

Seven Fires

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Foreword



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Seven prophets came to Anishinabe. They came at a time when the people were living a full and peaceful life on the northeastern coast of North America. These prophets left the people with seven predictions of what the future would bring. Each of the prophecies was called a fire and each fire referred to a particular era of time that would come in the future. Thus, the teachings of the seven prophets are now called the "Seven Fires."

Chapter 1

The first prophet said to the people, "In the time of the First Fire, the Anishinabe nation will rise up and follow the sacred shell of the Midewiwin Lodge. The Sacred Megis will lead the way to the chosen ground of the Anishinabe. There will be seven stopping places along the way. You will know the chosen ground has been reached when you come to a land where food grows on water."

It had not been a good day for Ian Stewart. A huge order from a supplier had arrived at his fishing tackle shop that morning, and it was mixed up beyond belief. He had spent almost the entire day on the phone trying to get things sorted out with what he had come to believe were complete idiots who were bent on ruining his business at the busiest time of the year. It was nearly midnight when he arrived home, and his guts were still in a knot. He bypassed his usual nightcap and went straight to bed. Sleep was what he needed most, but he was so wound up that it was slow in coming.

The phone rang. He was instantly awake and angry again. Seething, he simply lay there, gritting his teeth as the answering machine took the call. Most late night calls were pranks or wrong numbers, and few of the people he knew would dare to call at such a late hour unless there was some kind of an emergency. He cracked one eye open and saw by the clock radio that it was 5:15 a.m. Christ, he'd actually slept for about four hours, but it didn't feel like it.

He listened groggily as a voice spoke into his machine: "I'm looking for an Ian Stewart, who was a graduate student at the University of Manitoba back in the early 1970s. My name is Jack Elias and I once taught Anthropology there. If you are the Ian Stewart I am looking for, please give me a call. This is a matter of some urgency, so get back to me when you can. Thanks." The number he left had a Manitoba area code.

Jack Elias -- talk about a voice from the past. He has to be almost 80 years old by now. Ian had attended several of Professor Elias's courses a couple of decades earlier at the University of Manitoba. He had also been on Ian's Master's thesis committee. What could he possibly want after all these years? He decided to wait until later to return the call.

Knowing that he could never get back to sleep, he got up, splashed his face with cold water and went downstairs. While making coffee he dredged up some memories of his university days. For the life of him he couldn't think of any reason why an old Anthropology professor would want to get in touch after all these years. Had he discovered the bogus reference in his thesis? Nah! Around 8 o'clock, Ian dialled the number, and after a couple of rings a voice answered: "Jack Elias."

"Hello, this is Ian Stewart returning your call from this morning."

"Ian! I'm glad you called me back. How have you been doing?"

"Just fine thanks. If it's about my thesis, the statute of limitations on grade changes must have expired years ago."

"No, no," he laughed. "It's about a field trip that you and I took back in the 1970s. We flew up to Pigeon River and collected some artifacts. You had tried to do some follow up on some of the material but ran into some trouble. Do you recall what I'm talking about?"

How could he forget? The incident Jack was referring to had been the start of one of the strangest experiences of his life. "Running into some trouble" was a monumental understatement. "I sure do, but that's all ancient history, isn't it?"

"I thought so too, but something has come up. There's something I have to talk to you about, but I don't think we should be discussing this over the phone. Are you free to come to Winnipeg for a few days? I can make some travel arrangements and then I can explain the situation in detail."

The request to go back to his old hometown really caught Ian by surprise, but now he was really curious. "I guess I can spring loose for a few days, but I'm still mystified."

"I'll explain everything when you get here. I'll have my travel agent call you with your flight details. See you in a couple of days?"

"Yes. I'm looking forward to it."

During the 20-minute drive to open his tackle shop, Ian tried to think of what could be so important that Jack Elias would call him after 20 years. He was still wondering when he arrived. His assistant, Nick, was already there.

"I'm heading out of town on business for a few days," Ian said. "You'll have to hold the fort."

This usually meant that he was going fishing or hunting, so Nick quipped, "A bit early to be heading into the Interior for trout isn't it?"

"Smart ass! This really is business. I have to go back to Winnipeg for a couple of days."

Despite his denial, he wondered whether to take along some fishing gear. Nah, he wouldn't have enough time to do any serious fishing. Later that day he received a call from a travel agent. A ticket would be waiting for him at the Air Canada counter for a flight leaving for Winnipeg the next day at 11:20 a.m., and the return date was left open.

Holy smokes! he thought. The flight was tomorrow. Oh well. It was late May and the weather in Winnipeg was forecast to be decent, so he wouldn't need his Arctic gear. A carry-on would suffice, so packing wouldn't take long.

That evening he mulled over the events to which Jack had referred, which began in 1972. It took a while, but he managed to locate the journal he had kept during his university days. Back then, while a graduate student at the University of

Manitoba, he had pursued an interest in Anthropology. In hindsight, he should have been taking business courses, but the women were far better looking in Anthropology.

For his master's thesis he had chosen to research the current religious practices of the Northern Ojibwa, or as they called themselves, Anishinabe. The Ojibwa are one of the largest native cultures in North America in terms of population, and one of the most widespread. They still occupy much of the boreal forest region of Eastern Canada, including the area around the Western Great Lakes, Northwest Ontario, and the south-eastern shore of Lake Winnipeg. In the United States they are known as the Chippewa and occupy the northern portion of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. There was quite a bit of information on the Ojibwa in the university library, and one of the staff members in the Anthropology department had intensively studied the Ojibwa communities east of Lake Winnipeg.

Professor Jack Elias had amassed a great deal of information through his field studies, and it was he who had suggested Ian's thesis topic in the first place. The department had an extensive series of oral histories on tape, which had been obtained during interviews with Ojibwa elders. Most had been transcribed and came to be a primary source for Ian's thesis. Another source of information was a collection of religious artifacts, including several "medicine bags." Smaller bags were worn as amulets and might contain only a few items, while larger ones, sometimes called "bundles," typically contained dozens of objects, each wrapped and tied in leather or cloth, or in wood containers. Bundles were like onions -- organized layer upon layer. Their internal arrangement was often amazingly complex. Examining the contents of a large bundle could take weeks, and the follow-up analysis might go on for months.

At the time, Ian found the bundles fascinating. The image that came to mind was that they were a kind of "autobiography in junk." He likened them to carrying around the contents of the top drawer of your dresser. Some medicine bags were worn to ward off misfortune, others to insure success, such as in hunting. Larger bundles were often used to store the possessions of shamans and sorcerers. They were passed from generation to generation and had become extremely important cultural relics.

One day, early in the term, Jack had asked at the end of his lecture if Ian would accompany him to his office. When they got there, he questioned, "Do you have any plans for the weekend?"

"What do you have in mind?"

"I have to fly up to Pigeon River to do an oral history with an old woman known to be a powerful Ojibwa shaman. My graduate assistant can't make it, so there's an empty seat on the plane. I wondered if you would like to come along?"

Ian jumped at the chance and felt flattered at the invitation. He also realized that the trip would add an important field research component to his thesis. Jack also told Ian that he would be conducting the interview, so he would have to prepare some questions. Having conducted other oral histories, all in Winnipeg, though, Ian had a fairly good idea what to ask. He was particularly interested in mythical characters like *Makataeshigun*, Spirit of the Underworld, and *Nanabush*, messenger of the Great Spirit *Kitche Manitou*, and in learning what role they still played in everyday life. Almost as an aside, Jack mentioned that while Ian was

conducting his interview, he would be picking up a few artifacts, including a medicine bag.

The logistics of the journey were as interesting as the journey itself. They would be flying by floatplane, with several stops along the way. Ian was more than a little excited, having never flown on a small plane before. The flight would originate from the St. Andrews floatplane base located on the Red River, 40 km or so north of Winnipeg. Jack planned to pick Ian up at 6 a.m. Saturday morning, and then drive out to St. Andrews for the 7:45 a.m. flight. Their journey would take them up the east side of the lake with stops at several small communities. Their eventual destination was a small Indian village near the mouth of the Pigeon River on Lake Winnipeg. The aircraft would drop them off there and head north for several more stops, then pick them up on the return leg. That would give them several hours to conduct the interview and pick up the artifacts. They would be back in Winnipeg by early evening if all went according to plan.

Ian slept fitfully the night before their expedition, so when Jack arrived at 6 o'clock, he was awake but not very alert as they drove north, through the town of Selkirk and on to St. Andrews. After checking in at the small building serving as a terminal, they were soon ushered on board their aircraft down at the dock, a single-engine Otter. Despite the pilot's warning to "Watch your head," Ian banged his head on the doorframe as he stepped up the short ladder.

There were other passengers: an RCMP corporal on his way to one of the reserves, three Native children and their mother, and a man carrying a large toolbox, perhaps heading north to service some equipment. After a brief warm-up, the pilot turned into the wind, gunned the engine, and in a minute lifted off the river. Jack said there would be plenty of other landings and takeoffs on the journey, which he called a "milk run."

Those who have experienced flights in such aircraft know that one, they are very noisy, making conversation difficult; two, the seats are uncomfortable; and three, they fly at very low altitude. Ian did not care as he pressed his face to the window, watching the landscape pass slowly beneath him like a map. It seemed that even the cars on the highway were going faster. Soon they were flying over the southern portion of the lake, which from the air assumed oceanic proportions. Being early fall, the leaves of the deciduous trees were just beginning to turn colour, turning the forest shoreline into a mottled mosaic of shifting green, yellow and orange hues.

Jack had made the trip often before, so prior to take-off he inserted some earplugs and then opened up a mystery novel. Ian envied the earplugs. It wasn't long until he experienced his first water landing. The first stop was at the community of Manigotagan, less than an hour out of St. Andrews. The plane skimmed in low over the water, the floats touched down, and after a brief taxi they were at the dock. It had not been as exciting as Ian thought it would be. On the other hand, he should have been glad, for in later years he found out how "exciting" floatplane landings could be at times.

At Manigotagan the RCMP officer disembarked, a couple of boxes were off loaded, and then they pushed off from the dock. The pilot didn't waste any time. He taxied into the wind and was quickly back in the air, banking north over the

treetops. This exercise was repeated at Princess Harbour. They reached their destination just before noon.

The community of Pigeon River was a typical Northern Canadian native village, with rows of small government houses arranged in ranks up from the shoreline. Near the small dock were a store and a few other buildings, including two churches and a school. On the dock, a few men were fishing and the usual gang of children was playing, accompanied by a pack of barking dogs. After greeting those on the dock, Ian and Jack headed up to the village. They stopped first at the general store, where the Professor bought several cartons of cigarettes and a box of chocolate bars. Ian wondered aloud if he was a chain-smoking, junk food addict.

Jack laughed and explained that his purchases were meant as gifts. "Give Elsie a carton of smokes when we leave, and if there are kids around, give them each a chocolate bar."

They walked a few hundred metres, arriving at a small house near the Catholic Church. Jack knocked on the door. They could hear the chatter of children from within, and a few moments later the door opened. There were at least five grinning kids between two and six years old filling the doorway. A voice from the kitchen called, "*Aaniin* -- come in and have a seat."

This was easier said than done, for every available chair was covered with toys, dogs or kids. Eventually, they wedged themselves between a sleeping dog and a small girl on the sofa. A minute later a large, elderly woman emerged from the kitchen and greeted them. Elsie Jackfish sure didn't look 80 years old to Ian. She knew the Professor from previous visits, and as they shook hands, he introduced Ian.

After some tea and sandwiches, Ian set up the tape recorder and prepared for the interview. The kids stared at him as if he had a bug on his face, but were extremely well behaved. Elsie told Ian they were some of her grandchildren, and she was taking care of them while their parents were "down south."

Jack excused himself, explaining that he had other business to deal with in the community. That left Ian facing Mrs. Jackfish over a tape recorder. She indicated that she was ready to proceed. He had a list of prepared questions and began with a bit of biographical data. Mrs. Jackfish told him her Ojibwa name, *Mino-Nodiniquae*.

Ian asked her what it meant and she said, "Gentle Wind Woman." She went on to tell him where she had been born: east of Berens River at Pauingassi, on Family Lake. She related some of her upbringing, including her time at the residential school in Winnipeg, and how she had become a healer. She answered Ian's questions slowly and with minimal embellishment. Her training in the healing arts had started at a very early age. Her mother had also been a well-known healer, and had taught Elsie how to collect and prepare a vast array of natural medicines. Elsie's knowledge of plants and their curative properties was encyclopaedic.

Ian tried to learn something of the practice of witchcraft, but she deftly deflected his questions with the statement that she was not involved in sorcery -- only healing. "Sorcerers do sorcery" -- end of discussion. The same thing happened when he brought up the *wabanowiwin* that had replaced the *midewiwin* in the Berens River region. When asked if she was a member, she simply said she was a *maskikiwinini*, or a "plant healing doctor."

When he asked if she was a *wabano* leader, she abruptly changed the topic and started telling him about some native remedies that had been discovered by her people, which were now in common usage in white society. Elsie gave him a sharp look when he tried to get back to the *wabanowiwin*, so he dropped the subject. The time passed very quickly, and with the Professor's arrival back at the house the session was over and it was time to board the return flight to Winnipeg.

Ian said goodbye to Mrs. Jackfish and all of the kids. He gave her the carton of cigarettes as thanks for granting the interview. He said goodbye in Ojibway, "*Gigawaabamin*." He also gave each of the kids a chocolate bar, which they took shyly with slight smiles. They had barely made a sound during the entire interview. As Ian and the professor turned to leave, Elsie called Ian back and handed him a small bag attached to a leather cord. "Take this, it may come in handy some day," was all she said. Ian used one of the few Ojibway words that he knew, "*miigwech*", the Ojibwa equivalent of aloha. She told Ian that he was welcome back anytime. He put the cord over his head and tucked the bag into his shirt.

Half the village was at the dock to wave goodbye as they boarded the Otter. Ian had a good two hours of recorded material and the Professor had his artifacts -- a successful field trip. They were soon winging their way south. The flight back was more direct, with only one other stop. Besides Jack and Ian, there were six adult natives from various Swampy Cree and Ojibwa villages on their way to Winnipeg, probably for sundry medical treatments at the General Hospital.

The two men chatted about their trip, and Jack was pleased with Ian's interview. He listened to some of it and made a few comments about the meaning of Mrs. Jackfish's answers. He was amused by Ian's lack of success when it came to the *wabanowiwin*. That topic was regarded as taboo, he told him. Even he had managed very little success in learning about its inner workings. He said the same was true when it came to sorcery, which many related to the *wabanowiwin*. Everyone knew that it still goes on, but no one will talk about it.

"I find that fascinating," Ian replied, "given that most Ojibwa are nominal Christians -- and there were two churches on the Pigeon River Reserve."

Jack smiled and said, "Well, although most are nominal Christians, having been plagued by missionaries and other proselytisers for centuries, many still believed in the old ways. They took from Christianity only those things that suited them."

"Did you know that Elsie had met Irving Hallowell when he was doing his field work at Berens River?" Ian asked. Hallowell was a famous American anthropologist who had spent many seasons doing ethnographic research among the Ojibwa living on the southeast shores of Lake Winnipeg.

"No, I didn't. That's very interesting. She must have been a young mother and an apprentice shaman at the time, because Hallowell was in the area in the late twenties and early thirties. I talked to him several times at conferences back in the early 1960s, and we exchanged some correspondence over the years. He was really caught up in Ojibwa sorcery. Some of his unpublished material is absolutely hair-raising. He actually took part in a shaking tent ceremony. He told me that it had taken him years to get over the experience. You should read his monograph, *The Role of Conjuring in Saulteaux Society*."

"I read it just last week, actually. For some reason I felt that he was holding back a lot of information. After all, the thing was only about a hundred pages long."

Jack only nodded in reply, so Ian continued describing his interview. "It seems that Elsie's Uncle, Antoine Bittern, was one of the sources that Hallowell refers to in his monograph. Elsie said that she found the book 'amusing.' Other than that, she refused to talk about any sorcery related topics."

Jack smiled knowingly. There was a lull in their conversation, so Ian made notes as the light faded, then turned his attention to the scene below -- a spectacular sunset over the lake's western shore.

Jack turned on his overhead light and asked, "Do you want to have a look at the artifacts I collected?"

"You bet!" Ian was eager to see the material, especially the medicine bag. The light spotlighted their activity and he could sense that the other passengers were watching them. Jack showed Ian a turtle shell rattle and a bone handled trade knife.

"What's that notebook?" he asked?

Jack picked up the small black book and said, "It's the personal journal of a Catholic missionary who worked in the area back in the early 1960s. Since it's written in French, I have no idea what, if any, significance it has. The fellow who sold me the artifacts simply included it as part of the deal."

He opened up the package containing the medicine bag. Ian commented on the bundle's large size. Jack said he suspected that it was likely very old, and had probably once belonged to a shaman or high-ranking *midé*.

What happened next would forever stand out as one of the weirdest events of Ian's life. When Jack handed him the bundle, which from the outside looked somewhat similar to a long bowling bag fashioned from some kind of animal skin, there was a collective intake of breath from the natives near them. Some loud conversation ensued, then there was a sudden rush to the back of the aircraft. The sudden shift in weight caused the Otter's nose to pitch up sharply. The pilot looked back through the door and yelled, "What the hell is going on back there?"

He turned on the cabin lights to reveal six panic-stricken Natives trying to open the door on the port side of the aircraft. That they were flying about 500 feet above the waters of Lake Winnipeg did not seem important, they were determined to get off -- right now!

The pilot was doing his best to control the plane, which had now entered a steep bank to the left, and was yelling at everyone to sit back down. It dawned on Ian that the others were afraid of something on board, and that the panic had started the moment the medicine bag had appeared.

"Get this bundle out of sight, Jack! It's scaring the crap out of them!"

Jack quickly shoved it back into the box with the other material. Since Ian was closest to them, he called to the terrified Natives, "It's okay now -- you have nothing to fear. Please go back to your seats. It's okay".

Slowly, their panic eased and they clawed their way back into their places. When the pilot finally regained control, he set the plane down on the lake, which was as calm as a millpond in the gathering dusk. When the Otter came to a complete stop and was gently rocking in its own wake, the pilot came back into

the cabin to check out the situation. Ian told him that the natives had reacted to the appearance of the bundle, but now that it was out of sight the situation had quieted down. The pilot was obviously quite shaken and visibly angry.

“Buckle your seat belts and remain seated for the rest of the flight,” was his terse command. He also advised Jack, “Keep that bloody thing under wraps -- or I’ll off-load the both of you on shore!” With that he went forward and within three minutes the Otter was airborne again. Six pairs of wide eyes were glued on Jack and Ian the whole way back.

They landed at St. Andrews about an hour later. The light was rapidly fading as the Otter taxied up to the dock. The instant the pilot opened the door, the six Natives grabbed their belongings and fled in a couple of taxis. As Jack and Ian got off, the pilot asked to accompany him up to the office. He had obviously radioed ahead, because there was a welcoming committee consisting of the airline manager and a RCMP corporal. They wanted to get to the bottom of the incident. It seemed that the pilot felt he had come very close to crashing and wished to file a report.

It took nearly an hour to clear the mess up, with Jack and Ian both giving statements. Jack showed the corporal the bundle, commenting that it must have some significance outside of its rather normal appearance. The Native passengers were long gone, so they could add nothing to explain the events. In a typically officious tone, the corporal stated that there might be further action. Of course, there never was, at least in the way he meant.

By the time they got back on the road to Winnipeg, it was late and both men were exhausted. Jack dropped Ian off at his apartment on River Avenue just before 10 p.m. It had been quite a day.

The next morning Ian called Jack and they arranged to meet at the Anthropology lab around noon. When he arrived at the lab, Jack had already placed the medicine bag on a table and was preparing to open it. He had a camera and lighting system set up, as well as a tape recorder and a notebook. He told Ian that he suspected the bundle must have belonged to a shaman. The only way he could confirm this would be to open it and examine its contents. Ian, being a naive graduate student, agreed -- and besides, he was brimming with curiosity about what could have frightened the natives on board the plane so profoundly.

Jack took several photos of the decorative beadwork on the outer bag. The image was of some sort of anthropomorphic character with upraised hands, a horned headdress, and what appeared to be coiled snake for a torso. Jack suggested that it might represent “Skyman” or perhaps *Nanaboujou*, who was supposed to have founded the Medicine Society, but he wasn’t sure.

Then they opened the bundle to reveal several “packages” wrapped in various kinds of cloth, bark and leather. Several loose objects were also visible -- four small wooden figurines, a metal tube, a plain pipe made of red pipestone, a rawhide bag containing many cowrie shells or *miigiis*, two dried creatures that Ian guessed were toads, what looked like an old roll of birch bark, several small bundles of dried plants. As they removed each object, Jack photographed it and Ian wrote down its tentative identification in a notebook.

After processing about a dozen objects, Jack removed a small, extremely well crafted birch bark box. Because of its weight he knew there was something inside.

Curious, he lifted off the lid. They both gasped, for inside was a perfectly preserved human foetus. Jack knew and Ian guessed at what they were dealing with. This medicine bundle must definitely have belonged to a sorcerer. Talk about bad karma. The hair on the back of Ian's neck was standing on end, and Jack was staring open-mouthed at the tiny body. They both knew that such bundles were believed to possess an immense amount of power "*Manitou*."

Without saying a word, they quickly began placing the objects back into the bag in the order they had been removed. When the bundle had been restored to its original condition, Jack put it in a cardboard box and taped it shut. He placed it on a shelf in the lab, and then began gathering up his notes and camera equipment. Ian helped him with the gear, and within minutes they were out of the lab and back in Jack's office.

Ian couldn't explain what he was feeling as he sat in the office. It was certainly fear, but at some primordial level that he had never felt before. Jack was ashen and could barely speak, so Ian knew that he was in the same state. "How the hell did you get your hands on such a thing?" Ian asked weakly.

It took Jack a few moments to answer. "I received a letter from a fellow who said his name was Norman Beaudreau, and that he lived in Pigeon River. He said he had a few things that had belonged to his recently deceased father, and that they were for sale. I jumped at the chance to get the medicine bag and made him an offer. He accepted and that was why we made the trip. I arranged the interview with Elsie to justify taking an assistant along."

"I think this thing should go back to the reserve," Ian said. "Perhaps Elsie should have it."

"I don't think Elsie would touch it with a ten-foot pole," replied Jack. "Besides I have an idea what it is. I've heard rumours over the years about a very powerful medicine bag, a midéwayan that disappeared back in the sixties. It went missing from a medicine lodge belonging to the *Midéwiwin* Society on Lake of the Woods. It had something to do with the "*Wendigo*" and was widely thought to be extremely dangerous. Now I know why Beaudreau advised me not to show it to anyone in the village."

"Great!" Ian exclaimed. "It's no wonder the people on the plane went nuts. They recognized it and figured they were doomed. Maybe you should turn it over to the RCMP -- there might be a report of its theft. Then it could go back to whomever it belongs to. All I know is, the bloody thing gives me the creeps."

