to... to do what?

To do something with the sand, to play and make a pile in the sand?

He smiled. City boy, he thought. Oh, you city boy with your city ways—he made a mirror in his mind, a mirror of himself, and saw how he must look. City boy with your city ways sitting in the sand trying to read the tracks and not knowing, not understanding. Why would anything wild come up from the water to play in die sand? Not that way, animals weren't that way. They didn't waste time that way.

It had come up from the water for a reason, a good reason, and he must try to understand the reason, he must change to fully understand the reason himself or he would not make it.

It had come up from the water for a reason, and the reason, he thought, squatting, the reason had to do with die pile of sand.

He brushed the top off gently with his hand but found only damp sand. Still, there must be a reason and he carefully kept scraping and digging until, about four inches down, he suddenly came into a small chamber in the cool-damp sand and there lay eggs, many eggs, almost perfectly round eggs the size of table tennis balls, and he laughed then because he knew.

It had been a turtle. He had seen a show on television about sea turtles that came up onto beaches and laid their eggs in the sand. There must be freshwater lake turtles dial did the same. Maybe snapping turtles. He had heard of snapping turtles. They became fairly large, he thought. It must have been a snapper that came up in the night when he heard the noise that awakened him; she must have come then and laid the eggs.

Food.

More than eggs, more than knowledge, more than anything this was food. His stomach tightened and rolled and made noise as he looked at the eggs, as if his stomach belonged to somebody else or had seen the eggs with its own eyes and was demanding food. The hunger, always there, had been somewhat controlled and dormant when there was nothing to eat but with the eggs came the scream to eat. His whole body craved food with such an intensity that it quickened his breath.

He reached into the nest and pulled the eggs out one at a time. There were seventeen of them, each as round as a ball, and white. They had leathery shells that gave instead of breaking when he squeezed them.

When he had them heaped on the sand in a pyramid—he had never felt so rich somehow—he suddenly realized that he did not know how to eat them.

He had a fire but no way to cook them, no container, and he had never thought of eating a raw egg. He had an uncle named Carter, his father's brother, who always put an egg in a glass of milk and drank it in the morning. Brian had watched him do it once, just once, and when the runny part of the white left the glass and went into his uncle's mouth and down the throat in a single gulp Brian

almost lost everything he had ever eaten.

Still, he thought. Still. As his stomach moved toward his backbone he became less and less fussy. Some natives in the world ate grasshoppers and ants and if they could do that he could get a raw egg down.

He picked one up and tried to break the shell and found it surprisingly tough. Finally, using the hatchet he sharpened a stick and poked a hole in the egg. He widened the hole with his finger and looked inside. Just an egg. It had a dark yellow yolk and not so much white as he thought there would be.

Just an egg.

Food.

Just an egg he had to eat.

Raw.

He looked out across the lake and brought the egg to his mouth and closed his eyes and sucked and squeezed the egg at the same time and swallowed as fast as he could.

"Ecch..."

It had a greasy, almost oily taste, but it was still an egg. His throat tried to throw it back up, his whole body seemed to convulse with it, but his stomach took it, held it, and demanded more.

The second egg was easier, and by the third one he had no trouble at all—it just slid down. He ate six of them, could have easily eaten all of them and not been full, but a part of him said to hold back, save the rest.

He could not now believe the hunger. The eggs had awakened it fully, roaringly, so that it tore at him. After the sixth egg he ripped the shell open and licked the inside clean, then went back and ripped the other five open and licked them out as well and wondered if he could eat the shells. There must be some food value in them. But when he tried they were too leathery to chew and he couldn't get them down.

He stood away from the eggs for a moment, literally stood and turned away so that he could not see them. If he looked at them he would have to eat more.

He would store them in the shelter and eat only one a day. He fought the hunger down again, controlled it. He would take them now and store them and save them and eat one a day, and he realized as he thought it that he had forgotten that *they* might come. The searchers. Surely, they would come before he could eat all the eggs at one a day.