They left it at that and Ian went home.

As the term continued, Ian worked on his thesis, the first draft of which was due by the end of the first term. Using the material he had obtained from Mrs. Jackfish, plus some other information from the library and department collection, he had no trouble putting together a reasonable account of present-day Ojibwa religious practices. Virtually everything an Ojibwa did required a rite or offering of some kind, therefore, ceremonies, sacrifices and taboos were common. In their view, all things, whether animate or inanimate, possessed *Manitou* or spirit power. Ojibwa religion is also rich in supernatural characters and legends. Some of the more interesting and better-known characters in their spirit world include the Great Spirit, *Gichi Manidoo*; *Mikinak*, the Great Turtle and *Nanabush*, a culture hero. More ominous was the *Wendigo*, a cannibalistic monster that was said to

travel above the treetops on “feet of fire.” Ian decided that the entire pantheon was as diverse and fascinating as any from Classical Greece.

Much of their religion the Ojibwa shared with other Algonquian speaking cultures, such as their immediate neighbours to the North, the Swampy Cree. In the Lake of the Woods area, a secret society known as the *Midéwiwin* or Grand Medicine Society persisted. In other areas, it had either died out or been replaced by the *Wabanowiwin*, which many linked to the practice of sorcery. So secret was this society that even today little is known about it, other than a few brief anthropological accounts.

The Ojibwa, like all other Algonquians, had an abiding and deep fear of witchcraft. All misfortune and illness were blamed on acts of sorcery. Every person strove always to ward off the harmful effects of witchcraft, and so carried a variety of amulets and charms. The medicine bags of shamans and sorcerers were believed to possess a great amount of *Manitou*.

At Jack’s insistence, Ian did not mention the medicine bag that he had collected at Pigeon River. In fact, they both thought it prudent to try forgetting the incident entirely. Ian didn’t think Jack had even read his thesis, for when he returned it there was only one comment: “Excellent work, JE.” There was not one word on any of the other pages. Ian had expected to see a blizzard of red marks. Oh well, he wasn’t going to question his good fortune. He hoped the rest of his thesis committee would share Jack’s enthusiasm for his work.

His other studies kept him quite busy, and after a while he managed to erase the events of the “field trip from hell” from his mind. Other than a few strange dreams, there didn’t seem to be any after-effects of the encounter with the medicine bundle from Pigeon River.

It was about a month after the end of term in June when Ian paid a visit to Jack’s office. He was actually there to say goodbye, because he was leaving for another university to continue his doctoral studies that fall and probably wouldn’t see the professor again. They talked about his plans, and Jack suggested a few colleagues for Ian to contact in the coming year. He then handed him a thick manila envelope. “You might find this interesting. I had my secretary make you a copy.” Inside the envelope was a photocopy of the French missionary’s journal that he had obtained along with the other material from Norman Beaudreau. “Your French is a lot better than mine, so you can probably make more sense of it than I can.”

Ian thanked him, and for some reason asked if he had ever returned the bundle or found out where it had come from. Jack said that he had contacted the police, and they had no report on file of any such theft. He had also sent inquiries to various people in Native communities in the Kenora area and elsewhere, but had heard nothing. Therefore, the bundle was still sitting in an unmarked storage box in the Anthropology lab. Jack added that the only clue he had found about the bundle’s origin was in a clipping from the daily newspaper in Kenora, Ontario, dated sometime in July 1963. The details were sketchy, but the article mentioned that an American university student had turned up dead, and that several important objects of “local cultural significance” were missing. The OPP (Ontario Provincial Police) was investigating. There was no follow-up to the original article, so he assumed the investigation had gone nowhere. There was one name

mentioned, Daniel Kukisew, the spokesman for the local band council. It was he who had reported the missing objects.

Ian mulled over what Jack had said, and felt sure that Jack was right about one of those missing objects probably being the bundle now sitting in his lab. He came out of his reverie and said, "I'm driving to Lake of the Woods next week for a couple of days. My uncle has organized some sort of family gathering and fishing trip at his cottage on Clearwater Bay. It's only a few miles to Kenora from there, so I could nose around a bit and find out if anyone has any knowledge about Daniel Kukisew or the bundle."

"That sounds like a plan," said Jack. "Be careful who you approach for information, though. The local Natives are very touchy about subjects like the *Midéwiwin* and medicine bags. You could get yourself into a lot of hot water if you end up in the wrong place asking the wrong questions. Give me the number there in case something comes up. Take along these pictures of the bundle. See if anyone recognizes it." With that he handed Ian the envelope containing the photos.

Chapter 2

The second prophet told the people, "You will know the Second Fire because at this time the nation will be camped by a large body of water. In this time the direction of the Sacred Shell will be lost. The Midewiwin will diminish in strength; a boy will be born to point the way back to the traditional ways. He will show the direction to the stepping stones to the future of the Anishinabe people."

Along with Ian's uncle, many Winnipeggers enjoyed summer cottages on Lake of the Woods. This huge recreational area in North-western Ontario is a complex mixture of lakes, islands and rivers with hundreds of miles of shoreline, much of which is taken up with private summer homes. There are also large areas of park, wilderness and Indian reserve. The southern portion of the area is in Minnesota. Other than tourism, the main industries in the region are forestry, mining and fishing.

Ian's uncle's cottage was close to the town of Keewatin, just west of Kenora. Access to his place, on an island 5 km south of town, was by boat only. In fact, given the nature of the area, boats replaced cars for most travel during the open water season, and snowmobiles replaced boats in the winter.

On the Friday after his meeting with Jack, Ian made the three-hour drive east to the small marina on Norman Bay, just off Ontario Highway 17. When he got there, he phoned the cottage and about 20 minutes later his cousin, Jerry, arrived at the dock to pick him up. As they shook hands, Jerry reported, "Your Mom and Dad are already here."

He helped load Ian's gear into his boat, then Ian untied the bow and stern ropes and pushed them out from the float. He joined his cousin on the front seat of the 14 foot runabout, and they headed out into the maze of islands and channels.

Jerry made navigating through the treacherous confusion of reefs, shallow channels and uncharted rocks look easy. He had spent every summer at the cottage for almost his entire life and knew the area as well as anyone.

“How’s the fishing this year?” Ian asked, knowing that there was only one species of fish that had any status as far as Jerry was concerned -- muskellunge.

“Great! I’ve already hooked six muskies and landed two. One over 25 pounds.”

“What about walleye?”

“Not many monsters this year, but there are zillions of two-pounders.” Jerry shared Ian’s zeal for fishing and looked forward to spending some quality time with him. He was two years older than Ian, but his red hair and freckled face belied his 25 years.

“Great! I want to take a mess of walleye fillets back with me.”

“No problem, we’ll get up early tomorrow and head down to Reedy Bay. You can pound walleye and smallmouth from the rocks and I’ll troll up a couple of muskies from the reef out front.”

As they passed the cottages scattered along the shoreline, Ian marvelled at the ingenuity of various cottage builders who had managed to construct some really amazing dwellings in some very remote locations. His uncle’s cottage was no exception, having been constructed high on a solid rock slope. The entire structure was supported by an array of footings and trusses. From the dock there was a series of steps snaking up the slope. Ian’s back still twinged when he recalled helping lug a refrigerator up there the previous summer.

When they arrived, the entire clan was sitting on the deck 40 steps above the dock, enjoying the sunset while sipping various beverages and barbecuing burgers.

“Hey, college boy!” called Uncle Frank, “What could possibly pry you away from the books? Isn’t fishing a little too low class for you intellectual types?”

“I like to get out occasionally and study primitive cultures like this, and learn about their subsistence patterns.” Ian spoke without a trace of humour, but the twinkle in his eyes gave him away. This kind of exchange had been going on since his relatives had learned that he was studying Anthropology.

They spent the evening bantering about fishing and catching up on what had happened in each other’s lives. Ian related some of the “medicine bag” story to his cousin and uncle, and asked if they knew Daniel Kukisew or anyone connected to the local tribal council. Uncle Frank said that he had worked with a Tom Kukisew at the paper mill in Sioux Lookout many years before. Maybe Daniel was a close relative? He volunteered to give him a call the next day and find out what he could. With that they all headed off to bed. The 4 a.m. call to head out fishing was only a few hours away.

That night Ian did not sleep well, and had several dreams so vivid that he felt compelled to note them in his journal. His cousin, with whom he was sharing a room, asked groggily, “What the hell are you scribbling at two in the morning?”

“Oh, nothing, just an idea for a muskie plug.” He turned out the light. “Goodnight.”

Jerry just moaned in reply.

In what seemed about two minutes later, someone was kicking Ian’s bed and telling him to get up. It was still dark as he climbed into his clothes and stumbled

into the kitchen for breakfast. The others were already halfway through their bacon and eggs. "Just juice and coffee for me," he mumbled.

"Bullshit!" roared his uncle. "You'll eat a decent breakfast or you won't be going anywhere this morning."

As appealing as passing on fishing and going back to bed sounded, Ian acquiesced and wolfed down two eggs along with some bacon and toast -- the great Canadian Heart Association breakfast. Aunt Gwen had prepared lunches and Thermos jugs of coffee the night before. There was a note on the door reminding them not to forget them -- or else.

Uncle Frank and his father headed down to the dock. It wasn't long before Jerry and Ian heard them warming up their outboard motor, then they watched them pull away from the dock and head toward the latest in an endless series of "honey holes" that Uncle Frank had discovered.

Jerry and Ian weren't far behind. They got into Jerry's boat, retrieved the minnow bucket from under the dock, and were soon threading their way between the islands on the way to Reedy Bay. It took almost an hour to get there and, as usual, Ian was amazed at how his cousin could navigate through such a maze in the dim moonlight. By the time the bay was in sight, the first hint of dawn had started silhouetting the trees along the shoreline. A loon called from nearby. The rush of cool air past Ian's face had refreshed him, and he was fully alert and into fishing mode.

Jerry eased the boat up to a rocky face at the north end of the bay. Ian got out and Jerry handed him his tackle and lunch. "Work your way along that point over there and fish the drop-off. The walleyes hang on the south slope and the smallmouth hold tight to the rocks. There are even a few pike lurking in the weeds. I'll work along the reef and see if I can tease up a muskie or two. I'll catch up with you around lunchtime. See you." With that, he motored slowly toward the sunken reef located about 200 metres out in the bay.

Jerry had left him with a live bait bucket containing about four dozen minnows, so he decided to go after walleyes immediately. One of his favourite techniques was to use a small lead head jig suspended below a float, with a live minnow attached through its lips. In minutes he was rigged up, then adjusted the float so his jig would just touch bottom. From past experience he knew that the water was between eight and 10 feet deep, and the bottom was made up of gravel and small rocks. Only a few feet beyond was a drop-off into relatively deep water and a submerged weed bed. Walleyes cruised the drop-off in schools, looking for forage fish.

He cast out about 75 feet from shore, then started working his jig by giving short tugs on the line, causing the minnow and jig to undulate slowly along the bottom. He always had tremendous success using this technique, and this day was no exception. Wham! -- the line tightened as a fish grabbed his jig. From the bend in his rod he knew that it was no smallmouth. The fish dug for deep water, but he kept up the pressure and in a couple of minutes had netted a three-pound walleye. Not a bad start.

Ian put it on the stringer, then suspended the stringer in the lake. Within an hour, the first walleye had acquired six companions, so he started high grading. Each time he caught a fish larger than the smallest one on the stringer, he

replaced it. In this way he would end up with a limit of good-sized walleyes. As the surface water was cool, the released fish quickly darted away, seemingly none the worse for wear aside from a small hole in their jaw from the hook and a slightly larger one from the stringer snap.

Around 10 o'clock, Ian took a break as the fishing slackened off. The walleyes had probably moved out into deeper water as he had caught only a few rock bass in a while, so he packed it in so he could conserve the minnows. The day had turned out warm and sunny with only a slight breeze rippling the water. The previous night's lack of sleep suddenly caught up with him, and a nap seemed appropriate. There were some large boulders near the end of the point, so he picked one that appeared to be flat on top and angled perfectly, then climbed up onto it.

He had a good view of his cousin's efforts as he trolled back and forth along the reef. So far he hadn't heard any screams of either ecstasy or frustration, so assumed that the muskies were living up to their reputation for being difficult. He lowered himself and stretched out on his back, using his rolled jacket as a pillow. To his right, the rock face rose over 50 feet, relatively flat and almost featureless.

As his gaze drifted over the granite surface, he noticed something unusual -- there was some sort of pattern painted on the rock. In fact, as he looked closer, he could see that almost the entire surface of the rock face was covered with shapes and patterns, most hidden by lichens and moss -- it was a pictograph site. Suddenly, the shapes seemed to jump out at him. He could see strange animals, human figures with upraised arms, turtles, birds and geometric shapes. One large figure looked like a bear, but it was wearing some sort of headdress and had a concentric spiral where its chest should be.

Holy smokes! Ian thought, realizing that he had dreamed about this very figure just last night, and had sketched it in his notebook. He knew exactly what it was. This was not good. He had never been much of a believer in coincidence, and felt sure there had to be some explanation that would connect his dream and the pictograph on the rock -- where he *just happened* to be fishing. He also remembered that a very similar symbol had been sewn on the medicine bag he and Jack had opened in his lab. As they say, his "spider sense" began to tingle. Something definitely weird was happening.

Just then his cousin called out, "You giving up?"

"No. Just taking a break from hauling in fish."

"Sure!" scoffed Jerry as he nosed his boat ashore nearby and hopped onto the rocks. Ian clambered down from his perch and helped pull the bow up on shore. He quit scoffing when Ian showed him the stringer. "Holy cow! A couple of those fish must go over three pounds."

Usually, the fishing banter would come thick and fast, but Ian had been shaken up a bit by the image painted on the rock face. He asked Jerry if he knew about the site.

"Oh sure, this island is known as Spirit Rock. The local Indians avoid it like the plague. That's one of the reasons the fishing's so good around here. They won't even drop a net within a mile of here. This point is shown on some maps as an historic site. Just over there, see that island to the south? the one that looks like a big turtle? that's Witch Island, and they hold ceremonies there in the summer."

“What kind of ceremonies?”

“I don’t have a clue, but there is one hell of a lot of drumming and singing. You can hear it for miles.”

Ian thought it must be the site of the Midéwiwin but didn’t mention this to Jerry. Besides, he was suddenly hungry, so they ate lunch together and enjoyed the warm sun.

Muskie fishing had lost its appeal, so Jerry joined Ian on the point and together they put together a couple of limits of very respectable walleyes. Around 3 p.m. they headed back to the cottage. Their fathers were already there and enjoying a cold beer on the deck. Ian and Jerry climbed up with their cooler full of fish. The older men were impressed, but didn’t have much to show for their own efforts. They, of course, both swore that they had thrown everything back under 10 pounds. Ian guessed that their new “secret hole” was yet another in an endless series of Uncle Frank’s washouts.

Jerry suggested that they head back to Spirit Rock, where he and Ian had been so successful. Uncle Frank looked genuinely shocked. “Didn’t I tell you to stay clear of that place? If you’re spotted there the local Natives might get a bit excited.”

Jerry replied that he and Ian hadn’t seen another soul all day, not even a boat passing in the distance.

Uncle Frank was still grumpy. He recalled that the police had found the body of an American college student floating near Witch Island some years earlier, maybe around the early 1960s. There had been a lot of speculation about the case, and ever since most people had avoided the area.

Ian mentioned the pictographs, and the possible connection to both his dream and the medicine bag back in the University of Winnipeg Anthropology lab. His father thought that he was getting a bit too obsessed with Native superstition, and Uncle Frank simply called it a bunch of “mumbo jumbo bullshit.” However, the conversation had one positive point, it reminded Uncle Frank that he had promised to call his old friend, Tom Kukisew, to get a line on Daniel, so he went inside the cottage to make the call.

Jerry and Ian’s father started discussing whether it was wise to continue fishing in the area of Spirit Rock. Jerry, of course, loved the area. Why not? The fishing was great. Despite this obvious fact, Ian knew that he would rather fish elsewhere. His father was ambivalent. His attitude was that as long as it was legal he would do it. He even suggested going back there for the evening bite. For some reason, Ian had a strong feeling that it would be unwise to do so and made his feeling known.

“Are you turning into some kind of superstitious nutcase?” asked his cousin. “Before you got involved in this Anthropology business you would have crawled over broken glass during a piss storm to get fishing like you had today at Reedy Bay.”

Before Ian could reply, Uncle Frank came back outside. He said that he had talked to his old workmate, and that Tom was indeed related to Daniel Kukisew -- who his older brother, in fact. He said that he told him of Ian’s interest in talking to Daniel, and he agreed to pass the message on to his brother. Uncle Frank looked straight at Ian and said, “You know, it’s very strange, but I got the

impression that Tom knew that you were coming. So don't be surprised if you get a call from his brother."

The feeling that something strange was going on became even stronger when the phone inside the cottage rang. A moment later, Aunt Gwen called down to the dock, "Ian, there's a call for you."

His legs felt leaden as he climbed up the stairs to take the call. "Hello," he answered weakly.

"Ian, it's Jack Elias. How are things going there?"

Ian was so relieved that he stammered, "Jack, thank God it's you!" He hadn't really meant to sound so dramatic, but couldn't help feeling relieved that it wasn't Daniel Kukisew on the other end.

"Why? What's happened up there?"

Ian gave him a capsule summary of his dream, the pictographs, and the fact that his visit had apparently been anticipated.

Jack laughed. "That's why I phoned. I wanted to tell you that I called Daniel Kukisew myself, and I told him that you would be in touch."

"How did you get his number?"

"I called Directory Assistance in Kenora and they had a current listing for him."

Ian felt like a complete idiot for not having done so himself and said so. But he also felt relieved.

"Don't worry about it. Anyway, here's his number. I think you should call and arrange a meeting. He's very interested in seeing the photos of the bundle, and thinks it might be part of the stuff that went missing back in the sixties."

Ian explained how his uncle had contacted his friend, Tom. "So his brother is going to relay my message, and I'm sure he's going to call."

"Okay. Just don't wait too long. I sensed something in Daniel's voice. I can't put my finger on it, but I sensed some kind of urgency."

Ian was not keen on doing so, but promised to call the number Jack gave him before dinnertime. "I'll let you know what happens," he promised as he hung up. He just about jumped out of his skin as the phone rang the moment the handset hit the cradle. He snatched it back up. "Hello!"

"Ian Stewart, please." said a low voice on the other end.

"Speaking," Ian croaked.

"Ian, this is Daniel Kukisew. I spoke to your friend, Dr. Elias, and he suggested that I get in touch with you. He said you had some pictures of some stolen property that might have come from around here."

Ian had regained his composure and replied, "I was just about to call you. Yes, Dr. Elias is interested in returning a medicine bag that he thinks may have been stolen from the Kenora area a few years back. Since I was coming out here to do some fishing, it seemed logical to show the photos to someone related to the original story. Your name had come up in the newspaper back then."

"Yes," replied Daniel. "I was a spokesman for the Band Council back then. The whole thing got very mixed up with a death happening at the same time. The police decided a dead American tourist was more important than a few missing artifacts. We hadn't heard a thing about the subject until Dr. Elias called. I find it strange that an anthropologist would want to return anything to the people it came from. That hasn't been our experience in the past."

Ooh, low blow, Ian thought, but true. He suggested that rather than continue their conversation on the telephone, they meet in person so he could show him the photos. Daniel agreed and proposed that they meet at the public wharf in Kenora the next morning at 10 o'clock.

"Sure, that sounds great. Ten tomorrow it is. How will I recognize you?"

"Don't worry, I'll know who you are. Goodbye." With that the line went dead.

How in the hell will he know me, Ian wondered? Then he realized that he had no way to get to town the next morning. He rejoined the others on the deck and related the gist of the two calls.

Uncle Frank suggested that Ian take his boat to Kenora, and they would fish with Jerry. "Besides, you'll probably be back by early afternoon, then we can all head out for the evening bite."

Ian asked him to describe the best route to take. "Head due north once you clear the channel marker at the east end of Coney Island, turn east and follow the mid-channel markers. You can see Kenora from there if it's clear, in fact you can probably see the smoke from the paper mill from ten miles away. Just aim for that."

His father, uncle and Jerry decided to head back out to do some more fishing, but Ian opted out so he could fillet his walleyes. After he was through, he put the fillets in some empty milk cartons and filled them with water. His aunt placed the cartons in her freezer. This was a sure way to keep the fish fresh for an unlimited period, and there was nothing like a feed of pan-fried walleye in the middle of winter.

Ian spent the early evening playing hearts with his mother and aunt. After they had relieved him of all of his change, he begged off cards and went to his room. There, he pulled out the photos of the bundle and put them in his jacket pocket so he would be sure to have them for his meeting. He remembered that he had also brought along the copy of the priest's journal that Jack had collected at Pigeon River.

He pulled it out of the manila envelope and began reading. He was soon wishing that he had brought along his *Cassel's French-English Dictionary*. Although the priest's handwriting was quite legible and his French simple and terse, the quality of the photocopy was mediocre at best.

It seems that this Oblate Brother had begun life as Henri Laviolette in a small village west of Quebec City on the Gulf of St. Lawrence. He had started his seminary training in Montreal when he was in his late teens. His inspiration to spread the word of God among the Native people had come from reading of another Oblate, Brother Leach, who had spent decades among the Ojibwa of Berens River. After receiving his Orders, Brother Laviolette had requested a mission among the Ojibwa as well.

Travelling to Winnipeg in the late 1950s, he had spent some time in St. Boniface learning the Ojibwa language. It seems that this process had taken longer than expected. Ojibway, like all Algonkian languages, was difficult for most whites to master. Nevertheless, after two years he felt ready to head north and take the word of God to the people. He arranged to spend the winter of 1962 at Berens River, and then begin his work with a band of Ojibwa who had a summer fishing camp a few miles north of Sassaginagak Lake. Brother Leach knew the *oginaa* or leader of the

group of five families who made up the camp. The *oginaa* had no objection to the young priest living among them, but with the stipulation that he care for himself. Since that was the Oblate way, there would be no problem.

Ian was about to put the journal away when he heard a commotion in the kitchen. Apparently the fishermen had returned. His cousin crashed into the room. He was totally pumped. "Man! You picked a bad time to pass on a chance to fish. We went back to Reedy Bay and hooked three muskies. Two got off, but the one we brought to the boat weighted close to thirty pounds. What a monster! Your Dad got a couple of big walleyes as well. That muskie was something!"

Ian followed his cousin back to the kitchen. He did regret not seeing the battle with a big muskie. He asked, "Where is it, down at the boat?"

"Are you kidding?" Jerry exclaimed incredulously. "I'd never kill a muskie. We measured its length and girth while it was still in the water, then let it go."

"Sorry. I know that you'd never kill one. Christ, I haven't been able to think straight since this medicine bundle issue came up."

"So I noticed. My advice is to let this professor guy and Dan whatsisname sort it out and get the hell out of the loop."

"I agree, and tomorrow morning I'm going to tell Mr. Kukisew to deal directly with Dr. Elias. Once I show him the photos, my involvement with this stuff is done."

Ian's father and uncle chimed in with sentiments similar to Jerry's, but the talk quickly turned back to fishing. That's what "muskie fever" does to serious fishermen. Uncle Frank even

unearthed a couple of ancient wooden muskie plugs that were almost a foot long. They should have been in some fishing museum, but he was determined to use them to catch the "biggest goddam muskie ever hauled out of these waters."

The three of them made plans to return to the Reedy Bay area the next morning while Ian was in Kenora. The prospect of another muskie and some limits of walleye had put them all in an advanced state of excitement. They headed down to the boat to check their gear and prepare for the predawn assault. Ian yearned to go with them but was obligated to meet with Daniel Kukisew. Oh well, it was late, so he headed to bed and for a change fell immediately into a deep sleep.

Chapter 3

The third prophet said to the people, "In the Third Fire, the Anishinabe will find the path to their chosen ground, a land in the west to which they must move their families. This will be the land where food grows on water.

By the time Ian woke up the sun was shining brightly. The fishing expedition had departed hours earlier without disturbing him. His mother and aunt were already out on the deck enjoying the warm morning sun and drinking coffee.

“Welcome back to life, sleepyhead,” joked Aunt Gwen, “Jerry thought you might have joined the ‘spirit world.’ He said that he tried to wake you up earlier, but you didn’t even twitch.”

“I must have been more tired than I thought. What time is it?”

“It’s just after 8. You have time for some breakfast before you should head into Kenora. By the way, your Mom and I have decided to tag along for the ride. I want to pick up a few groceries and look in a couple of the shops.”

That was fine with him. At least his aunt knew the route well and would make sure they got there on time. He had no reason to believe that his meeting with Daniel Kukisew would take very long, so they decided to meet for lunch at noon and then head back to the cottage in the early afternoon.

With the water barely rippled by a slight southerly breeze, the trip into town was pleasant. A virtual flotilla of other watercraft was also headed in the same direction. Sunday drivers, Ian thought to himself. They arrived about 10 minutes early for the 10 a.m. meeting, which was good as Ian had trouble finding a spot to tie up the boat. Eventually he nosed his way into the public dock, whereupon the women immediately headed up the wharf and into town. He was just finishing tying off the bow rope when a voice from behind said, “Ian Stewart?”

Ian turned and found he was facing a heavy set, elderly native whose dark face was quite wrinkled from years of exposure to sun and cold. He wore a green plaid mackinaw jacket and a matching cap. His steady gaze and dark, twinkling eyes transfixed Ian. Before he had a chance to respond, the man asked, “Did you dream last night?”

“Not that I remember,” he replied. “You must be Mr. Kukisew.” Ian held out his hand and had it engulfed by a set of fingers that felt like steel cable.

“Good, that means that your Manitou is strong. Do you have protection?”

This conversation is getting weirder by the second, Ian thought, his hand still enveloped in the vise-like grip. “Protection?” he asked.

“Yes, you must have something that is keeping you safe.”

“Safe from what, Mr. Kukisew?” Now he was totally confused.

“Call me Dan. Let’s go have a coffee. You’re buying.” With that he let go of Ian’s hand and turned away and walked quickly from the dock, turning impatiently to wave Ian after him. He had to have been at least 70 years old, but Ian had trouble keeping up with him. He seemed to know every person that they passed, both white and Native, greeting all by name and shaking hands with several. He obviously doesn’t use the “grip of steel” on everyone, Ian thought as he flexed his fingers.

Daniel was waiting for him at the entrance of the Kanata Café, just up the hill from the government wharf. It was packed with tourists, but Daniel made his way to the back of the restaurant. When they reached the very back corner, the big man sat down with two young Native men. They greeted Daniel warmly and looked Ian over carefully before shaking hands. A waitress appeared to take their orders. “What can I get you, Dan?”

“Just coffee for me,” he said. “What would you like, Ian?”

“The same thanks.” He turned to Daniel and said, “I’m amazed that we found a seat -- this place is packed.”

“Let’s just say that I made a reservation,” Daniel said with a chuckle. “Now tell me about the *midéwayan*.”

Ian was just reaching for the envelope containing the photos when Daniel stopped him. “I wouldn’t do that in here. You don’t know who might be watching. Just give me a description.”

“Okay,” Ian said, sliding the envelope back into his jacket. “The bundle looks like an otter skin and is about two feet long. There is some beadwork on the outside. It might be the image of a shaman because the figure has its hands raised and is wearing some kind of headdress. Does that sound like the missing bundle?”

“Perhaps. Did you happen to look inside?”

“Yes, we opened it and removed several things.”

“Did you see anything strange?”

“At first, no. There was a pipe, some dried plants, a wooden carving, a bag of miigiis shells, a birch bark scroll and a little box. It was what was inside the box that gave the professor and me a fright.”

“A birch bark scroll? That’s strange. As for the ‘little one,’ do you know what it was?”

Ian was surprised that he knew about the tiny body. “Yes, it was a human foetus. After we saw it, we put everything back into the bundle and stored it away. We were both quite shaken up. Since you know about its contents, this must be the bundle that went missing.”

Daniel was looking intently at Ian and took a few seconds to reply. Then he leaned over the table and said very quietly, “Yes, this is one of the missing *midéwayans*. It is a very powerful thing. It belonged to a mighty shaman from the Shoal Lake Indian band. Before that, it had belonged to his grandfather, a man named *Kwewesansish*, who moved from Red Lake in Minnesota. He was known to be a great healer. Do you know where the other *midéwayan* is? That one is very dangerous. It belonged to a sorcerer thought to be a bear walker.”

“No, Dr. Elias only acquired the one bundle at Pigeon River. There might be other bundles there, but they weren’t offered for sale.”

“Do you have anything that can protect you?” asked Daniel.

Ian was wearing the amulet that Elsie had given him. Perhaps Daniel meant that? He pulled it out from inside his shirt. “Do you mean something like this?” He told Daniel that Elsie Jackfish had given it to him at Pigeon River.

“How is Elsie? I knew her late husband well.”

Ian said that she looked great considering her age, and was as sharp as a tack mentally. Daniel reached for the amulet and almost put his hand on it, but suddenly pulled back. He looked quickly around and stood up, leaving his coffee half finished. “Let’s get out of here. Don’t forget to pay.” He turned and briskly made his way to the door, where he waited outside as Ian paid the cashier.

“We are going for a drive,” Daniel said. “There’s someone I want you to meet.”

“I’m supposed to meet my mother and my aunt at noon.”

“Don’t worry, we’ll be back in plenty of time, we’re only going a couple of miles out of town.” He led the way into the alley behind the café and got into a blue Ford pickup truck. Ian got in the other side, and as Daniel turned the ignition, he noticed the two men whom they had sat with in the café. They were looking down the alley toward Daniel’s truck. One waved them forward while the other seemed

to be watching behind them. Daniel gave them a nod as he drove out of the alley and onto the street. The two men got in their own truck and followed at a distance.

“Why are those guys following us?” Ian asked.

“What guys? Oh, you mean my nephews. They must be going to the same place we are.”

“Where’s that?” Ian was starting to get a little nervous.

“Don’t worry, we’re going to a friend’s house just east of town. She can help us with this problem. By the way, did anyone else besides you and the professor see the *midéwayan*?”

“Yes,” Ian replied. “Some people on the plane coming down from Pigeon River, including the pilot.” He told Daniel of the reaction of the other passengers when they spotted the bundle.

“They would have been very frightened to see such a powerful thing. They must have seen that you were protected -- and that’s the reason you didn’t crash.”

“That’s true. I was wearing Elsie’s amulet around my neck, and I was able to calm everyone down. Why, did anyone from the plane talk about the incident?”

“No, I haven’t heard a word about it until now. That doesn’t surprise me, though. Let me see the photos.”

Ian passed them to him one by one. He glanced at each one while still driving, nodded, and then handed it back. “Here we are.” Daniel turned off Highway 17 and down a narrow dirt road with barely enough room between the birch trees for his truck to pass. Ian looked behind and saw that the truck driven by Daniel’s “nephews” had stationed itself across the entrance, effectively blocking the road.

They drove for another 10 minutes until they reached the rear of a beautiful log cabin. Daniel parked and they walked around to the front. The cabin was situated on a small lake and seemed to be the only one around. It was a great spot and Ian asked Daniel who owned it.

“It belongs to my daughter, Swan. She’s a police constable in Kenora. That should make you feel better.” Daniel was making fun of his obvious nervousness.

“Why all this cloak and dagger stuff?” Ian asked.

“Because you might be in great danger.” The answer to Ian’s question came not from Daniel but from a young woman who had just come out onto the front porch. “Hi, I’m Swan Kukisew, you must be Ian Stewart. How has my father been treating you?”

Ian shook her hand and noted that she shared both her father’s twinkling dark eyes and a very firm grip. She also took her time in releasing his hand. He felt something like electricity pass through him, but wrote it off to being touched by such a beautiful woman. Swan, who looked to be in her early twenties, was dressed in a buckskin shirt and blue jeans. She had her jet-black hair tied in braids that were decorated with beadwork and feather bands. Ian was almost too overwhelmed to speak, but managed to croak out, “Hi, he’s been great ... ah ... what danger?”

“Don’t worry,” said Daniel with a laugh. “Swan has the same effect on most men she meets. She got her good looks from her mother, and her brains from me.” He turned to Swan. “What news from our friends in town?”

"I'm not so sure about the 'brains,' Dad." Was it the missing *midéwayan*? I don't think you should have brought Ian here and got him involved." *Manitou* and can help us return the *midéwayan* to safety."

Ian did not like being on the outside of this particular conversation and was about to say so when Swan turned and transfixed him with a dazzling smile. "My Dad is a very good judge of character, and if he trusts you, so do I. The danger I spoke of comes from some people who want to get their hands on this medicine bag. They believe it has great power, and they will do anything to get it, including hurting anyone who happens to get in their way. It's very important that they don't find out where it is. They could get that information from you, which is why you're in danger."

"How do they know I have any information about the bag? The only people that I've talked to in town are you and your Dad."

"We believe that Dad's being watched, and that he's followed wherever he goes. They probably saw you with him in town. I'm sure you'll be followed when you leave."

"Speaking of leaving, I really should be getting back to town. I'm meeting with my Mom and Aunt for lunch, and then we're heading back to the cottage."

"I don't think that's such a good idea," said Swan. "I don't want them to find out where you're staying. Others might be placed in danger as well. I suggest that you write a note telling them that you have decided to stay in town for the afternoon, and that you will get a ride back to the cottage later. I'll give you my number here so that they can call. I'll have one of my cousins deliver the message. Where were you meeting them and when?"

"At the Kenora Inn at noon."

"Can either of them operate the boat?"

"My aunt -- better than me."

"Good, I'll pop inside and get some writing paper. What would you like for lunch? I have some fresh walleye that I caught this morning -- if you're interested?"

Interested! Call him crazy, but the idea of eating walleye filets with the most beautiful woman he had even met was absolutely mind-boggling. Why, it could possibly be the greatest thing that had ever happened to him.

During this exchange, Daniel had been watching him with a big grin on his face. When Swan had gone inside, he said. "I think she likes you. She doesn't have much to do with men -- especially white men."

"Why's that? She could have her pick of any man on the planet. Besides she's a cop. How could she not have much to do with other men?"

"Oh, something happened a few years back, before she joined the police. Besides, she is what they call a Community Liaison Officer, and she works mostly with Native kids in the region."

Ian was about to ask about the "something" that happened when Swan came back outside, accompanied by a little girl. "I'd like you to meet my daughter, Katie. Katie, say hello to Mr. Stewart."

Katie, who looked to be about five years old, had pale blond hair and blue eyes. She smiled at him shyly but said nothing. Ian said, "Hello, Katie."

She hid behind her mother's leg and peeked out at him, then quietly said "Hi" as she walked past and climbed up on her grandfather's knee. After he gave her a "horsy ride," Swan told her that she could go back inside and play. Ian was reeling from this revelation. Of course, someone as beautiful as Swan must have a man in her life. She must have seen the question on his face. "No, there is no Mr. Whatever around here. Katie and I live alone." Her tone suggested that Ian had best not pursue the subject.

Probably seeing the look of relief on Ian's face, she immediately regained her previously friendly tone. "Here's some paper and a pen," she said, "Keep it brief, then I'll add my name and number and assure your Mom that you're in good hands." For the first time he heard her laugh, and another tingle went through his body.

She led Ian over to a picnic table near the lakeshore, where he sat down and wrote the message. When he finished, Swan added a brief comment and handed the note to Daniel. "Dad, would you run this up to the top of the road and have the boys deliver it into town? You can tell them how to recognize Ian's mother and aunt. Tell them to make sure that no one follows them back to their cottage."

Daniel laughed as he folded the note and put it in his pocket. "You're sure good at giving orders. How come you were so bad at taking them when you were little? I'll be right back," he called over his shoulder as he walked around to the back. Swan and Ian heard him start the engine and listened while the tire noise faded up the road.

"I know that you are wondering about Katie," said Swan quietly.

"Hey, it's none on my business. She sure is a cutie though."

"Her father was a white man. He raped me when I was seventeen years old. He was never prosecuted."

Ian had often experienced the openness and honesty of Native people before, but now he didn't know what to say as he gazed into Swan's eyes. He was in shock at this frank revelation. They had met only minutes before, and here she was telling him about possibly the most intimate and traumatic thing that had happened in her life. Ian felt guilt for his race, shame for his gender, and fear that she would hold this atrocious act against him personally. He desperately wanted to say something intelligent and sensitive, but could only stammer, "I'm sorry!"

"What have you got to be sorry for? You didn't do it." She said this totally without bitterness. "Besides, when I look at Katie I realize that it was meant to be, and that I should feel blessed. I must know that I can trust you -- and that requires that neither of us have any secrets from the other. Now you know my most important secret -- tell me yours." She laughed again, and Ian's brain promptly filled with mush. What secret could he tell her that would even come close to what she had just revealed?

"Don't panic!" she said, sill laughing. "You have the whole afternoon to think about it." Then she grew serious and added, "But it's very important that you tell the truth and hold nothing back. Do you feel like helping me with lunch? You can cut up the potatoes while I bread the fish."

As Ian followed her into the cabin, his brain was sorting through his life experiences, trying to identify some secret that would even remotely match Swan's. He knew that he could not trivialize the importance of this quest, so rejected

things like cribbing a term paper, siphoning gas from his father's car, or shooting two ducks over his limit. It had to be something important. Ian thought he had it several times, but rejected everything. Could it be that he had no important secrets? Was his life that meaningless? A tap on his shoulder brought him back to the here-and-now.

"Earth to Ian, Earth to Ian. You have just cut up ten potatoes. Are you expecting an army for lunch?" Swan seemed genuinely delighted with his distracted behaviour. "Do you always concentrate this hard when you're thinking? You must be a real menace on the road."

Ian looked down at the massive pile of sliced potatoes, then laughed. "It so happens that I love potatoes." He didn't tell her that he had once driven 200 miles past his destination when he had been thinking about a term paper, and the only reason he stopped was because he had run out of gas.

"That's good, because I'm going to make you eat every last one."

They were laughing together when the screen door opened and Daniel came into the kitchen. "What are you two up to? I heard a lot of laughing as I came up the steps." Then he noticed the huge pile of potatoes in front of Ian. He joined in their laughter. "I'm hungry -- but not that hungry."

"Did the boys understand what they were supposed to do?" asked Swan.

"Yep. They were getting bored hanging around, anyway. They said no one had followed us here. I gave them ten bucks for lunch." He paused and chuckled. "Before they got AA they would have spent it all in the beer parlour."

"You know damn well they would have," Swan snapped, a hint of anger in her voice. Then she laughed. "I wonder what your Mom and Aunt will think when a couple of Indians go up to them and hand them a note?"

Ian hadn't considered that. He was sure his mother would take it in stride, but wasn't sure about Aunt Gwen. She had some very strange opinions when it came to the "Indian problem" as she put it. Oh well, they could always call if they had concerns. He really could have cared less, for it seemed that every minute he spent in Swan's company carried him further away from his other existence. Sheesh, he thought, talk about instant infatuation.

Daniel's comment about "getting AA" made him curious, so he asked Swan about it. "Most of the men around here belong to Alcoholics Anonymous," she said. "They get together on Sundays. I don't know why it works, I'm just glad that it does. Booze and drugs still cause a lot of problems, but not as much as back in the fifties and sixties."

Ian thought for a moment, then said, "I remember reading a paper that sought to explain why the Woodland peoples had embraced AA."

"Really?" Swan replied. "And what was the scientific explanation?"

"Well, in many ways it was thought to have a very powerful 'religious' influence, because it reflected many aspects of traditional Cree and Ojibwa society. Male dominated and male oriented; testimonials given verbally, much like native oral tradition; the chapters were band-centred; it allowed the full use of their native language, and often incorporated music and dancing, much like traditional gatherings."

"I don't know that I agree entirely," she said, "but some of it does make sense -- the similarities, I mean. Anyway, you've done enough damage in here. Why don't

you and Dad have a beer out at the picnic table? I'll bring everything out when it's ready." She opened the fridge and handed Daniel and Ian a couple of beers and shoed them outside.

Daniel watched Ian intently as they swigged their beer. "Did she tell you?" he asked.

"Did she tell me what?" he replied, knowing perfectly well that Daniel knew that she had.

"Don't play dumb. She has only told two other people her secret. Did she tell you?" Daniel's tone was deadly serious, so Ian told him that she had revealed the rape to him.

"Why on Earth would she tell me, a perfect stranger, something so personal?"

"Because for you to trust her there must be no doubt."

"Of course I trust her." Ian blurted, almost adding that he was also falling madly and giddily in love with her.

Daniel, who always seemed to know what Ian was thinking, nodded and said, "That's good. She has been alone with this secret far too long. Did she ask you to tell her your secret?"

"Yes, but I can't come up with anything that's even slightly interesting. I feel like a moron."

"Don't think too hard. Maybe you don't even know your secret. It might be locked deep inside you."

"Oh? Do you think that I'm suppressing some horrible guilt or trauma?"

"Maybe." Daniel shrugged and tilted the bottle to his mouth. "But maybe it hasn't even happened yet. You might have a secret wish that you have hidden from yourself."

"If that's true, I think it will take more than lunch and a few beers to bring it out. Swan wants to know what my secret is today."

"Do you mind if I make a suggestion? I have some experience. There is a way that you can discover some things if you're not afraid of the truth."

"God! I hope this doesn't involve eating or smoking any illegal chemicals and having visions," Ian said in mock horror. "Grass only makes me goofy and I tried LSD last year. It took me weeks to get over it. Hey, maybe that's my secret? Nah, everybody tries that stuff."

"I'd like to try LSD myself, someday," Daniel mused. "No, it doesn't involve drugs. Have you heard of the *jissakaan*, or as you call it the 'shaking tent?'"

"Of course. I found the Shaking Tent Ceremony one of the most fascinating topics during my research into Anishinabe religious practices. I read several accounts of the ceremony, including one by Irving Hallowell, who participated in one at Berens River. He wrote that he had been deeply moved by the experience."

Daniel had listened quietly, nodding occasionally as Ian told him what he knew, so he continued. "According to Hallowell, the tent was a small structure made of thin birch branches bent over and tied together. After the shaman entered, the tent was completely covered with animal hides or canvas, and shell rattles were tied along the frame. During the ceremony, the tent shook violently and strange sounds were heard coming from within. Apparently, during a transcendental state, the shaman could dispatch a supernatural helper to distant regions to answer

questions from his audience about the best places to hunt, the well-being of relatives, and what would happen in the future. Well, am I on track?"

"Yes, what you say is correct," Daniel replied. "And one can also use the ceremony to find out the deepest of secrets -- what is hidden in a man's heart."

"You don't propose to hold a Shaking Tent here -- today?" Ian asked incredulously.

"Yes, I do. There is a sacred place not far from here, and I have everything that I need with me."

"You mean to say that you are a shaman and you have done this before."

"Yes, I am a *tchissakiwinini*, a Shaking Tent practitioner. I have helped many people over the years. With the help of the sky spirits, I can help you to find your hidden secret."

Ian was stunned by Daniel's offer, and by the fact that he was a shaman. He was more than a little excited about participating in something that only a few other outsiders had ever seen. Before he could reply, Swan kicked open the screen door and made her way to the table carrying a tray laden with walleye, pan fried potatoes, coleslaw and more beers.

Daniel and Ian helped her spread out the plates and utensils. Ian's stomach was growling as he launched into the walleye fillets. He decided that it was probably the best meal he had ever eaten. The fish and potatoes were perfect and the beer tasted like ambrosia.

Every time he looked at Swan, their eyes would meet and he would almost choke. And every time that happened, Daniel would laugh and Katie would ask what Granddad was laughing at. At which point, both Swan and Ian would laugh, too. He wished that the moment would last forever, but the meal was soon over and Swan busied herself cleaning up. Ian offered to help, but she told him to sit still. When she had gone in with the lunch debris, Daniel asked, "Well?"

Ian was so sated and happy that he would have agreed to a lobotomy at that point -- with or without anaesthetic. "Sure, let's do it!"

"Good. I'll tell Swan and get my gear out of the truck. Meet me at the canoe by the dock." Daniel walked up to the cabin and then went around back to his truck. In a few minutes he was back carrying a large packsack and a bag that Ian assumed was a *midéwayan*. It looked a lot, in fact, like the one that had started this whole affair. Swan was standing at the door. She smiled and waved as they carried the canoe to the water.

"Have you done much canoeing?" asked Daniel. Ian told him that he had practically grown up in them, and was the proud owner of a Chestnut Prospector with thousands of miles under its keel.

"Good. You paddle. I have much thinking to do on the way."

Ian steadied the canoe at the dock while Daniel climbed into the bow seat. With a couple of strokes they were away and soon skimming out into the lake, which as it turned out, was only an isolated bay in a much larger body of water. Daniel directed Ian through a maze of channels. They made one brief portage on the way to their destination.

About 40 minutes from the dock they reached what seemed to be untouched wilderness. Ian asked the name of the lake. Daniel said it was Mikinak Lake. Mikinak, was the Great Turtle or the spirit of Mother Earth in Ojibwa legend. The

area had never seen a chainsaw or a miner's drill. In a shallow bay covered with acres of wild rice, Daniel directed Ian to paddle to a large rock jutting into the water. He clambered ashore and held the canoe as Ian walked up to the bow and got out. They pulled the canoe up and Daniel handed him the packsack. It was fairly heavy. "We don't have far to walk," he assured.