He had forgotten to think about them and that wasn't good. He had to keep thinking of them because if he forgot them and did not think of them they might forget about him.

And he had to keep hoping.

He had to keep hoping.

## 11

THERE WERE these things to do.

He transferred all the eggs from the small beach into the shelter, reburying them near his sleeping area. It took all his will to keep from eating another one as he moved them, but he got it done and when they were out of sight again it was easier. He added wood to the fire and cleaned up the camp area.

A good laugh, that—cleaning the camp. All he did was shake out his windbreaker and hang it in the sun to dry the berry juice that had soaked in, and smooth the sand where he slept.

But it was a mental thing. He had gotten depressed thinking about how they hadn't found him yet, and when he was busy and had something to do the depression seemed to leave.

So there were things to do.

With the camp squared away he brought in more wood. He had decided to always have enough on hand for three days and after spending one night with the fire for a friend he knew what a staggering amount of wood it would take. He worked all through the morning at the wood, breaking down dead limbs and breaking or chopping them in smaller pieces, storing them neatly beneath the overhang. He stopped once to take a drink at the lake and in his reflection he saw that the swelling on his head was nearly gone. There was no pain there so he assumed that had taken care of itself. His leg was also back to normal, although he had a small pattern of holes—roughly star-shaped—where the quills had nailed him, and while he was standing at the lake shore taking stock he noticed that his body was changing.

He had never been fat, but he had been slightly heavy with a little extra weight just above his belt at the sides.

This was completely gone and his stomach had caved in to the hunger and the sun had cooked him past burning so he was tanning, and with the smoke from the fire his face was starting to look like leather. But perhaps more than his body was the change in his mind, or in the way he was—was

becoming.

I am not the same, he thought. I see, I hear differently. He did not know when the change started, but it was there; when a sound came to him now he didn't just hear it but would know the sound. He would swing and look at it—a breaking twig, a movement of air—and know the sound as if he somehow could move his mind back down the wave of sound to the source.

He could know what the sound was before he quite realized he had heard it. And when he saw something—a bird moving a wing inside a bush or a ripple on the water—he would truly see that thing, not just notice it as he used to notice things in the city. He would see all parts of it; see the whole wing, the feathers, see the color of the feathers, see the bush, and the size and shape and color of its leaves. He would see the way the light moved with the ripples on the water and see that the wind made the ripples and which way that wind had to blow to make the ripples move in that certain way.

None of that used to be in Brian and now it was a part of him, a changed part of him, a grown part of him, and the two things, his mind and his body, had come together as well, had made a connection with each other that he didn't quite understand. When his ears heard a sound or his eyes saw a sight his mind took control of his body. Without his thinking, he moved to face the sound or sight, moved to make ready for it, to deal with it.

There were these things to do.

When the wood was done he decided to get a signal fire ready. He moved to the top of the rock ridge that comprised the bluff over his shelter and was pleased to find a large, flat stone area.

More wood, he thought, moaning inwardly. He went back to the fallen trees and found more dead limbs, carrying them up on the rock until he had enough for a bonfire. Initially he had thought of making a signal fire every day but he couldn't—he would never be able to keep the wood supply going. So while he was working he decided to have the fire ready and if he heard an engine, or even thought he heard a plane engine, he would run up with a burning limb and set off the signal fire.

Things to do.

At the last trip to the top of the stone bluff with wood he stopped, sat on the point overlooking the lake, and rested. The lake lay before him, twenty or so feet below, and he had not seen it this way since he had come in with the plane. Remembering the crash he had a moment of fear, a breath-tightening little rip of terror, but it passed and he was quickly caught up in the beauty of the scenery.

It was so incredibly beautiful that it was almost unreal. From his height he could see not just the lake but across part of the forest, a green carpet, and it was full of life. Birds, insects—there was a constant hum and song. At the other end of the bottom of the L there was another large rock sticking out over the water and on top of the rock a snaggy pine had somehow found food and grown, bent and gnarled. Sitting on one limb was a blue bird with a crest and sharp beak, a kingfisher—he thought of a picture he had seen once—which left the branch while he watched and dove into the water. It emerged a split part of a second later. In its mouth was a small fish, wiggling silver in the sun. It took the fish to a limb, juggled it twice, and swallowed it whole.