Daniel led the way along the rocky point and up onto a large shelf that opened into a natural amphitheatre. The area was totally covered with boulders of varying sizes, which were arranged in a fantastic array of shapes and patterns. Ian realized that it was a boulder mosaic site. Such sites typically cover acres and may date back many hundreds of years. He had explored several in the Bird River area of south-eastern Manitoba, but did not know that there were any near Lake of the Woods. Obviously there was, because here they were walking across a huge one. Near the middle was a large "medicine wheel" with spokes made up of human head-sized rocks that radiated out in all directions. It had to be at least 100 feet in diameter. In the centre was a small grassy depression that was totally clear of rocks. Daniel walked directly onto the grassy area.

He took the packsack and opened it. From inside he removed a hatchet and handed it to Ian. "I want you to cut down seven birch saplings, each about an inch in diameter." He pointed to a nearby thicket. "There are some good ones over there."

Ian had no trouble cutting the required saplings with the razor-sharp hatchet. When he returned to the grassy patch, Daniel had taken the rest of the contents from his packsack. The bulkiest item was an old canvas tarpaulin covered with patches. As he shook the tarp open, Daniel told Ian to cut the saplings to a length equal to his hand stretched above his head, and then to sharpen the base of each and trim off any branches. When Ian had done so, Daniel began thrusting the sharpened bases into the ground. They penetrated easily and in a minute were arranged in a six-foot circle. He took out some cord and bent over two of the saplings opposite each other and tied them together. He repeated this until all of the saplings were tied to form a small tipi.

Next, they cut some spruce boughs and spread them on the "floor." Daniel then took off his jacket and cap. He continued undressing, removing his shirt, boots and socks, then entered the birch structure and sat down in the middle with his *midéwayan* placed in front of him. Opening the bag, he removed two small bark boxes and took off their lids. He began painting his face, using a piece of cloth that he dipped into the boxes. First, he covered his entire face with a red pigment that Ian assumed was ochre. Then, using his fingers, he made four diagonal green stripes across his face. Finally, he drew several white stripes above each eye. From his studies, Ian knew that the red face paint signified that he was a *Midé*; the green stripes a high-ranking *Midé*, and the white lines over his eyes meant that he could see into the future. Ian realized then that Daniel was a very important man, indeed.

When Daniel was finished, he put the face paint away and took out a fur headdress that he put on his head. It had several small "horns" sticking out of the top. "Take these shell rattles and tie one to each of the birches," he ordered. "Then take the tarp and cover the entire tent. Tie the end shut and hold down the edge with rocks. Use seven rocks from that pile over there." He pointed to a small pile of

rocks at the edge of the circle. "Once you're done, go to the small circle of stones over there and sit inside the circle. Say nothing. Do nothing. No matter what you see or hear -- DO NOT MOVE! Understand me?"

Ian replied that he would do as Daniel asked, and as soon as he had arranged the tarp and placed the rocks, went immediately to the stone circle at the end of one of the radiating spokes and sat, using his jacket as a cushion. He was amazed that neither of them was being eaten alive by black flies and mosquitoes. He could hear them buzzing around, but they would not even so much as land. As Ian waited, he could only wonder at the series of events that had taken him from a fishing trip the previous day to one of the most amazing experiences of his life. He was about to witness a Shaking Tent Ceremony. Not only that, he had met a beautiful and mysterious woman, a woman who had told him her most intimate secret and wanted to know his. This had to be a good sign.

His reverie was broken by a sound coming from inside the tent -- a low chant accompanied by the regular beat of a drum. After a few minutes, Ian heard the shell rattles begin chattering, and then the chanting was replaced by a loud humming sound punctuated with groans and squeals. The noise grew in intensity, and he knew for certain that no one person could make so many different sounds simultaneously. The rattling became very loud, and then the entire tent suddenly started shaking so violently he feared that it would fly to pieces.

By this time, Ian's hair was standing on end, and he nearly fainted when several loud shrieks issued from inside the tent. He started to get up, but remembered Daniel's warning and stayed put. He felt a presence all around him, but scanning the surrounding bush, he could see no one -- or thing. Who or what was out there? Then, above the noise coming from the tent, Ian heard the sound of rushing wind, and it was coming his way. The trees at the end of the clearing began swaying, and a moment later a fierce wind gust blew across the clearing. Dust and leaves stung his eyes, and when he could see clearly again, Daniel was standing outside the tent. He was grinning and starting to wipe the paint from his face. When he finished, he pulled on his shirt, socks and boots, then walked over to where Ian still sat.

"Well, what did you think? Quite a show, eh?"

Ian was almost too stunned to speak. "Show! That was the most amazing thing I've ever seen. Where in hell did that wind come from? How did you make all those sounds?" Ian was full of questions as he brushed dirt and twigs out of his hair.

"I'll tell you later. Right now, let's pack up and leave. The spirits are tired of us and want us to bugger off."

Ian helped fold the tarp, pulled out the birch poles and tossed them into the bush, then carried the rocks used to hold down the tarp back to the pile. Meanwhile, Daniel replaced everything back in his packsack, then looked around the site. "Don't leave any sign that we were here," he said as he patted earth back into the holes made by the birch saplings. Once satisfied, he put a pinch of tobacco under a stone and gave Ian some to do the same. "You never trouble the spirits without leaving them something," he explained.

After finishing, they retraced their route across the boulder mosaic site and back down to the canoe. "Don't tell any of your goddamn Anthropologist friends about this place. It's too important."

The truth is, Ian had just been thinking about the wonderful paper he was going to write about the Mikinak Lake Boulder Mosaic Site. He might even be able to stretch a career out of it. Oh well, he thought. "Don't worry. I promise you that no one will ever learn of it from me." It was one promise he intended to keep.

As they paddled back to Swan's cabin, Ian asked what Daniel had learned about his "secret."

"I learned many things, from both the past and future. The spirits seemed eager to help." He told him that the "secret" thing had happened long ago, and when they got back to the cabin he would give him the key that would unlock it.

Ian was filled with apprehension as they paddled back to the cabin. Before he knew it, the canoe's keel ground onto the shore beside the dock. Swan and Katie were waiting for them. Swan looked relieved when she saw that they were both unscathed.

"How did it go?" she asked her father.

"The spirits had much to say. I learned many things."

Ian was totally confused. Before he could interject, Daniel turned to look at him and continued, "I saw you in a strange place, a jungle, wearing a uniform and carrying a rifle. Were you in the army?"

Ian's eyes widened in amazement. "Yes, in the late sixties I went through the Regular Officer Training Program, and then on to the Royal Military College in Kingston. At one time I thought I was destined to be a career soldier, but things happened that changed it all."

"You were in Viet Nam." It a statement, not a question. "How did a Canadian end up there? It was an American war."

"Actually, thousands of Canadians served there. Many signed up in the States, and a lot of regular Canadian military went as 'observers.' Our leaders, of course, took a public stand of opposing the American action, but at the same time our weapons industry was booming and the military was keenly interested in the action.

"A group of senior officers from Ottawa showed up one day and asked some of the cadets to join a special task group. From the sound of it we would be doing field assessments on some equipment that the Canadian military was interested in. We were also asked if we would like to receive some 'cross-training' with the US Forces. Not knowing any better, I jumped at the chance. Several other officer cadets and I were sent through combat training in New Brunswick, and later on, those of us that were still left took more at the jungle warfare school in South Carolina. I was in a lot better shape than some of the others, so I breezed right through it all." He paused, then motioned to the picnic table. "Let's sit down -- this might take some time."

After they were seated, Ian continued. "After South Carolina I was sent to a weapons testing facility in Alberta. I went through an intensive training course in assessing the effectiveness of things like a range of pistols, rifles and machine guns, mortars, rockets, and several types of light field artillery. The main reason I had been selected for the assignment seems to have been my writing skills. Some of my written assignments had impressed my instructors.

"After some weeks, I was back at the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario, for more officer training, then to Fort Leavenworth in Kansas. Some of it was

meant to prepare me for an American command and control structure in a combat arena. It didn't. After months of courses and thousands of miles of travel, I received the temporary rank of lieutenant, and was told to pack for an extended stay out of the country."

"So, you eventually ended up in South Viet Nam. How long did you spend there?" Daniel asked.

"In total, almost six months. The nature of my assignment meant that I'd receive orders and report to a combat battalion currently engaged in some sort of action. Then, once the heat died down, I'd go in to try to assess a particular piece of equipment's effectiveness, or lack thereof. I had a still photographer and two 'aides' as my team. The aides were hard core grunts whose job was to hump my gear, and to prevent my 'cherry ass' from getting blown off. It usually took a day or two to get what we needed. It was like doing a post-game analysis after a football game, except the losers were dead and the field was covered with exploded machinery. Some of the things I saw were almost indescribable. The first few times I examined the effect of an antitank rocket on a tank crew, I threw up. After a while, though, I got pretty hardened and could describe what I saw in the most objective terms. After we had what we needed, we headed back to 'the rear with our gear.' There I'd fill in the combat assessment report, analyse the interviews, complete a detailed map, caption the photos, and then send the completed package to my boss in S2 -- that's Intelligence. I took a lot of pride in being thorough and professional."

"It all sounds pretty horrible if you ask me," said Swan.

"It was, at times, but there were better times occasionally. For a few months I was assigned to the Military Assistance Command, headquartered in Saigon. That was fun. You could act out any fantasy you desired in that city. Later, I was reassigned to I Corps in the extreme north. It wasn't quite as pleasant. The Third Marine Amphibious Force was headquartered there, and they used a lot of the toys that the Canadian military was interested in assessing, in particular a new variant of the M113 APC -- Armoured Personnel Carrier. Each APC carried a rifle squad and all of their equipment. They were lightly armoured, but had a lot of firepower in the way of top-mounted, heavy machine guns. Plus, they were fast and very agile in addition to being amphibious." He paused and snorted derisively. "Anyway, that was the theory. In the open they were fine; in the heavy bush, they were often death traps. I guess their biggest drawback, especially for the poor slobs inside, was that they couldn't withstand either rockets or antitank mines. The grunts referred to them as bullet magnets, and more often than not they preferred riding on the outside.

"My field assessment was that the general staff should be forced to drive them around in mine fields. Needless to say, my boss, who was a G2, an Intelligence officer, had some interesting things to say when I was hauled up in front of him. For my efforts, I got a week of R&R in Guam during Christmas, 1967. I was twenty-one years old.

"It was in early sixty-eight when I received new orders to report to the 11th Armoured Cavalry, known as the "Black Horse Regiment." They had lots of useful things like tanks, APCs, howitzers, and forty helicopters. They operated in the III Corps theatre in War Zone C, near the Cambodian border. To say that it was a

'hot' area would be an understatement. In late January, the whole country went nuts. It was the Tet offensive. The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army attacked everywhere, all at the same time. You know, it's funny, but I can't remember much of what happened for the next few weeks. All I recall was that on my first assignment back in the bush, we had flown into what had been a regional capital in Tay Ninh province to assess the effectiveness of a new SAW or Squad Automatic Weapon, the M249, when the crap hit the fan. The NVA counterattacked and we were right in the middle of it. The fire fight was intense. Bullets and mortar rounds were hitting all around. After that -- nothing. A big blank.

"I woke up in hospital. I was told later that a piece of shrapnel had gone right through my vest and was lodged very close to my heart. I was out of it. A month later I was back in Canada, and soon after that out of the military. I got a couple of commendations from the Americans, a piece of shrapnel that's still in my chest, and paid tuition to any university I chose as a reward. When it comes right down to it, I have no regrets."

Daniel had listened very intently. "Something happened there that you have hidden deep inside you. It must come out. It is even more damaging than the piece of metal in your chest. During the battle, what did you do?"

"I can't remember a thing. Bullets were flying everywhere. It was a miracle I got out in one piece."

Daniel leaned across the table and grasped both of Ian's arms above the elbow in his powerful grip, then looked him straight in the eyes. It was like an electric shock running through his entire body. Ian was instantly back in the bush, in the midst of a ferocious fire fight. His team was pinned down in the wreckage of a building. Less than 500 metres away, a column of North Vietnamese tanks supported by infantry was bearing down on their position. Someone off to the left let fly with an anti-tank missile and knocked the left tread off the lead tank -- sheer luck. The advance was stalled, but not for long. All of the tanks had to be knocked out or they would be overrun. Looking around, Ian realized that he was the top ranking officer still on his feet. There were NCOs and grunts from several different outfits in pockets all around his position. They were all looking to him to do something. He was not a combat officer -- he was a paper-pusher, but how could he explain that during a fire fight? Instinctively, he realized that his only option was to call in an artillery strike. The military grid map for the town was in his assessment kit. He pulled it out and quickly plotted their position and that of the enemy. The same firebase that had flattened the area in the first place was under attack, but was still operational. Ian gave the coordinates to the radioman, and within a few minutes they could hear the incoming rounds. The first salvo was right on the money. The enemy advanced had stalled, so Ian was about to call in the choppers for a pickup when they heard another salvo screaming in. It struck near their position. The thunder of exploding rounds was the last thing he remembered.

No wonder he had erased the memory from his mind. If he had been clearer about the coordinates, a lot of the men who had trusted his judgement would still be alive. Ian suddenly felt weak and his head slumped forward. His shoulders were shaking and he started weeping.

Daniel let go of his arms. Swan quickly ducked into the house and returned with two cans of beer. "Ian," she said softly, "have this."

He raised his face and looked at her, tears still coursing down his cheeks. "I'm so sorry," Swan said.

The irony almost made him smile. He took the beer and gulped most of it down. Then, wiping his eyes, he asked, "Do you have anything stronger?"

"I have some scotch. Will that do?"

"You bet! Make it a quadruple."

As Swan left to get the drink, Daniel patted him on the arm and said, "You did well. It's over now. Your spirit is free. You have Manitou. Besides, you made the only decision possible at the time. You saved many lives. There is no fault."

Strangely enough, Ian did feel as though a huge burden had been lifted from him. Something had been eating at him for years, but he had never been able to put his finger on it.

Swan returned with a tumbler half filled with scotch. Ian thanked her and put the glass down on the table. She took his hand in hers, and he immediately started feeling a lot better.

"I feel bad about asking for that," Ian said. "The truth is, if I try to drink it I'll probably barf it right back up."

"I know," she replied with an understanding smile. "That's why it's really only iced tea." They all burst out laughing.

"Dad," she asked, "could you go up to the house and look after Katie?"

"Sure, I'd be glad to. I'll even let her win at checkers."

Swan sat down beside Ian and looked into his eyes. "Take your time. What did you learn?"

He had to turn away from her gaze. While Ian felt an intense need to tell Swan what had happened, he was filled with shame. He had suppressed everything even from himself.

"Well, you wanted me to tell you my deepest, darkest secret, and I don't even know if I can listen to it myself. It's a beauty."

He related the story. It all came out in a rush, and he took full blame for the deaths of the men around him. When he was through talking he felt exhausted. Swan gave him another hug, but he was too beat up to feel anything at that point.

"I think you should be getting back to your family. Dad will drive you into town, and one of my cousins will take you to your Uncle's cottage."

It was if a plug had been pulled and the life drained out of him. He could only nod in agreement as Swan lead him to Daniel's truck.

"I'll be in touch," was the last thing she said to him as they drove out of her yard and up the road. Neither man had much to say on the ride back. When they arrived at the government wharf, Daniel approached a young man and brought him back to the truck. "This is my nephew, Robert. He'll take you back to your cottage."

Ian shook Robert's hand and followed him to his boat. It was set up like a ski boat with a massive outboard. Robert's only comment was, "No one can follow us in this thing."

Daniel gave Ian a pat on the shoulder and said, "So long, Ian."

"Yeah, so long. And ... thanks."

Once clear of the marina, Robert pushed the throttle forward and they were instantly on plane, hurtling across the water at an amazing speed. Ian asked how fast they were going. "Around fifty," was the terse reply. Robert asked for directions, and then suggested a less direct route. After a few changes in direction and some backtracking to make sure they weren't being followed, he pulled his boat up at Uncle Frank's dock. Ian barely had time to thank Robert before his boat had backed away and was soon only a speck on the horizon. What a ride! Ian thought, realizing that despite all of the intentional detours it had only taken 25 minutes.

The exhilaration of the high-speed trip had brought some feeling back into his body. As he trudged up the stairs to the upper deck, his mother came to the railing. "We were starting to get worried. I was just about to call this Swan person."

Ian glanced at his watch and realized it was almost 7 p.m. The day had gone by like a flash. Looking back at the dock, he noted that Jerry's boat was missing. Seeing his look, his mother said, "They went back out fishing again -- they have become absolutely obsessed with muskies. They should be getting back any time now. You must be starving. Come on up and have some dinner."

Both women were brimming with curiosity. From the moment they had been handed his note by that "nice young Indian fellow" to his arrival back at the cottage in that "speed boat," they had been trying to fill in the blanks. Ian was not in the mood to let them in on the details at that point, so he told them that he and Daniel Kukisew had visited with his daughter, Swan, and then he had shown him a boulder mosaic site. He told them nothing of the Shaking Tent Ceremony or the things he had learned. Fortunately, after assessing his body language, his mother asked no further questions and decided it was best that she get some supper ready. After eating, Ian joined them on the deck while they awaited the fishermen's' return.

They chatted about their adventures in Kenora, and he a little about Swan and her cabin. Then, as the light began to fade, they could see Jerry's boat turn past the end of the island. In a few minutes they had tied up the dock and were climbing the stairs. One could sense that the fishing had not come up to their expectations. Ian called down, "Well, did you manage to snag the "Great Muskie?"

Neither of the older men looked up, but Jerry spoke, "What a debacle! Everything went wrong. First, we fouled the prop in an old fishing net. Then your Dad had his rod yanked right out of the holder -- plop -- gone. My Dad lost his two antique muskie plugs. It was amazing -- you'd think wooden plugs that big would float right back up -- but no. We couldn't even catch a rock bass. Then the bloody motor acted up all the way back. That's it for Reedy Bay. I've had it!"

Ian could tell that both his father and uncle were seething. Smiling, Aunt Gwen and his mother hustled into the kitchen to get dinner ready, and once inside they burst into laughter. This did nothing to improve the mood of the crestfallen fishermen.

"I can't believe it," moaned Ian's father. "That fish yanked my rod right out of the boat."

"Fish my ass," retorted Uncle Frank. "It was a weed. To hell with your rod, at least you can buy a new one. Those muskie plugs were irreplaceable."

“Yeah, well what about my prop?” growled Jerry. “I’m fairly sure it’s bent all to hell.”

This set off another round of bitching, and it was all Ian could do to keep a smirk off his face. He knew that the post-mortem was likely to go on well into the wee hours, so he excused myself and headed off to bed. He prayed that he would not dream.

Chapter 4

The Fourth Fire was originally given to the people by two prophets. They come as one. They told of the coming of the Light Skinned race. One of the prophets said, “You will know the future of our people by the face the Light Skinned race wears. If they come wearing the face of brotherhood then there will come a time of wonderful change for generations to come. The other prophet said,” Beware if the Light Skinned race comes wearing the face of death. You must be careful because the face of brotherhood and the face of death look very much alike. If they come carrying a weapon ... beware. If they come in suffering ... they could fool you. Their hearts may be filled with greed for the riches of this land.

The dreams came anyway, and he slept fitfully. Images of explosions, maimed bodies and Swan Kukisew swirled around at the edge of his consciousness. He eventually got tired of thrashing around like an eel under the sheets and got up, put on his bathrobe and walked down to the dock. The others were all sound asleep after several hours of “post muskie” trauma, and then trying to console themselves with strong drink. The night was clear and the stars seemed to leap out of the sky. There was no sound other than water lapping at the pilings under the dock. Even the loons had fallen silent. Far off in the distance he could hear what sounded like drumming, but the sound drifted in and out like a weak radio station. Ian wondered where it was coming from. It seemed to be all around him. Then he noticed something floating in the middle of the bay. It was a boat, and it was just drifting there. It had no running lights. Suddenly there was a little flare of light. Someone had just lit a smoke. What the hell were they doing out there?

“They” -- the mysterious “they” that Daniel and Swan had talked about. Had “they” followed him here? He felt a chill run through him. Was he under surveillance? He had a sudden impulse to yell something, but thought better of it and decided just to sit on the dock a while and see what happened. Retrieving a blanket out of his uncle’s boat, he nestled down in a deck chair. He could only catch glimpses of the boat and its lone occupant in the dim starlight. It was too bad that the moon had already gone down or he might have been able to get a good look.

He stared into the gloom, wondering what his next step would be. Leaving in the morning and returning to Winnipeg seemed logical. He would contact Jack; give him a brief account of what had happened, and then drop the ball back in his lap. Jack could contact Daniel and return the bloody bundle. Ian’s heart twisted when

he considered the prospect of never seeing Swan again. What the hell? He didn't stand a chance with her, anyway. It was all wrong -- she was a beautiful Native woman who had good reason to hate white men, and he was a white man. And an Anthropologist, which made it even worse. Besides, each knew too much about the other's darkest secret. Ian wasn't sure that he could ever feel comfortable around her again.

Suddenly it was light and Ian was awake. The deck chair was covered in dew and he felt half-frozen. The boat in the bay had vanished. Stiff with cold, he made his way back upstairs to the cottage. No one was stirring yet, and probably would not for some time given the previous evening's festivities. He quietly went into the bedroom and changed into jeans and a sweatshirt without disturbing his snoring cousin. His mother walked into the kitchen as he was making coffee.

"How are you feeling this morning? You looked like you had aged ten years when you got back from Kenora. I hope you're not coming down with something."

She made herself a cup of tea and sat opposite him at the kitchen table. "I worry about you sometimes, Ian. You hold everything in. Sometimes you look so sad. We never talk any more."

Ian couldn't remember a time when they did talk. In fact, his whole family rarely shared any intimacy. Supposedly, it stemmed from their Scottish ancestry -- "dour Scots" as his grandfather used to say about them. Ian had never been able to express any strong emotion other than anger. Now he knew why.

"I know Mom. Yesterday I remembered everything. Viet Nam -- leaving the army, everything." For some reason he just blurted it out. She looked shocked. He tried to make it easy on her. "It's okay, what happened, happened, and it's time to forget the past and press on."

"What happened yesterday? What did you remember?" she asked, her voice full of concern. "You have never, ever said a word about that time."

"I'll tell you sometime, but for now can we just forget it?" She obviously wanted to talk but he didn't. "I'm going to call the water taxi in Keewatin and have them pick me up. It can drop me off at my car in Norman Bay. I want to get back to the city."

Before his mother could reply, he got up and rinsed out his coffee cup. He used the phone in the kitchen to call the water taxi, and they said someone would be right out, which would take about a half hour. As he passed his mother on the way to his bedroom to pack up his gear, she tried to catch his arm.

"Sorry, Mom, I have to pack. Give me a call when you and Dad get back to the 'Peg. Thank Uncle Frank and Aunt Gwen for me, and tell Jerry there are plenty of other muskie spots out there." With that he went into the bedroom and shut the door. He sat on the bed and tried to stop the noise inside his head. All he knew was that he had to get the hell out of there. It only took a few minutes to throw his gear together, but he lingered in the darkness until he heard the sound of an approaching boat.

Mom and Aunt Gwen were waiting on the deck. "Here's your ride. Are you going to be okay?" asked his mother. His aunt had retrieved his frozen walleye from the freezer and put them in a grocery bag. Wordlessly, she handed them to him.

Ian gave them both a quick hug saying, "Don't worry. You know me -- the 'Teflon Kid' -- nothing sticks."

The water taxi was just pulling up to the dock when he reached the bottom of the stairs. Moments later, as the boat was pulling away, his mother waved from the deck. He returned her wave, then joined the driver in the cabin. The talk turned to fishing and mutual acquaintances during the ride into Norman Bay. At the marina, Ian paid him the \$20 taxi fee and walked up the finger float to the parking lot.

A few minutes later he pulled out onto the highway, then watched Keewatin fade from sight in the rear view mirror. He thought of his mother's comment about "looking ten years older." Hell! He'd aged a lot more than that in the last few days.

Cranking up the volume on the car radio, he concentrated on driving as he sped west toward Winnipeg. Traffic was light and he made good time. In fact, he doubted later that he could remember one second of the trip. If "they" were following him, he wouldn't have known it and didn't give a proverbial rat's ass, anyway. It was around 2 in the afternoon when he pulled into his parking spot at the apartment.

He ran into the caretaker as he unlocked the backdoor. "Did your friends find you?" he asked.

"What friends?"

"A couple of guys rang my buzzer. They said they were old friends of yours and wanted to know if you were around. I told them you were away for a few days."

"Did they leave a note or anything?"

"No, they said they'd try again in a few days. How was the fishing?"

"Not bad, I got a few walleye. I'll bring down some later." Ian usually gave the caretaker a few fillets when he went fishing, and some ducks during hunting season. It was a good way to keep him on his side and, besides, he was a good guy.

After stepping inside his apartment and turning on the light, he had the feeling that something was wrong. Looking around carefully, he noted that nothing was missing but, somehow, he knew that things had been moved. Someone had been in there. He quickly checked his closet and looked in the dresser drawers.

Everything was where it should be. The real tipoff was the bookcase. All of the books were neatly arranged on the shelves. Ian remembered that before he left, a number were jutting out and a couple had been upside down. Now they were in perfect order. Someone had searched through them.

He didn't know what to do. Maybe it was just paranoia. Just then he noticed the answering machine's message light was blinking. He pushed the playback button. There were five hang-ups, a short message from his brother, two more hang-ups, and then a call from someone who identified himself as Lawrence Connaught. He had left a local Winnipeg number. Ian was still wondering what to do when the phone rang. He picked it up immediately.

"Ian its Swan. Why did you leave without saying goodbye? I called the cottage and your Aunt told me that you had left this morning. She gave me your number. She ... I ... both of us are very worried about you. Is there something wrong?"

Wrong? How could things be any bloody worse! Ian wanted to shout, but her concern sounded so genuine that he had to believe she really cared about him. His strong feeling for her suddenly rematerialised and he apologized for leaving

without a word. "I just had to get out of there. I need time to think." He didn't tell her that he intended to turn the whole mess over to Jack Elias.

"Listen, I understand. Just try to get some rest. I'll call again tomorrow. I really enjoyed our time together. I don't know if you want to hear this, but I feel very close to you. Meanwhile, Dad says to be careful. Goodbye for now."

Ian's heart was pounding as he put down the phone. Swan cared for him. He almost decided to drive all the way back to Kenora just to gaze into her eyes again. Maybe later ... he was too tired. It was all he could do to stick his fish in the freezer and then stagger into the bedroom. Falling face down across the bed, he was asleep in an instant.

He heard the phone ring several times, but ignored it, stuffing his head under the pillow to blot out the sound. It was getting dark when he finally came to. He was ravenously hungry, having eaten nothing all day. After checking out the fridge, he realized that even near starvation couldn't force him to eat the fungus-covered cheese and mouldy bread that comprised his entire food supply. He would have to go out on a food run.

Grabbing his jacket, he headed out the door. Just as he locked it, he heard the phone ring again. He was sorely tempted to go back in and rip the cord out of the wall. Instrument of the Devil, he thought as he fled down the stairs.

The corner grocery store was still open. "Hi, Mrs. Panko," he said as he entered. Ian had been going to the Pankos' store for years. She grunted her usual "Hullo" and turned back to reading her tabloid.

Mr. Panko was manning the deli counter. "Hey, Ian! What will it be today? I've got some great Montreal smoked meat. Just came in."

"Sure, Mr. Panko. Give me half a pound, and half a pound of Swiss cheese." As his order was sliced up, Ian grabbed a loaf of rye bread and a quart of milk. Dinner would be quick and dirty. Instant gratification was what he needed.

After paying Mrs. Panko, he dashed out the door with his booty. Head down, he caromed off two large men who were standing just outside the door. His grocery bag and jacket went flying and he ended flat on his face. Furious, he was on his feet in a flash, ready to do battle. Before he could turn, he was flattened by heavy blow to the side of his jaw. He saw stars and a few other bright flashes, and then another whack on his head turned the lights out.

He awoke with Mrs. Panko hovering over him, dabbing his face with a wet towel. Mr. Panko was lurking nearby, cradling his favourite "theft prevention device," a genuine Louisville Slugger.

"What happened?" Ian muttered, his head still ringing.

"Those two buggers mugged you, that's what happened," said Mr. Panko. "They stole your jacket. They was yanking at something around your neck when I came out. They took off pretty goddam quick when they saw Mr. Slugger. Mama called the cops and an ambulance. You should lie still until they get here."

Ian had no intention of moving. His head felt like it had been used for batting practice. A police car arrived in a few minutes and an ambulance wasn't far behind. The cops took statements from the Pankos, and then told Ian that they would catch up with him later at the hospital. It took only a couple of minutes to load him on the gurney, then they were on their way to Winnipeg General, sirens

wailing. Despite the situation, Ian thought it was kind of cool, for he had never ridden in an ambulance before. Christ, he thought, I definitely needed a life.

By the time they reached the emergency room he was fully conscious. His jaw felt like it had been unbolted and put back on crooked, and his head throbbed like some large furry creature was inside and trying to bite and claw its way out. As he was wheeled into the ward, he thought, It must be an off night because every nurse and doctor in the hospital is working on me. Lights were flashed in his eyes and ears, his pulse and blood pressure were monitored, and he was asked a lot of questions before they finally took a head X-ray. Eventually, the sea of people parted and there was his cousin, Jake, grinning down at him. Jake was a Winnipeg City Police detective.

“Jake, what are you doing here?”

“I’m a cop, remember? I happened to be in the squad room when the call came in. I figured there couldn’t be many other Ian Stewarts running around, so I came right over. Do you have any idea who those guys were? By the looks of the marks they must have used a black jack. You must have a head like an anvil.”

“I never got a clear look, but my impression was that they were built like linebackers and wore dark suits.”

“They don’t sound like your everyday garden variety muggers to me ... they sound like pros. What have you been up to?” Jake asked, his eyebrows raised.

“Nothing, really. I just got back from fishing at the lake. I went out to get some groceries and wham! You don’t suppose they were the Fish Police? Oh, something else, I’m fairly sure that someone had been in my apartment while I was out of town.”

“The guys that jumped you must have been after something. Are you missing anything?”

“Just a few million grey cells. I still have my wallet and watch. Wait a minute. Where’s my jacket? I was carrying my jacket when I left the store. Where did it go? It was just a bloody windbreaker. Why would they steal that?” Then he remembered -- the pictures. The pictures of the medicine bag had been in an envelope in his jacket pocket. That must be what “they” had been after. On impulse, he felt inside his shirt. Elsie’s amulet was still there. “When can I get out of here?”

“The doctor would like to hold you overnight for observation in case you have a concussion, but knowing you, it will take a lot more than a rap on your noggin to keep you here. I guess you can sign yourself out any time you want. If you like, I’ll give you a ride home.”

“Great, but can we stop for something to eat first? I’m starving.”

“Sure, Salisbury House okay? There’s one on the way back to your place.”

Ian left after signing a release. The resident in emergency tried to convince him to stick around, but when he realized Ian was determined to leave, gave him a small packet of painkillers. “You’re going to need these,” he advised with a shake of his head, “believe me.”

Ian followed Jake outside to his unmarked police car. It was conveniently parked in the NO PARKING EMERGENCY zone, so they didn’t have far to walk. On the way to the restaurant, Ian gave Jake a brief rundown of what had happened in Kenora, the medicine bag episode, and his thoughts about the mysterious “they.”

He told him that he thought they must have been after the photos in his jacket, and had been shadowing him since his meeting with Daniel Kukisew.

“What’s so important about this ‘medicine bag?’” Jake asked. “Does it contain something valuable? Why would someone cave your skull in you just to get pictures of it?” Just then there was a burst of static on his police radio and a voice asking for Unit Five-five. It was obviously Jake’s call sign because he picked up the microphone and pushed the transmit button. “Five-five.” The following conversation was brief and largely unintelligible -- at least to Ian.

Ian hoped the message wouldn’t cause any delay in reaching a source of food. He was looking at Jake’s beefy arm and considering cannibalism. Jake must have sensed the urgency of his hunger and laughed, “Don’t worry, that was one of the constables who attended your assault. He and his partner have some information to pass on. I suggested that we meet them at the Salisbury House. That okay with you?”

“Fine, just as long as they don’t mind me talking with my mouth full. Can you put on your siren or something? I’m going to pass out any second.”

“Calm down, we’re almost there,” Jake chuckled as they sped down Winnipeg’s wide Portage Avenue. Ian could see the red roof of the restaurant a block away and began to compose his order -- two cheeseburgers, large fries and a chocolate shake. The throbbing in his head had become secondary to the aching in his gut. He literally ran into the restaurant, eventually followed by an obviously amused Jake. Ian went immediately to the counter and put in his order. When he turned, he saw Jake sitting with two constables in uniform. They were all having a big laugh -- probably at his expense.

Jake beckoned him over and introduced the two officers. Ian vaguely recognized them as the ones who had shown up while he had been in horizontal mode on the pavement. He shook hands with Ray and Pete. The three of them ordered coffee while Ian sucked on his shake. He almost quipped, “What, no doughnuts?” but decided to let it pass.

“How’s the noggin?” asked Ray. “We figured you for a DOA.” With that reassuring diagnosis they all had another good laugh. “Seriously, I’m glad you’re okay. If that blackjack, or whatever it was, had connected with your temple, you probably would be dead. As it is, you’re going to have a couple of nasty bruises.”

Turning to Jake, Ray continued, “We got a very good description from the Pankos.” He took out a notebook and read, “Two white males, both approximately six feet tall, dark hair, medium complexions, one heavy set -- approximately 230 pounds, the other lighter -- around 180. Both wearing dark jackets and pants. Last seen running towards a late model dark sedan -- license unknown. Oh yeah, they were carrying a jacket according to the witnesses. They fled the scene. So far, no sign of the vehicle. That’s about it. What’s your call, Jake?”

“Let’s treat this as a robbery/assault beef, and I may toss in attempted murder for good measure. That way Major Crimes can get involved, and my partner and I can look into it. I don’t take too kindly to some assholes trying to bash my cousin’s head in.”

Thankfully, the food arrived. Despite some temporary problems with chewing, Ian managed to put on an amazing display of gluttony. Jake commented, “Watch it you guys, you might end up with some missing fingers.” Who cared? After a few

minutes, he was totally sated and leaned back in the booth. Ian felt much better, even his headache was almost gone.

“That was amazing,” Pete said. “Two burgers in less than a minute. It has to be world record.” They all enjoyed another good laugh, then Pete and Ray excused themselves, saying that they were going off duty at midnight. Ian thanked them and Jake added, “Let the other guys know the score and have all of the reports routed back to me -- okay? I want to personally welcome these boys to Winnipeg.”

Ian knew exactly what that meant. Jake Carter and his partner, Bill van Horne, were a legend in police circles. As a team, they were known as the “Wrecking Crew.” Both were over six feet tall and better than 200 pounds. As constables they had often broken up dozens of brawls in some of Winnipeg’s worst beer parlours -- single-handed. There were numerous but unconfirmed stories of lengthy elevator rides at police headquarters, and long drives in the country that eventually lead to visits to the hospital by known criminals, and/or to their rapid departure from the city. Perhaps as a consequence, Winnipeg enjoyed one of the lowest rates of serious crime in Canada. Ian knew that if Jake and his partner got their hands on the guys who had nailed him ... well, let’s just say they would be shown the error of their ways.

“Listen, I’ve got to get going,” Jake said. “No, no, let me get this,” he added as Ian reached for his wallet. “The least I can do is buy dinner for a starving college student. How’re the studies going, by the way?”

“Thanks, Jake -- for everything. I’m going to take my Doctorate next year. At least I was. This recent crap is making me reconsider staying in Anthropology. It’s too dangerous. Maybe I should switch to Archaeology or something. At least dead Indians aren’t likely to pound my head in.”

Jake laughed as he paid the bill. “I had no idea that academia could be so violent. I’m glad that I joined the force, where it’s safe.”

He drove Ian to his apartment, which was only six blocks away, and offered to come inside and have a look around. Ian declined. “They’ve already got what they wanted. I don’t think they’d be stupid enough to come back here with every cop in the city looking for them. I’d bet they’re long gone. Thanks, Jake. Let me know what happens.”

With that Ian opened the front door, and when Jake saw that he was safe inside the building, he waved and pulled away. Ian had to admit that he was more than a little wary as he pushed open the apartment door and turned on the light. Thankfully, the place was exactly as he had left it and no one was lurking in the shadows. He was exhausted. What a day! He ignored the flashing light on the answering machine, and then turned off the ringer on the phone. After a quick shower, he went to bed, this time managing to undress and put on his pyjamas before hitting the sheets.

Chapter 5

The Fifth Prophet said, "In the time of the Fifth Fire there will come a time of great struggle that will grip the lives of all Native people. At the warning of this Fire there will come among the people one who holds a promise of great joy and salvation. If the people accept this promise of a new way and abandon the old teachings, then the struggle of the Fifth Fire will be with the people for many generations. The promise that comes will prove to be a false promise. All those who accept this promise will cause the near destruction of the people."

Despite his wish for a decent night's sleep, such was not to be. His head and jaw began throb unmercifully as soon as he hit the pillow. To make matters worse, he had already taken one of the painkillers the doctor had given him. It worked fine on the pain, but made him so nauseous that he simply dragged his pillow and blanket into the bathroom, then spent most of the night "talking to the big white telephone." The next morning he was hardly ready to take on the world. As his Uncle Frank would have said, "He felt like shit warmed over."

Ian was just about to stagger back to bed when someone pounded on the door. According to his clock radio it was 7:40 a.m. Christ! What now?" He was just about to shout, "GO AWAY OR DIE!" when he recognized his older brother's voice, "Ian, let me in or I'll kick the bloody door down!"

Ian unlocked the bolt and undid the chain, allowing his brother in. James charged right up to him, and after examining his face blurted, "You look like hell, why aren't you in the hospital? Jake called this morning and told me that you had been assaulted but not to worry. 'Not to worry!' You could have been killed! Mom is frantic. She and Dad are driving back this morning."

Ian groaned. "Oh, God. You didn't call the cottage?"

"I sure as hell did. What did you think -- that we wouldn't find out? Why in hell don't you answer your phone? I called but only got your stupid machine."

At this point Ian remembered that he had turned off the ringer on his phone, so he walked over to switch it back on. The light on the answering machine was blinking steadily, indicating a slew of new messages. He was in no mood to talk to anyone. Even his brother was already getting on his nerves.

"Listen, James. Some pricks decided they wanted my jacket. They hit me on the head and took off. I went to the hospital. They checked me over and Jake drove me home. End of story. I'm really okay. Listen, could you do me a big favour? Go down to Panko's and get me a coffee and a couple of cinnamon buns -- I'm starving."

"Okay, but when I get back, I want you to tell me the truth. There's something going on -- and I want to know what it is!"

Ian knew that his brother was deeply concerned about his well-being, but what he really wanted was time to think ... well, what he really wanted was some food. Throwing up all night hadn't left him with any of his late supper. He decided to listen to the phone messages while he waited for his brother's return. Again there were repeated hang-ups, his brother urging him to call, and the message from Lawrence Connaught. The new messages were from Jack Elias, Mr. Connaught again, and finally several increasingly more abusive messages from James. Jack's call sounded the least irritating, so he decided to call him after he had managed to get rid of James.

James arrived about 10 minutes later, bearing a bag of groceries as well as the coffee and cinnamon buns. "The Pankos kept your groceries in their cooler for you. I told them that you were okay. Mrs. Panko sent up some chicken soup. Now tell me what's going on."

"Thanks. Listen, James, I'm beat, literally. I was up all night tossing my cookies. My jaw is killing me, and besides I've told you all that I'm going to, so give it up will you? I'll call you later and fill you in. Meanwhile, would you try to keep Mom and Dad at bay -- at least until tonight -- please?" While saying this he tried steering his well-meaning brother out the door. He was at the point of threatening him when James sighed, "Okay," and gave him a brotherly punch on the shoulder as he left.

After locking the door, he attacked the cinnamon buns. His stomach decided that he could hang on to this offering, at least for the time being. He felt marginally better, that is before he went into the bathroom to brush his teeth. He gasped as he saw his reflection in the mirror. The whole side of his face was swollen and starting to turn various shades of brown and black. No wonder his brother had been so upset. He looked like he'd been in a train wreck. Great! This is probably what the inside of his head looked like, too.

Despite his long night in the john, Ian knew that trying to get any sleep would be a complete waste of time. He decided to get dressed and start the process of freeing himself from whatever it was in which he had become entangled. His first step would be to call Jack Elias and tell him that he did not want to have any more to do with the "evil bundle of joy," as he now thought of the midéwayan. If people were willing to beat his brains in just to get a picture of it, he could only imagine what they'd do to get the genuine article.

Ian dialled Jack at home. He picked up the phone on the first ring. "Ian!" he exclaimed. Thank God you're all right. I heard about the mugging on the morning news. What happened?"

Ian quickly related details of the attack, the theft of his jacket and photos, his suspicion that his apartment had been searched, his meeting with Daniel Kukisew in Kenora and, finally, that he no longer wished to be involved in any further dealings concerning the bundle.

"I can understand your feelings. I'm really sorry that something like this happened. But I have to tell you something -- you're not the only one having problems. Someone broke into the Anthropology Lab over the weekend. Whoever it was trashed the place. Besides that, they completely destroyed my office. There are files and books all over the place."

"Is there anything missing?" Ian really wanted to say, "Is the medicine bundle missing?"

"The place is a complete mess, but the door to the storage area held. The police are still investigating. If you're wondering about that item from Pigeon River, no, it's still safe. The only thing that I am sure of as missing is the original copy of that priest's journal, the one I photocopied for you. Why would anyone steal that?"

Why indeed? Strangely enough, he felt relieved that the bundle was safe, but one part of him would have been glad to see it disappear forever. "Jack, do you mind if I make a suggestion? Call my cousin -- he's a police detective. I think he might be interested in the break-in at the University. I think my mugging and your

break-in are related. I've got a lot more to tell you. Perhaps I should meet you at your office?"

"No, it's a total disaster. Why don't you come over to the house, say around one o'clock? I have some information for you as well."

"Okay, see you later." Ian put down the phone, then on impulse picked it up again before the line went dead. There was another click. Call it paranoia, but he would have bet any money that his phone was bugged. He thought about unscrewing the mouthpiece and having a look, but thought better of it. Then "they" would know that he knew. He would be very careful about what he said on the phone from then on.

He puttered around for the rest of the morning, mostly bringing his journal up to date. A lot had happened in three days. There was no answer when he called the number that Mr. Connaught had given. It was a hotel in downtown Winnipeg. He didn't leave a message. He almost called Swan, but decided to do that later from another phone, given his doubts about the security of his line. He would call Jake from the Pankos' store and let him in on his suspicions regarding the phone line. He would also suggest that Jake or one of his colleagues follow him over to Jack Elias's house, just in case he was being tailed by the mysterious "they."

Ian left the apartment around noon and walked over to the store. After Mrs. Panko stopped fussing over his "poor face," he thanked Mr. Panko for possibly having saved his life.

"Eh," he grunted. "I'm just sorry I wasn't able to beat the living shit outta them guys."

Ian asked to use the phone in the back. Mr. Panko said it was okay anytime. "Just no long distance, eh?" he added with a smile.

It took a few tries, but Ian eventually tracked Jake down. He relayed his thoughts regarding the phone, and the possible connection between his assault and the break-in at the University. Jake sounded a bit sceptical, but agreed that there might be something to it. "When are you leaving for Dr. Elias's house?"

Ian glanced at his watch. "About 12:30, from the lot behind my apartment block."

"Okay, if I can spring the manpower on short notice, I'll have someone watch your back. At any rate, be careful. If there is someone following, don't do anything rash."

"What do you mean by 'rash?' Like ramming them with my car and shoving my 12 gauge up their ass? You mean rash like that?"

"Yeah," laughed his cousin. "Something like that. Do me a favour and leave your cannon at home. We'll take care of that end."

Ian had no intention of taking along his pump shotgun, although the thought had crossed his mind. He agreed to let Jake know if he learned anything important from Dr. Elias, then asked, "Did anything come up regarding the men who thumped me?"

"Nope. There's an APB out for men matching their description, but so far nothing's turned up."

As Ian left the store, he had to endure Mrs. Panko's "poor face" routine one more time before escaping. Back at his car, he looked it over carefully before

opening the door. On impulse, he even checked under the hood. Was he getting paranoid or what?

He drove a very circuitous route to Jack's house in River Heights, an affluent suburb of Winnipeg that is popular with academics and professionals. A couple of times he was certain a car was following, but each time it turned off. Eventually, he turned off Academy Road and on to Campbell Street, but didn't drive directly to Jack's house. Instead, he parked and started walking up the block, then turned suddenly and walked back to his car, hoping to surprise anyone who had followed him. Not spotting anything suspicious, he got back in his car and drove farther up the block, parking in front of Jack's.

He was waiting at the door. "Ian, come on in. Let's have a look at your face. That's quite a bruise. I hope it doesn't hurt as badly as it looks. Can I get you a drink?"

"I'd better stick with Coke. I don't think my guts would be happy with the interaction between painkillers and alcohol."

While Jack went for the drink, Ian looked around his house, never having been there before. He knew that the professor had lived alone since his wife died a few years earlier. There were bookcases everywhere, and virtually every other surface, vertical and horizontal, was covered with Indian art and artifacts -- baskets, paintings, and pottery. It was like a museum. Even the floors and furniture were covered with Navajo rugs. When Jack returned with the Coke and a beer for himself, Ian commented on his amazing collection.

"I've been gathering Native art since I was a graduate student -- almost forty years now. I'm particularly fond of the American Southwest, especially Navajo and Hopi material."