Fish.

Of course, he thought. There were fish in the lake and they were food. And if a bird could do it...

He scrambled down the side of the bluff and trotted to the edge of the lake, looking down into the water. Somehow it had never occurred to him to look *inside* the water—only at the surface. The sun was flashing back up into his eyes and he moved off to the side and took his shoes off and waded out fifteen feet. Then he turned and stood still, with the sun at his back, and studied the water again.

It was, he saw after a moment, literally packed with life. Small fish swam everywhere, some narrow and long, some round, most of them three or four inches long, some a bit larger and many smaller. There was a patch of mud off to the side, leading into deeper water, and he could see old clam shells there, so there must be clams. As he watched, a crayfish, looking like a tiny lobster, left one of the empty clam shells and went to another looking for something to eat, digging with its claws.

While he stood some of the small, roundish fish came quite close to his legs and he tensed, got ready, and made a wild stab at grabbing one of them. They exploded away in a hundred flicks of quick light, so fast that he had no hope of catching them that way. But they soon came back, seemed to be curious about him, and as he walked from the water he tried to think of a way to use that curiosity to catch them.

He had no hooks or string but if he could somehow lure them into the shallows—and make a spear, a small fish spear—he might be able to strike fast enough to get one. He would have to find the right kind of wood, slim and straight—he had seen some willows up along the lake that might work—and he could use the hatchet to sharpen it and shape it while he was sitting by the fire tonight. And that brought up the fire, which he had to feed again. He looked at the sun and saw it was getting late in the afternoon, and when he thought of how late it was he thought that he ought to reward all his work with another egg and that made him think that some kind of dessert would be nice—he smiled when he thought of dessert, so fancy—and he wondered if he should move up the lake and see if he could find some raspberries after he banked the fire and while he was looking for the right wood for a spear. Spearwood, he thought, and it all rolled together, just rolled together and rolled over him... There were these things to do.

## 12

THE FISH SPEAR didn't work.

He stood in the shallows and waited, again and again. The small fish came closer and closer and he lunged time after time but was always too slow. He tried throwing it, jabbing it, everything but flailing with it, and it didn't work. The fish were just too fast.

He had been so sure, so absolutely certain that it would work the night before. Sitting by the fire he had taken the willow and carefully peeled the bark until he had a straight staff about six feet long and just under an inch thick at the base, the thickest end.

Then, propping the hatchet in a crack in the rock wall, he had pulled the head of his spear against it, carving a thin piece off each time, until the thick end tapered down to a needle point. Still not satisfied—he could not imagine hitting one of the fish with a single point—he carefully used the hatchet to split the point up the middle for eight or ten inches and jammed a piece of wood up into the split to make a two-prong spear with the points about two inches apart. It was crude, but it looked effective and seemed to have good balance when he stood outside the shelter and hefted the spear. He had worked on the fish spear until it had become more than just a tool. He'd spent hours and hours on it, and now it didn't work. He moved into the shallows and stood and the fish came to him. Just as before they swarmed around his legs, some of them almost six inches long, but no matter how he tried they were too fast. At first he tried throwing it but that had no chance. As soon as he brought his arm back—well before he threw—the movement frightened them. Next he tried lunging at them, having the spear ready just above the water and thrusting with it. Finally he actually put the spear in the water and waited until the fish were right in front of it, but still somehow he telegraphed his motion before he thrust and they saw it and flashed away.

He needed something to spring the spear forward, some way to make it move faster than the fish—some motive force. A string that snapped—or a bow. A bow and arrow. A thin, long arrow with the point in the water and the bow pulled back so that all he had to do was release the arrow... yes.

That was it.