Later, they toured the rest of the house. It was virtually packed from top to bottom with many similar objects -- Hopi katchina dolls, dozens of pieces of Navajo pottery, including several "black ware" works by the noted potter, Maria. It was a phenomenal collection, and Ian highly coveted many of Jack's possessions, having just started his own collecting career. Thus far he had amassed one basket.

Back in the living room, Jack invited Ian to have a seat. "Tell me all about your adventures in Kenora, and your meeting with Daniel Kukisew."

Ian quickly outlined the initial meeting with Daniel, the trip to Swan's cabin, the intrigue involved in the journey there, and the fact that Daniel was a shaman and a high-ranking midé. He told him of the shaking tent ceremony, but omitted any mention of the boulder mosaic site, of seeing the boat floating in the darkness, and then ended with a description of getting bopped on the head and the theft of his jacket -- along with the photos of the bundle. Other details he left out included his strong attraction to Swan, her traumatic revelation to him, and his own equally traumatic discovery about himself.

Jack was fascinated by the shaking tent and pumped Ian for details. He told him as much as possible, but did not tell him what he had learned about his past. Jack was very curious as to why Ian had been involved in the ritual to begin with. Ian replied that it had been to learn how best to get the bundle back to its rightful owners. To deflect further questions, he told Jack that the bundle in the Anthropology Lab was definitely the one stolen from the area several years earlier. Daniel had identified it from the photos.

“Good, then it’s simply a matter of returning it to him.”

“I hope it’s that simple. It seems that someone else is interested in getting their hands on it, and I’m fairly sure that ‘someone’ is responsible for my ringing head and your wrecked office. By the way, have you heard of someone by the name of Connaught, Lawrence Connaught? He called me a couple of times.”

“Connaught!” Jack spit the word out like it tasted bad. “That bastard! Who hasn’t heard of him? He’s one of the most unscrupulous men in the world. He buys and sells antiquities. That jackal has looted half the Pre-Columbian sites in Mesoamerica and Peru. He is nothing but a treasure hunter and a thief. Why on earth would he be calling you?” Jack was obviously very worked up.

“Do you think he could be after the bundle?”

“I really doubt it. There never has been much interest in medicine bags shown by collectors. They have no real aesthetic value. Their principal worth is scientific. Museums will purchase them, but not for the big bucks. Connaught only deals with the major stuff -- Aztec stellae, Mochica pottery, Inca gold -- those kinds of things. Besides, he works mostly on commission.”

“What do you mean? He does his looting based on an order, like shopping at K Mart?”

“Precisely. A wealthy collector will put out the word that he is interested in, say, a Mochica portrait vase. Connaught will arrange that a known site be looted, or he will obtain the material by theft from a small museum or private collection. Anyhow, he will fill the order for a hefty fee.”

“What a guy! Well, maybe someone put an order in for this bundle. Daniel said that it was one of the most powerful things known to the *Anishinaabeg*. He also mentioned that two bundles were missing. Did Beaudreau try to sell you the other one as well?”

“Daniel said that? This might put a different spin on things. No, I would have bought both bundles if he had offered. I can see now that there might be any number of people who want one or both bundles back.”

“Like who?” Ian asked.

“Perhaps someone wants to wield control over the Ojibwa for some political or financial reason. They are a very large and in some cases wealthy tribe, especially the Chippewa in the States. The bundle might give someone the leverage to control the Tribal Council. Vast tracts of territory and some very valuable resources are being claimed as part of aboriginal land claims. There are tens of millions of dollars at stake.”

“I haven’t heard anything about any movements to unify or organize the Ojibwa here or among the Chippewa in the States.”

“You wouldn’t. They are very secretive about such things. Leadership, and those involved in the decision making structure, are difficult to pin down. They are fond of using spokespersons who have no real power. Our political leaders and the press fall for it every time. You’ve heard of the saying ‘All chiefs and no Indians’? Well, in the case of the Ojibwa, it’s all Indians and no chiefs. It’s people like Daniel Kukisew who exercise the real power, but no one outside their culture would ever guess it.”

“I would,” Ian said emphatically. “I’ve seen him in action. I’m of the impression that he is a great man.”

“Well, I’ve never met him, but I would welcome the chance to.”

“Good, why don’t you call him and arrange to return the bundle in person?”

“I may do just that,” Jack said. “By the sounds of it, you don’t seem too keen to stay involved.”

“You’ve got that right. I’d like to forget this whole mess and get on with the rest of my life. Besides, I start my summer job at the brewery next week. I don’t have time for this crap.”

“Okay, I understand. Thanks for all your help, Ian. I’ll carry on from here. Good luck.”

They said their goodbyes and Ian left Jack at his door. He felt a twinge of guilt, feeling that perhaps he was letting him down in some way. Oh well, it wasn’t his problem any more.

Jack called out as he reached his car, “Ian, now that I think of it, could you return that copy of the priest’s journal some time? I’m curious about what it says now. By the way did you know that Norman Beaudreau is dead?”

Ian turned and walked back up to the stairs. “You mean the Norman Beaudreau who sold you the bundle at Pigeon River? What happened?”

“Apparently his house on the reserve burned to the ground last winter. His body was found inside. I tried to get in touch with him this spring to do some follow-up on the material that I collected from him. The local Catholic priest told me the news. It’s really unfortunate, now I may never know the provenance of the artifacts.”

Yeah, unfortunate, Ian thought, especially for Norman Beaudreau.

He told Jack that he would get a copy of the journal to him within a couple of days and left. Now he was even more curious about what the priest had written. He decided to make a copy for himself and finish reading it when he got a chance. Back at the car, he saw there was a note under the windshield wiper. Great, a freaking ticket! Actually, it was a note from cousin Jake. “Hey James Bond. No one followed you -- Jake.” Ian had not even seen him. Oh well, evasive driving had never been his forte.

Instead of heading directly to the apartment, he decided to drive by his parents’ house in St. James and check if they had arrived back from the lake. If they were home, he could do a little damage control. Sure enough, his father’s Buick was in the driveway, so he pulled in behind and walked around the back. Just as he reached for the handle, the back door was flung open and his obviously very agitated mother confronted him.

“Thank God you’re alive!” she blurted. “James told us that you were in the hospital with head injuries. Oh! Your poor face! What happened?”

Seeing she was about to burst into tears, he said, “I’m okay, Mom, really. It was only a slight bop on the head. I feel fine. Trust me, it looks a lot worse than it feels,” he lied.

She pulled him into the kitchen just as his father came upstairs from the basement. “Your mother is worried sick,” he growled. “What the hell’s going on? Jake told us you’d been mugged. Your face looks like a monkey’s butt? Have they caught whoever did it?”

Ian went through his “I’m okay -- really!” routine all over again. He had to endure several more minutes of intense cross-examination, but he eventually

calmed his parents down and convince them that he had suffered no permanent brain damage. He gave them a very condensed version of the mugging and brief visit to the hospital, assuring them that there would be no further complications.

His mother was convinced that it was “something to do with that Swan person or her father.” Ian replied that Swan had nothing to do with it, and that it was doubtful whether he would ever see either of them again, anyway. By claiming fatigue and a headache, he was able to avoid staying for dinner. Both excuses were actually valid. His only goal now was to get back to the sanctuary of his apartment and hide out for a while.

Good, he thought as he disengaged from his mother, at least this part of the ordeal is over. He contemplated stopping by his brother’s place and killing him for getting their folks all bent out of shape. Nah, that would leave his children without a father, and he rather liked his little nephew and niece. James’s heart was in the right place, but Ian still felt that he had overreacted. Oh well...

Back at the apartment, the flashing light on the answering machine signalled yet another spate of messages. Resigned to the annoyance, Ian pressed the replay button. Detective Jake had called, his mother twice (thankfully he had put out the particular fire), and Lawrence Connaught. Given what he had learned from Jack, Ian decided to deal with Mr. Connaught first. Someone answered immediately. “Connaught here.”

“Mr. Connaught, this is Ian Stewart. What can I do for you?”

“Ian -- do you mind if I call you Ian?” he asked, and went on without waiting for an answer. “I have a proposal that I think you might be interested in. Why don’t we meet and I can explain what I have in mind. Are you busy?”

“Sorry, Mr. Connaught. I’m a little tied up right now. If you can tell me what this is all about, maybe we can deal with it now.”

“I can’t really discuss it over the phone. Are you sure that we can’t get together for a brief meeting. I can have a car pick you up in twenty minutes. I assure you that you will be very interested in what I have to say.”

Ian was more than slightly intrigued and half tempted to meet with Connaught, but he was simply too tired, and besides, he was starting to suspect that Connaught might well be behind all of the things that had happened recently.

“Sorry, I just can’t make it today. Perhaps some other time. I’ll let you know.”

A tone of urgency entered Connaught’s voice. “This really can’t wait. I’m leaving town tomorrow and may not be back in this country for quite some time. I can make it worth your while. How about a thousand dollars for five minutes?”

Now he was interested. A thousand bucks. That would pay the rent for three months or put a new engine in his piece-of-junk car. His mind was racing. He could meet with Connaught, but in some public place where he could avoid further head damage. “Okay, why don’t we meet at Champs in say, forty minutes?”

“Champs -- what’s that? Why not here at my hotel?”

“I have my reasons. Champs is a pub on Osborne Street, a couple of blocks south of the Osborne Bridge. It’s only five minutes from your hotel. The desk clerk can give you directions.” Ian’s tone made it clear that this was a take-it-or-leave-it proposal.

“All right, I’ll meet you there at four p.m. Where will you be?”

“I’ll wait for you in the lobby on the Osborne Street side.”

“Fine, I look forward to our meeting.”

Ian immediately started formulating a three-point plan: first, get the \$1,000; second, make sure that he didn't end up making another visit to emergency; and three, find out what the hell was going on. Champs, only two blocks from his apartment on River Avenue, was his favourite watering hole and he was a familiar face there. He decided that before heading to the pub, he would give cousin Jake a call and let him in on the scenario he had devised. He wished that he had one of those tiny tape recorders that spies used, and perhaps a Walther PPK automatic pistol.

He had lots of time to plan his strategy, in fact, he had too much time because he began to reconsider his decision within seconds after hanging up. He thought of a half dozen “what ifs,” each more terrible than the last, and finally ending with, “what if I end up lying on the sidewalk full of bullet holes?” Nah! This was Winnipeg, not Beirut. He would be perfectly secure. However, just to be on the safe side he would call Jake from the Panko's store.

After yet another session of “poor face” with Mrs. Panko, and of answering Mr. Panko's queries about the “buggers who done it,” Ian reached the phone. He might definitely have to shop someplace else until his bruises healed. His attempts to contact Jake ended in failure. He was out somewhere on a call and out of radio contact. Shit! Ian thought. He had no choice but to face Connaught alone. He came up with several more “what ifs” as he trudged over to Champs. Great! he thought. I'll probably end up a crispy critter like Norman Beaudreau.

His intention was to arrive before Connaught, so he could check him out and make certain that he arrived alone. Ian stepped into the lobby a good 10 minutes early, but to his surprise there was a well-tanned man in his early forties already there. Ian knew instinctively that he was the notorious Lawrence Connaught. He didn't give Ian any chance to wonder further, for he walked immediately toward him and held out his hand. “Ian?”

“Mr. Connaught. You managed to find it.” Ian felt like a refugee as he shook the offered hand. Connaught was wearing a camel hair overcoat, cashmere sweater and Gucci loafers. He definitely didn't fit in with the usual crowd who frequented Champs. They were more likely to have arrived on Harleys and be sporting tattoos instead of Rolex watches.

“Yes, you were correct. The reception clerk provided excellent directions. What happened?” he asked, examining Ian's face. “Have you been in an accident?”

“Yeah, just a little fishing accident. It only hurts when I talk, eat or laugh,” Ian replied, while at the same time thinking, You smarmy prick, I bet it was your goons who did this to me.”

“I hadn't realized fishing was so dangerous,” he laughed. “Shall we find a place where we can talk?”

Ian suggested the coffee shop to the left of the entrance. The pub was simply too noisy and packed to hold any sort of conversation, at least a sober one. They took a seat in a booth and had the whole place to themselves. The waitress came to take their order. Connaught ordered mineral water and Ian a chocolate milk. Answering his quizzical look, Ian said, “My stomach has been slightly touchy lately.”

Connaught wasted no time. He reached in his coat and retrieved an envelope that he placed on the table. Ian's heart was racing as he picked it up, knowing from the heft exactly what it contained -- 10 \$100 bills. "Is American currency okay?" he asked. "I didn't have time to exchange it."

Ian nodded. "Perfectly okay, thanks." After shoving the envelope into his back pocket he continued, "Now what do you need from me?"

"Are you familiar with the Chippewa legend concerning the Seven Sacred Fires?"

The question caught Ian off guard. He had been sure he would be asked about the "bundle of joy," and was prepared to deny all knowledge and split as soon as possible.

"Only what I learned in an Ethnography course. The 'Sacred Fires' are believed to be a series of prophecies written by Anishinabe holy men long ago. They are said to contain the secrets of the Midéwiwin Society, and other knowledge important to their people. They were recorded on scrolls made of birch bark. The scrolls are said to be hidden in a cave somewhere. Oh yeah, some people believe they contain predictions about the future. Something like that. They probably don't actually exist."

"Oh, they exist all right. In fact, someone went to the trouble of stealing one of them a few years ago. That one may hold the key to where the rest of the scrolls still are. I don't need to tell you that these scrolls have incredible potential value. They might even be the North American equivalent of the Dead Sea Scrolls."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Connaught, but I can't help you. I honestly don't know anything about any sacred scrolls."

Before Ian could further convince Connaught of his genuine ignorance concerning the subject, he was caught off balance again. "But you are familiar with a man by the name of Norman Beaudreau, are you not?"

Having just heard that day of Beaudreau's death, Ian was shocked by the question. It would have been useless to deny his surprise, so he decided to play along a little bit longer. "Sure, he sold some Native artifacts to the University last year. I never met him. I saw all of the material he turned over, and I know for sure that there were no birch bark scrolls."

"What exactly did Mr. Beaudreau sell to the University?" A more strident tone had come into Connaught's voice. This was a man accustomed to getting his way.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Connaught, but that is something you will have to discuss with Dr. Elias in the Anthropology Department. He dealt with Norman Beaudreau directly. I was only his humble and ignorant assistant."

A contemptuous look crossed Connaught's face, "Jack Elias. Jack and I go away back. He will not even take my calls."

Ian thought it strange that Jack had not mentioned any recent contact with Connaught. "Come on, Ian. For a thousand dollars I'm entitled to a few straight answers."

To his surprise and horror, Ian heard himself saying, "Look, Mr. Connaught, I don't want to take anything that I haven't earned, so here's your money back." He reached in his pocket, pulled out the envelope and placed it on the table. Standing up to leave, he said, "Sorry I couldn't be of more help." His immediate intention was to head across the lobby into the pub and order enough beer to console himself for the loss of a grand -- maybe about 10 pints would do it.

Connaught's tone changed immediately. "No, no! Keep the money. A deal's a deal. I paid only for your time and you gave it to me generously. Perhaps I can prevail upon your knowledge at some other date?"

Before Ian could reply, Connaught stood, reached into his pocket and placed a ten on the table to cover a two-dollar cheque, and then strode off immediately for the door. Upon reaching the driveway in front of Champs, he looked to his left, waved, and within seconds was whisked away in a black limousine.

Man, was that weird or what? Ian thought as he pocketed the money for the second time. Now it's goddamn scrolls. What scrolls? Then he remembered something: Although, Jack had removed only a few things from the Beaudreau medicine bundle, one of the objects had been a small tube of old birchbark. Ian had always pictured scrolls as large rolls of papyrus. Could this have been one of the scrolls that interested to Connaught? If it was, maybe Beaudreau had stashed it there. He might have even been the person who had stolen it in the first place. The only way to find out would be to open the bundle again and have a look. He decided to call Jack, tell him the gist of the meeting with Connaught, and suggest that they take another look inside the bundle. His curiosity was getting the best of him -- again.

Feeling on top of the world, he stepped out the front door of Champs and onto Osborne. He was rich! The next thing he knew, a car screeched to a stop in front of him, almost running over his toes. The passenger door opened and out stepped Bill van Horne, Jake's partner. Without any preamble, he grinned and opened the back door saying, "Get in, Ian baby."

After closing the door of the unmarked squad car, he rejoined Jake in the front seat. Jake turned to glare at Ian. "That whack on the head must have done some real brain damage, you fucking idiot!" With that he accelerated out onto the busy street, almost hitting a city bus. The honking subsided into the distance as they headed north along Osborne at a high rate of speed. Once across the bridge over the Assiniboine River, Jack veered right and onto the grounds of the Manitoba Legislative Buildings. He headed directly for the parking lot and stopped abruptly. Both he and Bill turned and fixed Ian with their patented "you worthless piece of shit" stares.

"What the hell do you think you're doing? Do you realize how close you are to going in for questioning? Do you know who that guy in Champs was? What did he give you? Hand it over."

Ian was still reeling from the ride and was having trouble dealing with this sudden change in trajectory. Jake and Bill must be playing some sort of joke. Besides, there was no way he was handing over the money. Unwisely, he decided to play the smartass. "Aren't you going to read me my rights?"

Jack was out of the car like a shot and jerked open the passenger door. "Out! We're going for a little walk." He grabbed Ian's arm none too gently and yanked him to his feet. Then, still gripping his upper arm, they started their "little walk" with van Horne, still grinning, trailing a few feet behind. "You think this is some kind of fucking joke, don't you? Well it isn't. You are in some very deep shit. Now tell me what you are doing with Connaught and no bullshit, or I'll kick your ass right around the block!"

Message received -- loud and clear. Jake was not kidding. He would genuinely kick Ian's butt if he didn't level with him. He had never seen his cousin so angry before. Now Ian knew what the criminal element must feel like when they were "welcomed to Winnipeg" by Jake and Bill. He was more than slightly intimidated and quickly recounted the story: the phone messages from Connaught, his reply and subsequent meeting, the discussion in Champs, and the thousand dollar "fee" for his time.

Jake released his arm and dropped the "bad cop" act. "I'm sorry about coming on strong, but I had to attract your attention."

"You did -- believe me." Great, he thought, rubbing his arm, more bruises. "So, if I may so bold as to ask, why were you following me?"

"We weren't following you, you fucking moron, we were tailing Connaught! I almost crapped my pants when I saw you two together."

"Why were you following him? Was he responsible for my visit to emergency the other night?"

"No, he has nothing to do with that. This is something else altogether. We got a call from the Mounties. It seems they were alerted by their pals in the FBI that this Connaught guy was coming to Winnipeg, and that he should be placed under close surveillance. No one does shit in this town without Bill and me knowing about it, so we took the assignment. I don't trust the "horsemen" anyway -- they have a tendency to piss in our pool whenever they get a chance."

Like most of the local police force, Jake had an abiding lack of respect for the RCMP, whom he likened to rent-a-cops. When it came to jurisdiction, the Mounties rarely stepped on any toes in the Winnipeg Police Department.

"Ever since Connaught's private jet hit the tarmac, either Bill or I have been on him. He rarely left his hotel room, so when he headed out this afternoon we were right on his ass. What the hell do you know about him? All I know is that our friends to the south are very interested in everything he does. We assumed it had to be drugs."

Ian told Jake what Dr. Elias had told him earlier: That Connaught was an international antiquities dealer, and that he had a somewhat unsavoury reputation.

"I'd bet that he deals in a lot more than fucking 'antiquities' then. If you're smart -- and I used to think you were -- you won't have anything more to do with this guy. He's obviously poison."

Ian assured Jake that was precisely his plan, given the chance. Besides, Connaught had told him that he was leaving the country tomorrow. Jake asked why Ian had assumed that Connaught might have something to do with his Technicolor face. He replied that Dr. Elias had a theory about the potential importance of the bundle, and that someone may have commissioned Connaught to obtain it. The stolen photos would confirm that it was what they were after.

"But you told me that Connaught was interested in a 'scroll,' not a medicine bag. You know, I think you've seen too many goddam movies. Connaught is after a scroll that is somehow related to Norman Beaudreau, now deceased; Elias had dealt with Beaudreau; Connaught can't get any joy from Elias; so he comes to you. What I can't figure is how he made the connection to you. You told me that you were just along for the ride."

“Believe me, Jake, I’m having trouble with that myself. Maybe it comes down to somebody spreading a little money around in Pigeon River. Many people saw Jack and me there. In a place that small, there aren’t too many secrets.”

“Maybe, but consider this: There might be another set of players. Someone who is after the bundle itself. Your native pals in Kenora seemed to think so.”

Ian hadn’t considered that possibility. When he thought about it, it made sense. Connaught had not mentioned the bundle, and he couldn’t possibly know that Norman Beaudreau might have stashed a bark scroll inside of it. God! If that was true, things had gone from being merely strange to seriously weird.

At this point, Bill yelled to Jake that they had a call and had to leave. Knowing that Ian had only to walk back over the bridge to get home, Jake didn’t offer him a ride. Which was fine as Ian preferred to walk home, anyway. As they got in the car, Jack advised, “Be good or I’ll tell your Mom.”

Bill just grinned and waved, appearing to be vastly amused by the whole thing.

What an asshole! Ian thought. Oh well, he still had the thousand bucks, so he stopped by the liquor store on his way home to pick up a case of beer and celebrate. He would order a celebratory pizza as well, once he got back to the apartment. Yum -- painkillers, beer and pizza. His stomach was already seething in anticipation. Ian decided to toss in a few Tums to maintain some semblance order down there.

The caretaker was lurking in the lobby as he entered. “What the heck happened to you -- did you try to ride your bike down the stairs again?”

“No!” Ian grimaced at that painful reminder. “I got mugged outside of Panko’s last night. Don’t you read the papers?”

“No shit? This neighbourhood is going all to hell. Did they get anything?”

“Just my jacket,” Ian replied as he started edging up the stairs.

“Oh. Anyway, I saw your two friends again. They were across the street in a car.”

Friends! Those were probably the guys who had mugged him. He tried to stay cool. “Listen Ray, if you see them again, give me a call. I would like them to meet my cousin Jake.”

Fleeing to his apartment, he bolted and chained the door, and then started abusing his stomach with beer. He couldn’t remember much past 8 o’clock. The phone rang a couple of times, but he didn’t really give a damn.

Chapter 6

In the confusing times of the Sixth Fire, it is said that a group of visionaries came among the Anishinabe. They gathered all the priests of the Midewiwin Lodge. They told the priests that the Midewiwin Way was in danger of being destroyed. They gathered all the sacred bundles. They gathered all the scrolls that recorded the ceremonies. All these things were placed in a hollowed out log from the ironwood tree. Men were lowered over a cliff by long ropes. They dug a hole in the cliff and buried the log where no one could find it. Thus, the teachings of the elders were

hidden out of sight but not out of memory. It was said that when the time came that the Indian people could practice their religion without fear that a little boy would dream where the Ironwood log, full of the Sacred Bundles and Scrolls were buried. He would lead his people to the place.

Around 10 the next morning, Ian finally succumbed to three urgent bodily urges -- a full bladder, desperate thirst and a pounding headache. After a half hour in the bathroom, he felt marginally better. A huge pile of dirty clothes and no clean underwear forced him to consider doing something he truly dreaded -- laundry. At least the machines in the laundry room down the hall would probably be available on a weekday. He started organizing the loads, then remembered the bag containing the clothes he had worn while fishing at the lake. Yes, they would definitely be part of the first batch. As he dumped the bag out onto the floor, the envelope containing the photocopy of the priest's journal flopped out. He remembered promising to return it to Jack. He would make a duplicate at the University, then drop off the original copy at Jack's office. While his clothes sloshed around in the machine, he opened Laviolette's journal and started reading where he had left off...

It seems that when Father Laviolette arrived at the small encampment at Fishing Lake, he appeared in a 20-foot freighter canoe loaded with all of the supplies he would need for a long time. There were pages of inventory in his journal. After being greeted politely by the adults, he began to settle in with them. He erected a large wall tent at one end of the clearing on the north side of the encampment, then started constructing some crude furniture from spruce and birch trees. Soon he had a table and a chair, as well as some shelves. He built a small lean-to and filled it with supplies.

As the people went about their daily activities -- the men tending their nets and trapping, the women caring for their children, gathering firewood, cleaning and smoking fish, and preparing meals, the priest would talk with them in his halting Ojibway. His clumsy speech was the source of much amusement, especially among the children, and at first they would usually run away at his approach. The women in camp would listen patiently, and then answer his questions politely, patiently, and with good humour.

The priest wrote in his journal of how happy everyone seemed despite the harsh conditions under which they lived. He regarded their simple life and lack of many possessions as signs of poverty.

Ian thought about this, and decided that the good priest had obviously missed the point that the Anishinabe thought themselves fortunate beyond measure. Just then his concentration was broken by old Mrs. Jantzen, who started prodding him in the side with her cane. She lived on the same floor, and usually tried to make his life miserable by constantly complaining about the "loud" music and banging doors. He knew that she was deaf as a post, but the slightest vibration would have her on the phone to the caretaker. "Aren't you finished with the machines yet?" she shouted.

"I just started, Mrs. Jantzen," Ian shouted back. It will be about another hour. I'll let you know when I'm done." Now piss off you old hag, he thought as she left, muttering something about "calling the landlord." Any time that anyone on the

floor tried to use the laundry room, they got the same treatment. Ah, the joys of collective living.

Ian decided to go back to his apartment and continue reading there. Such was not to be. The phone was ringing when he got to the door. He managed to grab it before the machine did.

“Ian, it’s Swan. I just read about your assault in the Tribune. Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. You get a Winnipeg paper?” Ian asked in surprise

“Of course, we get the Trib and Free Press at the police station. We have to keep up with the news from the big city, you know. Now tell me what happened. The Trib only mentioned your name and that you had been mugged.”

It must have been a slow news day, Ian thought, if a minor incident like that got any ink. He quickly related the details of the attack, and the loss of his jacket and the photos of the bundle. He also told her that his cousin, Jake, was handling the investigation. Swan was amazed that he was related to the Jake Carter. Ian was equally amazed that his reputation had reached as far as Kenora.

“I told you that you were in danger” she chided. “Now are you convinced? Now they know for sure that you are close to the thing they want.”

Ian really didn’t want to continue the conversation on the phone, given his suspicion about the line’s security. “Listen, Swan, thanks for your concern. I have to get out of here in a few minutes to do something at the University. Can I call you later at home?”

Swan wanted to find out more, but finally gave him her home number and he managed to hang up. Just the sound of her voice had made his heart pound. God, it was worse than any puppy love he had endured as a horny, pre-pubescent kid. After replacing the receiver, he depressed the replay button to see who else had called the previous day. His mother, his girlfriend (Christ! He had forgotten all about her), and someone whose voice he didn’t recognize. He knew it was the voice of a Native man because of the flat intonation and slight slurring of his speech. Many speakers of Native languages have trouble with soft consonants and put little stress on vowels. He asked for “Een Shtewrt” by name, and said he would call again. He did not leave a name or number. Great! Another player heard from.

Ian finished off his laundry and banged on Mrs. Jantzen’s door as he went by. Surprisingly, she didn’t rush out and try to attack him with her cane. “Probably busy boiling up some toads and lizards, you old witch,” he mumbled aloud. He made himself two sandwiches, finally getting to taste the Montreal smoked meat and cheese that he had bought at Pankos’. Later, he grabbed the journal and tossed it in his packsack, feeling that he might as well hoof it over to the University. Usually, he walked to the downtown campus, at least during the warmer months. The 20-minute trek was far too brutal in winter. He made sure there were no suspicious looking people lurking outside as he exited the lobby.

Using the Anthropology Department machine, it took about an hour to photocopy the diary’s 200 or so pages. Ian first had to convince the secretary that he was doing some work for Dr. Elias, which was true -- technically. When he finished, Ian gave her the original to put in Dr. Elias’s mail slot. He could see by the pegboard that he had not appeared yet.

The secretary told Ian that the mess from the break-in had been cleaned up. Everything was back to normal, and maintenance was busy installing new locks

and shatterproof glass on all of the office doors. Better never than late, he mused. He left Jack a note, asking if it would be okay for him to have another look inside the bundle, and to call him with his answer when he got the chance.

Having no reason to hang around, Ian simply retraced his route back to the apartment block. He was tired of people staring at his war wounds, anyway. On impulse, he called home and had a chat with his father, who had taken a week of holidays from his job as an electrical engineer with the Manitoba Telephone System. Ian asked whether it was possible to detect a bug or tap on a phone line. His father was curious why he would ask such a thing, so he told him about his suspicion that someone was listening in to his calls. He also told him that it had something to do with both his mugging and the meeting with Daniel Kukisew. His father said that a wiretap could easily be detected because of the current drain, but to find a bug required more sophisticated equipment.

"I can put you in touch with one of my co-workers at MTS who specializes in such things. He can arrange to run a diagnostic check from the switching centre on Osborne Street to check for a tap on your line. I think that the way it works, a technician actually has to 'sweep, your apartment electronically to find a bug."

Ian thanked his father and said he would let him know about getting his apartment checked for bugs. Then he had to endure another session of fretting from his mother. She made him promise to call Carol, because she too was "worried sick."

After hanging up, Ian thought that the very least, if someone was listening and had heard the conversation with his father, "they" would know that he was on to them and would, perhaps, leave him alone. They might also be dying from boredom after listening to all of the inane crap.

He called his girlfriend, figuring that she was probably home from work. They had been dating fairly steadily since high school. He felt guilty that he had not called her when he got back from the lake, or at least the morning after he got out of the hospital -- or that evening. If pressured, he would plead that, hey, I just never got the chance, okay?

He and Carol had not been on the best of terms the previous week, because he had chosen to go fishing on the weekend rather than go with her to her parent's cottage at Victoria Beach. He hated it there -- the fishing was lousy and lying on the sand slathered in oil did not appeal to him. Besides, her parents constant bickering drove him up the wall. So, she went to the beach and he went fishing. When she answered, he said, "Hi, Carol, I..."

"Why didn't you return my calls?" she demanded. "I've phoned everywhere looking for you. How could you be so inconsiderate? I have been worried to death since I heard about the robbery. Everybody's talking about it. Your Mom said your face looked awful. I'm coming right over. You had better be there when I get there. You have some explaining to do, mister." Slam!

He took the receiver away from his ear and looked at it so see if there were any signs of smoke. Shit! She was on the way over. He had less than 20 minutes to clean up the carnage created by last night's beer blitz and today's laundry epic. Maybe his facial bruises would get him some sympathy. Nah! Knowing Carol, she would probably add a few more. That would teach him to date an Irish girl, and especially a redhead. He laughed to himself when he considered the two women

currently in his life: a redhead who carried a grudge and a brunette who carried a gun. Yikes!

He busied himself picking up beer bottles, tossing his laundry into the closet, and then doing a quick vacuuming job to remove some of the larger dust bunnies. Jake called to see if “James Bond” had anything new to report, “Like hydrogen bomb secrets or the location of Atlantis.”

Ian told him to get stuffed. Jake said that Connaught had indeed flown out of Winnipeg on a private aircraft that morning. The flight plan was for a direct run to Chicago. There was still no trace of Ian’s assailants, and he suspected they had left town. That was good news, but Ian would have liked his turn at bat. Just as Jake rang off, there was a none too gentle rap at the door. The wrath of Carol had arrived.

Ian tried to grab her for a quick squeeze, but she pushed past him and turned in the centre of the room. “My God!” she cried as she saw his face, and immediately burst into tears. “Your Mom told me you left Kenora on Monday morning. For your information, it’s now Wednesday afternoon ... well?” Her face was about the same color as her hair by this point. Ian knew that saying something like “I was too busy to call” might cause a fatality -- his -- so he went to plan B. He blamed everything on the knock on his head and the painkillers that had turned him into a zombie. “I was just so ... dazed and ... confused.” His voice cracked on the last word, and he even moaned, trying to look as pitiable as possible. Thank Christ! She bought it. The injured puppy routine comes through again.

“I’m sorry!” she wailed. Ian put his arms around her and rocked her gently back and forth until her sobbing waned. She took his face in her hands and began kissing his injured jaw and cheek. Both of them were beginning to feel much better, and soon the kissing spread to other non-afflicted areas. When the heavy breathing began, Ian knew that he was out of the woods. A half hour or so of intense mutual consolation on the couch put the matter to rest.

He gave Carol the Reader’s Digest version of fishing at his uncle’s cottage, then the mugging and subsequent events. The news of his thousand-dollar windfall brought about a complete change in persona. Now all smiles, she announced that he was forgiven, and as a reward, he was taking her out for dinner to “someplace nice for a change.”

Ian quickly agreed, glad to get off relatively lightly. Besides, he had to admit it; he really did love Carol and would never hurt her in any way. The call to Swan would have to wait. Before they left for dinner, he unplugged the answering machine -- *assistant to the instrument of the Devil*.

He took Carol home after a great Italian dinner at Mama Rosa’s, but had to go through the now familiar fussing over his face with her parents. As she was an assistant producer with CBC Radio, Carol had to be at work early the next morning. Therefore, they made an early night of it. He was back at his place by 11 o’clock. All was forgiven. He had promised to call her the next day, and they had made some tentative plans for the weekend.

Ian was still wide-awake when he got home, so he opened Laviolette’s journal and began reading where he had left off.

After a few days among the people, the priest had started to build a small chapel out of logs. Gaining permission from the group's leader, he began felling spruce trees and laboriously dragging them to a clearing in the woods behind the village. He worked long hours, cutting the trees to length and peeling the bark. He had brought the necessary tools with him -- axes, saws, block and tackle, broadaxe, and a spud for peeling bark. He also had a plentiful supply of rope and nails. Such plenty did not go unnoticed. It was the Ojibwa way to share all things, and the priest began to notice that his supplies were dwindling. Canned goods, rope, tools -- all seemed to have vanished. He knew there was only one explanation and was angered by what he perceived as theft.

He did not want to create a problem, so he approached the leader, Marcel, and asked if he knew anything about his missing goods. Marcel was forthright and told him the people simply assumed that because he was living among them, "what was his was theirs, and what they had was his." The priest explained that he needed the goods to continue "God's work," and that he would like the missing tools returned. Marcel said that it would be as he asked, and by the next morning all of the tools were back in their place. Laviolette did not seem to notice any change in attitude from the people, but there must have been. He put all of his effort into the log construction, recording every detail of his labours, filling page after page with minute details. Jeez! Ian thought, this guy should have been an accountant.

One day in early August, a stranger paddling a canoe showed up in the village. He was an Ojibwa, but knew no one in the camp. As he spoke passable French, he quickly ingratiated himself to Father Laviolette. He told him that he had been baptized a Catholic, and immediately offered his services to the priest. To Laviolette, the appearance of Norman Beaudreau was heaven sent. *Norman Beaudreau!* Holy cow! There *was* a connection between the priest and Beaudreau. That might explain the theft of Laviolette's journal from Dr. Elias's office.

Laviolette and Beaudreau worked together to build the log chapel, and things progressed rapidly. By the third week in August the tiny building was complete, and the two men had become friends. They even shared the large wall tent. The people of the camp remained outwardly cordial to the two outsiders, but had little to do with them directly.

The men next turned their attention to the chapel's interior, building several rows of benches and a table at the back. Upon the table, Father Laviolette laid out the altar cloth and placed upon it a cross and chalice. To the side of the small building, they erected a tripod of three tall pines. At the top they hung a small brass bell and connected it by a rope to the base of the tripod. The priest was now ready to begin his work.

In late August, on the first Sunday after construction ceased, the priest put on his vestments and had Beaudreau ring the bell. Some people came out to see what was going on, and the priest went from tent to tent, inviting the people to come to the chapel. They humoured the black robed priest and followed him to the log structure. He indicated that they should sit on the benches while he stood at the front and spoke to them. They all knew from past experience with priests and missionaries what was happening. Out of politeness, the small group listened as the priest said mass. When he had finished, he suggested that they should come

forward and eat a crust of bread and then drink a glass of red juice. The rite of communion was also familiar to many of them. They saw that taking the bread and sweet juice greatly pleased the young priest. The entire group of five men, their wives and nine children filed past and “took communion.” Then they left quickly and went back to their normal activities.

Laviolette was filled with joy. He had succeeded in his goal of bringing the word of God to these people. Yeah, thought Ian, whether they wanted it or not.

The following week, the priest noted a change in the small community. The men brought their nets to shore and hung them to dry. There was a general air of anticipation, and the people busied themselves preparing for something. Late in the week, three of the men loaded some supplies into one of their freighter canoes and headed south. The priest asked Beaudreau if he knew where they were going. He replied that they were headed to a gathering at Vickers Lake. The priest was curious about the nature of the gathering. Although Beaudreau was reluctant to discuss the matter, the priest was persistent. Beaudreau finally told him that it was a *wabanowiwin*. Laviolette continued his questioning and eventually discovered that the *wabanowiwin* was a kind of pagan ritual, perhaps even involving witchcraft. He was scandalized. Had not these men taken communion? He felt that for his mission to be successful, the people had to forget the old ways and achieve salvation through accepting Christ. He would have to redouble his efforts. He must go to the place where this “worship of the Devil” was taking place and put a stop to it.

Despite strong protests from Beaudreau, the priest made immediate plans for the two of them to head south to Vickers Lake and end the blasphemy. Beaudreau was obviously not keen to go, and this was noted in Laviolette’s journal. The priest finally had to resort to old-fashioned bribery, and paid Beaudreau to take him to Vickers Lake. He was told that it was about 20 miles to the southwest, and would involve two days of travel including several portages.

The next morning they left on their crusade. Beaudreau told the priest that he only knew vaguely where the place was. Consequently, they cruised around fruitlessly for days. Once or twice they could hear the beat of drums far in the distance, but could never seem to find the source. After four days, Beaudreau announced that the *wabanowiwin* was over and that they might as well head back.

When they reached the camp, the priest reeled in horror. The entire place was abandoned. The tents, the canoes, the nets, the dried fish -- the men, women and children were all gone. His tent and the chapel were all that remained. He fell to his knees and looked to Beaudreau with his eyes filling with tears. Beaudreau knew perfectly well what had happened: the *wabanowiwin* had marked the end of summer. Fishing was through for the season, so the people had moved back to their winter settlement at Berens River on the shores of Lake Winnipeg some 50 miles away. Father Laviolette took their departure personally. He felt that God was testing him. Beaudreau tried to convince him that they too should consider heading out of the bush. The leaves would start turning colour soon, and the snow would not be far behind. The priest would have none of it. He was convinced that the people would return any day.

Ian paused in his reading and thought; the poor bugger wouldn't know that they probably wouldn't return to this particular encampment for many years, if at all. These Ojibwa still practised a seasonal migration pattern over a huge territory. Traditionally, they moved from summer fishing to winter hunting and trapping camps. By constantly changing locations, they ensured that the fish and game would have a chance to recover. They were one of a few groups left who still practised the "old ways," but it was likely that in a generation the traditional lifestyle would vanish completely. It was, after all, the 1960s. He lowered his gaze and continued reading....

Autumn came and the leaves began to fall. Ducks and geese flew overhead by the thousands on their annual migration south. The evenings became frosty, and both men spent much of their time huddled around the fire. Still, the priest persisted in his belief that the people would return. He turned all of his attention to Beaudreau, constantly pestering him to confess his sins and seek eternal salvation. To quiet Laviolette, he decided to "confess" and relate his life story. He knew that the priest was bound by the sanctity of the confessional and would never tell anyone else. Little did he know at the time, but Laviolette wrote down virtually everything that he was told.

Ian was intrigued and would have loved to continue reading, but it was late and his eyes were drooping as he laid the journal down. But the next morning, he couldn't resist and began reading again as soon as he was awake.

Father Laviolette must have transcribed Beaudreau's confession almost word for word. There was page after page describing his life from his birth on the Fort Alexander Indian Reserve, through his years in a Catholic residential school in St. Boniface, his troubled youth and frequent brushes with the law, including several terms in Stony Mountain Penitentiary for such things as car theft and assault. Beaudreau assured the priest that he had seen the error of his ways, and after his last stretch in jail he had retreated to the Little Black River Reserve and lived with his mother's brother. He wanted to rediscover his native roots and renounce the evil path of the white man.

At the time, revival movements and Alcoholics Anonymous were sweeping Native communities, largely as a response to escalating alcoholism, suicide, and family violence. Beaudreau said that he had tried to purify his soul, but that temptation had overcome him. He began to drink heavily, got into some trouble, and was banished from the community. He ended up in Kenora, doing odd jobs and a little guiding during the summers. He married a local woman in the late 1950s and fathered several children.

He had been on and off welfare until the spring of 1963, when he had been hired to do some guiding for a rich American college student. Jeff Stanton was the son of the president of a large American chemical firm based in Ohio. Stanton junior claimed to be a graduate student doing research for his doctorate comparing Siberian and Chippewa shamanism. He was interested in visiting and documenting rock art sites in the Lake of the Woods area. Stanton was also very intent on obtaining Native artifacts, especially those of religious significance. According to Beaudreau, he seemed to have an almost unlimited supply of money. They travelled all over Lake of the Woods, asking questions and visiting known heritage sites, calling in on reserves and other native settlements. No one would

have much to do with them, and most attempts to gather information, especially concerning religion and sorcery, met with failure.

Beaudreau milked the situation for all it was worth. He knew just enough about the area's history and his own cultural tradition to convince Stanton that he was a reliable informant. In reality, however, by then he was a total outcast among his own people. That was the only reason he got the job in the first place. No other Native would have anything to do with Stanton, or of any other white man who were asking so many questions about forbidden things.

By July, it looked like the gravy train was about to leave town. Beaudreau knew that there was to be an *onauminauh midéwiwin*, a very important ceremony, in late July. He also knew that the location was to be Witch Island. Instinctively, he realized it would be very unwise for anyone to attempt to "gate crash." Nonetheless, he tantalized his client with stories of the scope of this ceremony, and told him that all of the important *midé* of the Ojibwa people would attend. Stanton asked if all of the sacred scrolls, carved totems and medicine bags would be brought out during the rites. Beaudreau assured him that all of the sacred things would be there. At the same time he warned that it was impossible to even get close to the island, and that those who attempted to trespass would be dealt with severely.

Stanton insisted that they somehow get on to the island so he could witness the ritual for himself. He said that it would clinch his doctorate. He offered Beaudreau an obscene amount of money to make that happen. Norman accepted the money and then devised a plan. They would approach the island by canoe. He knew that if they set up camp at Spirit Rock they would have only a three-mile paddle to Witch Island. If they waited until the *midéwiwin* was in full swing, and the moon obscured by cloud, they could approach unseen. He would wait at the canoe while Stanton, clad in dark clothing and with his face blackened, would gain a vantage point and watch the happenings.

By late July, their plans had been finalized. They motored to Spirit Rock and set up a base camp a few days before the ceremonies were to begin. To avert suspicion, they pretended to be fishermen. Then, on the fateful night, they heard the drumming begin and could see the flare of a large fire on Witch Island. The *midéwiwin* ceremony had begun. Around midnight, the moon went behind a cloud, so they began their approach. Each time the moon reappeared they would stop paddling and duck down in the canoe. Norman had wrapped cloth around the paddles to muffle any sound should they accidentally strike a gunwale. The trip took just under an hour. The drumming and chanting seemed to come from every direction. No one saw them as they quietly pulled the canoe up on shore and into a small cleft in the rocks.

As agreed, Beaudreau stayed by the canoe while Stanton made a stealthy approach to the ritual taking place at the centre of the island, a few hundred yards away. Hours went by and Beaudreau must have fallen asleep. When he awoke with a start, the drumming had stopped and it was just starting to get light. Stanton was not back yet. Had he been caught? How long would it be until he was discovered? Just then he heard the rustling of branches -- Stanton appeared and he was carrying a large canvas bag. He immediately threw the bag into the canoe and whispered to Norman, "They're all asleep. Let's get the hell out of here."

They threw all of their strength into the paddle back, grinding ashore just as it became full light. They quickly broke camp and tossed their gear into the runabout. Stanton's only comment about the *midéwiwin* was that it was "incredible." When Beaudreau asked about the canvas bag, he laughed and said the "dumb bastards" had put two medicine bags in it and left it in the centre of the *midéwegun* or medicine lodge. He couldn't believe it, and crept in to steal the bag after everyone had gone to sleep. He said that they would probably be too busy to follow for a while. Beaudreau looked toward Witch Island and could see a large column of smoke rising. Stanton must have started a fire as a diversion. Norman was outraged and became even more terrified.

When they reached their runabout at Spirit Rock, Stanton reached under the seat and took out a small knapsack. He opened it and removed several items. Opening the canvas bag, he pulled out one of the stolen *midéwayans* and put some of the things from his knapsack inside. Retrieving the other bundle, he repeated this performance. Norman wondered what the items were, but he was terrified that pursuit would soon begin. He urged Stanton to hurry. Just as he was about to step down into the boat, Stanton tripped on a root and fell headfirst into the water. He must have cracked his head on a jagged rock just under the surface, because when Beaudreau reached him he was floating face down, blood streaming from his temple. When he turned him over, he was met by Stanton's wide-open but quite dead eyes.

Panicking, Beaudreau left the corpse floating there, jumped into the runabout and, towing the canoe behind, headed north. There was plenty of gas and he didn't stop until he hit Keewatin several hours later. All the while he nervously scanned the water behind, looking for the inevitable pursuit. He left the powerboat at the marina and carried the canvas bag up to the parking lot, where Stanton had left his rental station wagon. Beaudreau had done most of the driving, so he still had the keys in his pocket. He went back down to the dock and carried the canoe up to the car and roped it to the roof rack.