He had to "invent" the bow and arrow—he almost laughed as he moved out of the water and put his shoes on. The morning sun was getting hot and he took his shirt off. Maybe that was how it really happened, way back when—some primitive man tried to spear fish and it didn't work and he "invented" the bow and arrow. Maybe it was always that way, discoveries happened because they needed to happen.

He had not eaten anything yet this morning so he took a moment to dig up the eggs and eat one. Then he reburied them, banked the fire with a couple of thicker pieces of wood, settled the hatchet on his belt and took the spear in his right hand and set off up the lake to find wood to make a bow. He went without a shirt but something about the wood smoke smell on him kept the insects from bothering him as he walked to the berry patch. The raspberries were starting to become overripe, just in two days, and he would have to pick as many as possible after he found the wood but he did take a little time now to pick a few and eat them. They were full and sweet and when he picked one, two others would fall off the limbs into the grass and soon his hands and cheeks were covered with red berry juice and he was full. That surprised him—being full.

He hadn't thought he would ever be full again, knew only the hunger, and here he was full. One turtle egg and a few handfuls of berries and he felt full. He looked down at his stomach and saw that it was still caved in—did not bulge out as it would have with two hamburgers and a freezy slush. It must have shrunk. And there was still hunger there, but not like it was—not tearing at him. This was hunger that he knew would be there always, even when he had food—a hunger that made him look for things, see things. A hunger to make him hunt.

He swung his eyes across the berries to make sure the bear wasn't there, at his back, then he moved down to the lake. The spear went out before him automatically, moving the brush away from his face as he walked, and when he came to the water's edge he swung left. Not sure what he was looking for, not knowing what wood might be best for a bow—he had never made a bow, never shot a bow in his life—but it seemed that it would be along the lake, near the water.

He saw some young birch, and they were springy, but they lacked snap somehow, as did the willows. Not enough whip-back.

Halfway up the lake, just as he started to step over a log, he was absolutely terrified by an explosion under his feet. Something like a feathered bomb blew up and away in flurry of leaves and thunder. It frightened him so badly that he fell back and down and then it was gone, leaving only an image in his mind.

A bird, it had been, about the size of a very small chicken only with a fantail and stubby wings that slammed against its body and made loud noise. Noise there and gone. He got up and brushed himself off. The bird had been speckled, brown and gray, and it must not be very smart because Brian's foot had been nearly on it before it flew. Half a second more and he would have stepped on it.

And caught it, he thought, and eaten it. He might be able to catch one, or spear one. Maybe, he thought, maybe it tasted like chicken. Maybe he could catch one or spear one and it probably did taste just like chicken. Just like chicken when his mother baked it in the oven with garlic and salt and

it turned golden brown and crackled....

He shook his head to drive the picture out and moved down to the shore. There was a tree there with long branches that seemed straight and when he pulled on one of them and let go it had an almost vicious snap to it. He picked one of the limbs that seemed right and began chopping where the limb joined the tree.

The wood was hard and he didn't want to cause it to split so he took his time, took small chips and concentrated so hard that at first he didn't hear it.

A persistent whine, like the insects only more steady with an edge of a roar to it, was in his ears and he chopped and cut and was thinking of a bow, how he would make a bow, how it would be when he shaped it with the hatchet and still the sound did not cut through until the limb was nearly off the tree and the whine was inside his head and he knew it then.

A plane! It was a motor, far off but seeming to get louder. They were coming for him!

He threw down the limb and his spear and, holding the hatchet, he started to run for camp. He had to get fire up on the bluff and signal them, get fire and smoke up. He put all of his life into his legs, jumped logs and moved through brush like a light ghost, swiveling and running, his lungs filling and blowing and now the sound was louder, coming in his direction.

If not right at him, at least closer. He could see it all in his mind now, the picture, the way it would be. He would get the fire going and the plane would see the smoke and circle, circle once, then again, and waggle its wings. It would be a float plane and it would land on the water and come across the lake and the pilot would be amazed that he was alive after all these days.

All this he saw as he ran for the camp and the fire. They would take him from here and this night, this very night, he would sit with his father and eat and tell him all the things. He could see it now. Oh, yes, all as he ran in the sun, his legs liquid springs. He got to the camp still hearing the whine of the engine, and one stick of wood still had good flame. He dove inside and grabbed the wood and ran around the edge of the ridge, scrambled up like a cat and blew and nearly had the flame feeding, growing, when the sound moved away.

It was abrupt, as if the plane had turned. He shielded the sun from his eyes and tried to see it, tried to make the plane become real in his eyes. But the trees were so high, so thick, and now the sound was still fainter. He kneeled again to the flames and blew and added grass and chips and the flames fed and grew and in moments he had a bonfire as high as his head but the sound was gone now. Look back, he thought. Look back and see the smoke now and turn, please turn.

"Look back," he whispered, feeling all the pictures fade, seeing his father's face fade like the sound, like lost dreams, like an end to hope. Oh, turn now and come back, look back and see the smoke and turn for me....

But it kept moving away until he could not hear it even in his imagination, in his soul. Gone. He stood on the bluff over the lake, his face cooking in the roaring bonfire, watching the clouds of ash and smoke going into the sky and thought—no, more than thought—he knew then that he would not get out of this place. Not now, not ever.

That had been a search plane. He was sure of it. That must have been them and they had come as far off to the side of the flight plan as they thought they would have to come and then turned back. They did not see his smoke, did not hear the cry from his mind.

They would not return. He would never leave now, never get out of here. He went down to his knees and felt the tears start, cutting through the smoke and ash on his face, silently falling onto the

stone.

## 13

BRIAN STOOD at the end of the long part of the L of the lake and watched the water, smelled the water, listened to the water, was the water.

A fish moved and his eyes jerked sideways to see the ripples but he did not move any other part of his body and did not raise the bow or reach into his belt pouch for a fish arrow. It was not the right kind of fish, not a food fish.

The food fish stayed close in, in the shallows, and did not roll that way but made quicker movements, small movements, food movements. The large fish rolled and stayed deep and could not be taken. But it didn't matter. This day, this morning, he was not looking for fish. Fish was light meat and he was sick of them.

He was looking for one of the foolish birds—he called them foolbirds—and there was a flock that lived near the end of the long part of the lake. But something he did not understand had stopped him and he stood, breathing gently through his mouth to keep silent, letting his eyes and ears go out and do the work for him.

It had happened before this way, something had come into him from outside to warn him and he had stopped. Once it had been the bear again. He had been taking the last of the raspberries and something came inside and stopped him, and when he looked where his ears said to look there was a female bear with cubs.

Had he taken two more steps he would have come between the mother and her cubs and that was a bad place to be. As it was the mother had stood and faced him and made a sound, a low sound in her throat to threaten and warn him. He paid attention to the feeling now and he stood and waited, patiently, knowing he was right and that something would come.

Turn, smell, listen, feel and then a sound, a small sound, and he looked up and away from the lake and saw the wolf. It was halfway up the hill from the lake, standing with its head and shoulders sticking out into a small opening, looking down on him with wide yellow eyes. He had never seen a wolf and the size threw him—not as big as a bear but somehow seeming that large. The wolf claimed all that was below him as his own, took Brian as his own.

Brian looked back and for a moment felt afraid because the wolf was so... so right. He knew Brian, knew him and owned him and chose not to do anything to him. But the fear moved then, moved away, and Brian knew the wolf for what it was— another part of the woods, another part of all of it. Brian relaxed the tension on the spear in his hand, settled the bow in his other hand from where it had started to come up. He knew the wolf now, as the wolf knew him, and he nodded to it, nodded and smiled.

The wolf watched him for another time, another part of his life, then it turned and walked effortlessly up the hill and as it came out of the brush it was followed by three other wolves, all equally large and gray and beautiful, all looking down on him as they trotted past and away and Brian nodded to each of them.

He was not the same now—the Brian that stood and watched the wolves move away and nodded to them was completely changed. Time had come, time that he measured but didn't care about; time