Beaudreau grasped that he was in big trouble. Many people knew that he was working for Stanton. With his criminal record, he would be immediately suspected of the man's death, even if it was accidental. His experiences with the police, especially the OPP, made him doubt that anyone would believe his story. Besides that, the local *midé* would quickly make the connection between the missing *midéwayan* and Stanton's body, and that would lead them inevitably to him. He had to get out of the area.

His plan was to drive back into Manitoba, then head north through the Whiteshell and over to Fort Alexander. He would ditch the car there and continue north by canoe along the eastern shore of Lake Winnipeg. There was any number of small communities where he could hide out. As he drove up Highway 44 through the Whiteshell, he revised his plan. Money was no problem, Stanton had paid him plenty - he could charter a floatplane and get dropped into some remote lake with enough supplies to last until the heat died down. He knew of an air charter service that flew out of Lac du Bonnet. Stopping at a campground, he got rid of Jeff Stanton's possessions by burning them in a fire pit. Afterward, he continued north, reaching Lac du Bonnet several hours later.

Whiteshell Air floatplane service was located on the Winnipeg River just north of town. He drove directly there and arranged a charter into Fishing Lake for the following morning. Since he paid \$250 cash up front and explained that he was doing survey work for a mining company, the pilot had no problem with the deal. Beaudreau asked if he could leave his canoe in their locked compound. They said it was okay, so he unloaded it there and placed the canvas bag underneath. Then, driving east of town, he found what he was looking for -- a rough cat track leading into dense brush. He ploughed in until the car stalled. Staying a few minutes to cover the vehicle with spruce boughs, he walked back into town. Norman still had a few hours before the stores closed, so he purchased a couple of large duffle bags and filled them with what he would need: camping gear, clothing and food. He took a cab over to the floatplane base and put everything under the canoe with the canvas bag. Back in town, he spent the night in a local hotel. The next day he and his canoe were flown into Fishing Lake, and the day after that he paddled into Father Laviolette's life.

At this point in Beaudreau's narrative, the priest had asked about the stolen bag and its devilish contents. When he learned that Norman had brought it with him, he demanded that it be turned over to him so that the evil could be purged in fire. He wanted to burn the sacred *midéwayans* and the other things. Although he was an outcast, Beaudreau was still Anishinabe and could never let that happen. He secretly hoped to one day return the material and be redeemed in the eyes of his people.

Laviolette must have totally snapped at that point, because he dashed into the tent they shared and dragged out the canvas bag and tore it open. He removed one of the two medicine bags inside and threw it into the fire. Beaudreau was horrified and grabbed the canvas bag from the wild-eyed little man. He fended Laviolette off, protecting the rest of the contents. The priest screamed that Beaudreau was in league with the Devil and ordered him out of the camp.

This is where the priest's entries in the journal ceased. There was a gap where several pages had been torn out. From then on the handwriting was different and the language was English. Ian surmised that Beaudreau must have made the subsequent entries. His grammar was quite poor and the writing very difficult to decipher. There were no dates to mark the entries, and they varied wildly in their length and subject matter. It took some time to make sense of things, but Ian was able to learn that Beaudreau was actually relieved when he was ordered away by Laviolette. He had been planning to head for the big lake, anyway. Freeze-up was too close, and the thought of being stuck with the mad priest all winter was too much to bear. He quickly put his gear together and was soon paddling south toward the river system that would eventually take him to Lake Winnipeg. He turned back once to see the small black figure of the priest standing on the shore, watching him dwindle into the distance. It was very bad medicine to destroy a *midéwayan*.

It took four days for him to reach the settlement at the mouth of the Pigeon River. No one knew him there, but he ingratiated himself with the local Catholic priest by describing the plight of poor Father Laviolette marooned on the shore of Fishing Lake. The priest at Pigeon River called the Archdiocese in St. Boniface, and was authorized to commission a floatplane to fly into Fishing Lake and

retrieve Father Laviolette. Ironically, the man chosen to guide the expedition was Norman Beaudreau, now going under the name Albert Keeper.

When Norman Beaudreau and Father Crisp skimmed in low over the trees in a chartered Beaver and landed in front of the encampment, it had been about two weeks since Laviolette had been left standing on the shore of Fishing Lake. The pilot taxied the aircraft up to shore and the occupants were able to step out onto dry land. There was no one there to greet them. They looked in the tent and found it empty. The small chapel was also deserted, but everything had been laid out as if for a mass.

Beaudreau had to make sure that the priest's journal was not found, so he was relieved when he spotted it beside the makeshift cot in the tent. He quickly stashed it in his jacket. Laviolette's canoe was missing. Beaudreau felt the fire pit. It had been cold for days. He could see charred miigiis shells and bits of bone in the ashes. The priest should not have destroyed the midéwayan. They searched the nearby woods to no avail, calling loudly but receiving no reply. Laviolette had simply vanished. The pilot suggested an air search, so while Beaudreau scouted around the area on foot, Father Crisp and the pilot flew along the shoreline looking for signs of the missing Oblate. After an hour, with fuel getting low, the plane landed and picked up a very nervous Beaudreau. They had found no trace of the missing priest. Beaudreau was sure that the *windigowak* had come for him, and that Laviolette was now in *djibaiaking* (the land of ghosts).

Back in Pigeon River, Father Crisp contacted the Archdiocese with the news of Laviolette's apparent disappearance. He also filed a missing person's report with the RCMP. Two days later, when the police investigators arrived, they found a canoe pulled up on shore but the priest's tent, the small chapel and about an acre of the surrounding forest were nothing but smouldering ash. Human remains were discovered in what little remained of the chapel. Dental records had to be used to verify that the body was indeed that of Father Laviolette. Police viewed the death as "suspicious." A severe snowstorm prevented further investigation at the site, and by spring the matter had been closed -- accidental death by fire was the official verdict of the local coroner. Meanwhile, Albert Keeper (Beaudreau) had been hired as a general caretaker and handyman at the Catholic Church, and allowed to live in a small house on the grounds. Mixing very little with the other people in the community, he did nothing to bring any attention to himself. He had at first decided to burn the priest's journal, but for some of the same reasons that he could not let the medicine bag be destroyed, he kept the journal and occasionally added his own thoughts. Laviolette's entries had ended a few days after Norman had left the camp. Beaudreau must have torn out the last few pages for some reason, thought Ian.

Keeper/Beaudreau stayed in the community for many years and performed his caretaker duties well. No one ever questioned his story concerning the priest, and none of the local Anishinabe, even if they knew, let on that they were aware of his real identity. Norman Beaudreau had vanished. That is until 1972. A persistent cough and severe chest pains lead to a trip to Winnipeg General Hospital, and a diagnosis of inoperable lung cancer. Beaudreau had less than a year to live. He would live out his remaining days in increasing pain, for which he was prescribed powerful analgesics. The medicine bag and other objects stolen from the Lake of

the Woods were still hidden under his house. He had tried to give them to a local healer, Elsie Jackfish, but she would not even touch them, and told him to get away from her house and stay away. He had heard from a visitor to the village that a man at the university down south would pay money for such things. So he obtained the man's name and address from Father Crisp and wrote him a letter. It was addressed to Dr. Jack Elias at the University of Manitoba. The letter described the things he wished to sell: an old medicine bag; a turtle shell rattle and a trade knife. An old roll of birch bark that he had found among Stanton's possessions, he simply placed inside the *midéwayan*. It probably had no value.

Then Ian realized that his conclusion from the previous day -- that the scroll in the bundle was not part of its original contents -- was correct. He wondered what mysteries it might reveal. Holy smokes! He could hardly wait to tell Jack what he had learned from reading the journal. He wondered why Beaudreau had given it to Jack. Probably because he knew that he was dying and it didn't matter who knew his secret. Maybe it was an act of atonement? Ian had a chilling thought -- whoever had stolen the original journal would know the location of the scroll as well. He glanced at his watch -- it was 1 p.m. He had been reading for five straight hours. It had been a miracle that his phone hadn't rung the entire time. Then he discovered that he had managed to disconnect the cord while disabling the answering machine. Whoops!

Chapter 7

The Seventh Prophet that came to the people long ago was said to be different from the other prophets. He was young and had a strange light in his eyes. He said, "In the time of the Seventh Fire, New People will emerge. They will retrace their steps to find what was left by the trail. Their steps will take them to the ELDERS who they will ask to guide them on their journey. But many of the ELDERS will have fallen asleep. They will awaken to this new time with nothing to offer. Some of the ELDERS will be silent out of fear. Some of the ELDERS will be silent because no one will ask anything of them. The New People will have to be careful in how they approach the ELDERS. The task of the New People will not be easy. If the New People will remain strong in their Quest, the Water Drum of the Midewiwin Lodge will again sound its voice. There will be a Rebirth of the Anishinabe Nation and a rekindling of old flames. The Sacred Fire will again be lit.

The revelations from the Laviolette/Beaudreau journal had rekindled Ian's interest in the affair. Perhaps he had been a bit hasty in his decision to turn things over to Jack. At any rate, he was determined to have a look at the mystery scroll, even if it meant opening the "sorcerers" bundle again. Reaching for his amulet, he remembered that he had stashed it in the freezer. First things first, he thought and went to the fridge to retrieve it. He somehow felt better with it around his neck. "Better safe than sorry," he said aloud.

He called Jack at home. There was no answer, so he tried him at the University. He was in his office, and when he realized that it was Ian, asked if he had been on the phone all morning. He was quite amused when Ian explained the constant busy signal. Ian gave him a quick rundown of his discoveries in the journal regarding the connection between Beaudreau and the priest, and the details concerning the stolen bundle in his lab. Jack was surprised that Ian wanted to stay involved, but agreed that a second look in the bundle was certainly in order and suggested that he come over to the department.

Rather than walk and take the chance of getting soaked by an impending thunderstorm, Ian drove. Miraculously, there was a spot in front of the CBC Building next to the University. He sprinted over to the main campus building trying to outrun the huge raindrops that were just starting to fall. The darkness of the clouds and the strong wind gusts signalled the arrival of a prairie thunderstorm. It was a dandy, with flashing lightning, crashing thunder and pouring rain. As he reached Jack's office he wondered if was an omen. Nah!

As he entered the office he saw that Jack had already opened the medicine bundle and retrieved the bark scroll, for it was sitting on the desk.

"There didn't seem any reason to wait," Jack said by way of greeting, "so I went to the storeroom and opened the bundle just long enough to remove the scroll."

Ian was actually relieved, because he still remembered vividly what had happened last fall. The scroll was about 10 inches wide and four inches in diameter. It was tied with babiche -- a rawhide cord -- and there was a striped "trade bead" at each end of the cord. Jack suggested that the scroll had been treated with some kind of natural preservative, because it was quite supple and had not deteriorated after years of storage. Most bark scrolls he had seen previously had been badly desiccated. Many had been lost to decay and neglect -- even those in museums -- and of those in better condition, most usually had to be steamed open.

They cleared an area on a table in the office, then Jack untied the cord and prepared to unroll the scroll. It took both of them to prevent the document from springing back as they gently started unrolling it. Once fully opened, they used several stone artifacts from Jack's collection to hold the corners down. Unrolled, it was approximately 30 inches long. Most of the inner surface was covered with figures and patterns. The markings had been made by a sharp instrument, and were inscribed or impressed into the bark rather than written on it. Most of the centre was taken up by what appeared to be a map. There was a simple outline of what looked like a lake, islands in the lake, and a river leading into the lake. Several locations were highlighted by different symbols -- thunderbird, *Skyman*, *müigiis* shells, turtles, and so on. One had seven little triangles beside it.

Jack had examined other Ojibwa bark scrolls, and knew for certain that what they were looking at was at least partly map, which undoubtedly pinpointed sites important to the midéwiwin. Ian knew from his own studies that the function of most midé iconography was mnemonic rather than literal. In other words, the symbols on most scrolls evoked an oral memory of something like a song or a ritual. There were only a couple of symbols on the outside, or paper side. Because they looked like they were written in ink, Jack suggested that these marks were quite recent. Also, they looked more like Greek symbols than anything else. He

was sure they were not connected to the rest of the “map.” Ian suggested that perhaps they were some kind of cataloguing mark, and that maybe Stanton had obtained the scroll from a museum or private collection. Jack doubted that theory, but allowed that it was a possibility.

They had no way of knowing what any of the marks on the inner bark meant, and they were difficult to decipher because of the darkness of the surface. At Jack’s suggestion, they carried the scroll down to the University print shop, where there was a large Xerox machine capable of photocopying the entire document at once. After playing around with the contrast, every mark became visible on the copies. Jack ran off a set for Ian as well. “Make sure that it doesn’t fall into the wrong hands,” he warned.

With that done, they rolled up the scroll and replaced the cord. Jack cut off a small piece of one corner and wrapped it in tinfoil. “For radiocarbon dating,” he explained. The radiocarbon or C14 dating method could be used to measure the age of organic material. It would be interesting to see how old the scroll was. Jack thought it prudent to place the scroll in a plain box and lock it in the department strong room. Its steel door and concrete construction would deter any further attempts at theft.

“If this is a map,” Jack said, “and I’m sure that it is, no wonder Connaught was after it. It may indicate the location of some very important places. Most of the other scrolls of this type that I’m familiar with, are the so-called “migration scrolls” that illustrate the western movement of Algonkian speakers from the 1700s onward. This map is far too specific. I’ll compare it to some actual maps and I bet that I can identify the area. It may even show where the bulk of the other sacred scrolls are stored -- or something else that we don’t know about. I’m going to call a colleague of mine, Selwyn Dewdney. He’s doing some research into birch bark scrolls at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary.”

“If so, don’t you think someone would have moved the rest of the scrolls as soon as they realized that this one had been stolen?”

“Perhaps, but remember, the Anishinabe have an entirely different view of the world and how it operates than we do. They would find it inconceivable that someone would want to steal such sacred things.”

Ian nodded his agreement. “I’ll ask Swan Kukisew to question her dad about it. I promised to call her last night but got sidetracked. I’ll call her tonight. Anyway, I have to get going.” With that he left Dr. Elias studying the photocopy of the scroll.

Back at his car, there was the mandatory \$10 parking ticket tucked under the windshield wiper. He stuffed it in the glove compartment with untold others. His plan was to sell the car in a few weeks, anyway, since his insurance was due to expire soon. As he would be heading to the West Coast to attend graduate school in a couple of months, screw them. What could they do? Track him down for a few (well maybe a dozen or so) parking tickets?

It was close to dinnertime when he arrived home. There were several calls on his machine. Swan had beaten him to the punch. Her message sounded rather urgent. The next was from the native fellow with the thick native “akshent,” and the last from a man who simply said that he would call later. Ian didn’t recognize the voice, but the accent was unmistakably American.

He called Swan first. She wondered why he had not called the night before, and why his phone was busy for so long. Ian's excuse to her stressed family obligations and complications. She didn't press too hard. She told him that she was travelling to Winnipeg on Friday and asked if they could get together. Ian's heart was already racing just from hearing her voice and his brain had obviously turned to mush, for he replied, "What time are you arriving? If it isn't too late I'll take you out to dinner."

"Mm ... I'll probably arrive around 7 p.m."

Great." He gave her his address and said they could leave for the restaurant from there.

"Fine. I really look forward to seeing you again. Goodbye."

After hanging up, Ian thought that he must have lost his mind. He was making a date with a woman he had just met, but who made every nerve in his body tingle, while just the night before he had reaffirmed his affection for the woman he "truly loved." Well -- he sure liked Carol a lot ... and respected her ... and would never do anything to hurt her... but.... He felt like one of those cartoon characters where a little devil sits on one shoulder and a little angel sits of the other. He wracked his brain -- what plans had he made with Carol? Oh yeah, it was just to call her, nothing definite. He would have to come up with a good excuse for Friday night.

On to the next call. Ian dialled the number left by the Native fellow, who had left a name and number this time. The name sounded like Ed Bouduin as far as he could tell. He said that he had a message from Elsie Jackfish. Ian called the number and asked for Mr. Bouduin. After a few minutes he came to the phone. The noise in the background was horrendous and Ian could barely make him out.

"Ian Stewart here. What can I do for you?"

"I gotta letter fer you from Elshie Chackfish."

"Okay. I can pick it up. Where are you?"

Bouduin said he was staying with relatives in a house on Selkirk Avenue, in Winnipeg's North End, and gave Ian the address.

"I'll be there within half an hour, Ed. Thanks." Leaving at once, he drove north on Osborne Street, which, for some reason he could never figure out, turns, into Colony, then Isabel and finally Salter Street (all within a few blocks). He turned right onto Selkirk off Salter, drove east a few blocks and pulled up in front of the address that Bouduin had given. This area of Winnipeg had seen better times, and many of the houses had been converted to tenements. Others were simply run down from age and neglect. For a variety of reasons, many Natives lived in the area, in fact, some estimates put their numbers in the tens of thousands. Whatever the reason, a lot of Natives lived on both sides of North Main in the Selkirk/Redwood area. It seemed to Ian that most of them were present at the address Ed had provided.

There was a party going on -- big time. At the door, Ian asked for Ed Bouduin. The next thing he knew he was hauled inside, given a beer, and then got dragged into the kitchen. He was placed face to face with a young native man, perhaps in his mid-twenties. "Ed, this white guy is looking for you. Maybe he's a social worker, eh?" Everyone got a big laugh out of that. Ian introduced himself.

Ed simply nodded in response, then said, "Elsie told me to give you this letter." He handed him a plain white envelope with his name on the outside. Ian took it and shoved it in his pocket without reading it. "Quite a party," he commented. "What's the occasion?"

Ed looked at him slightly bleary eyed, "Okayshun?" It was obvious that this was not a unique event, but rather a kind of continuous celebration. Ian would have loved to stay, but being the only non-Native there, his "Custer complex" was beginning to act up. He thanked Ed and managed to work his way through the throng and back to his car. It was fortunate that he had chosen that moment to leave, because as he pulled away, he could see several of Winnipeg's finest converging on the house -- including the paddy wagon. He was sure that most of the partygoers would soon be residents at the crowbar hotel.

Back at his apartment, he opened Elsie's letter. It began: "To Ian Stewart." The rest was a bit hard to follow: The man who brings you this letter is Edward. He is my nephew. If you wish to send me any news, do it through him. I have written to tell you some things that you should know. The man who sold the professor those things is dead. He was known here as Albert Keeper for many years. When he died the priest learned he was a man named Norman Beaudreau. He had many secrets. Years ago he showed me some things and wished to give them to me but they would only bring harm so I did not take them. He begged me to take an amulet. It was the same one I gave you. I do not know why but the spirits told me that you should have it. During the winter, two white men came to the village. They said they would pay to learn some things. Albert Keeper was the only person to speak to them. They left and one week later his cabin burned and he died. There are some who will harm others to possess things. Be careful. Trust your dreams. I believe you are a baudway widun, a messenger. Elsie.

So, the amulet that Elsie had given Ian in Pigeon River had come from Norman Beaudreau. He wondered if it had been part of Jeff Stanton's loot. Ian had never even looked inside the amulet. Curiosity overcame him as he slipped it off and undid the cord tying the little bag closed. Inside was the single canine tooth of what he presumed was a large carnivore, possibly a lynx or maybe a bear. There were two symbols deeply etched into the enamel. They were unfamiliar to him, but did not appear to be aboriginal in nature. Replacing the tooth, he retied the bag's opening and put it back around his neck. Elsie's letter raised a few questions in his mind. First, why was he now a "messenger"? Second, who were the men who had talked to Beaudreau, and did they have anything to do with his death? Finally, the comment about trusting his dreams -- he could barely remember his dreams let alone trust them. Oh well...

After dinner he gave Carol a call. She wondered what they were going to be doing on Friday night. She suggested going to a movie. Ian told her that something had come up and that he would be tied up with a guest from out of town. She was, of course, curious (suspicious?) and asked who it was. Being as evasive as possible, he told her, "A Native acquaintance from Kenora who has some critical research information regarding the medicine bag. Friday night's the only time we can meet because he's heading back to Kenora the next morning. We're meeting in a hotel near Main Street, so it might be a little risky. I think its best that I go alone."

"It sounds too dangerous," she said, concern in her voice.

"That's what I think, so I'm getting my cousin Jake to keep an eye on things. But look, it's just for Friday night -- I'm yours for the rest of the weekend."

This seemed to satisfy her, so they talked for a while longer about other things. The time was fast approaching when he would be heading to Vancouver to continue his studies. They had danced around the subject of their relationship, and whether Carol would be going with him, and if so in what role -- girlfriend? Wife? Ian knew that she and both of their families were leaning toward matrimony, but he was not so sure that he was ready to tie the knot. Hell, he would be only 24 in August. He was too young to get married! Carol could sense his reluctance to make a commitment, so she turned up the heat a bit by suggesting a simple wedding sometime in July.

Wedding! Marriage! Ian felt panic overtake him and could barely speak (squeak?). He heard himself saying things like, "What's the rush? We can always get married later. Maybe we should live together for a while first. This whole 'marriage thing' is a relic of the past. Blah, blah, blah..." He was just blowing smoke and Carol knew it, but she did enjoy twisting the knife. Finally, she released him from his torment, and he could hear her actually snickering as she hung up.

It took a while for his panic to subside. After dinner, some pals from the fraternity called and suggested a pub-crawl. Needing the solace of alcohol and the company of loutish friends, he agreed to meet them at the Assiniboine Hotel in St. James at 7 o'clock.

Many pitchers of beer and several beverage rooms later, he and two of his "brothers" staggered out of a cab and into Ian's apartment. He had no idea where his car was. Oh well, he thought fuzzily, at least I'm still alive ... and I think I had fun. Maybe we can fill in the blanks in the morning. He fumbled his way into the bedroom only to find his chums sprawled on top of it. Claim-jumping pricks he thought, but the couch worked just fine for him.

Morning had a somewhat nightmarish quality to it. Two large, ill-tempered monsters started thundering around at the crack of dawn. After nearly destroying the bathroom and eating everything remotely edible in the kitchen, his "guests" vacated for their summer jobs, one as a day camp counsellor, the other as a delivery truck driver for Eaton's. Since they had no time to get home to change or shave, Ian cringed at the thought of various poor little kids and Eaton's customers encountering two very hung-over, grubby, dishevelled maniacs throughout the day.

His own recovery was surprisingly manageable. Besides hunger and thirst, his only problem was locating his car, but eventually some memory cells started functioning. He had left the "junk mobile" at the St. Charles Hotel -- a mere 30-minute walk away. Praised be!

Eventually, he worked up enough energy to go and retrieve his car. Once behind the wheel, he decided to make a real food run and drove to Polo Park shopping centre, where there was a large Safeway store. Before attacking the aisles laden with food, Ian refuelled with some greasy Kentucky Fried Chicken in the food court. About \$100 and six bags of groceries later, he was replete. Just as he was loading the plunder in his car, he glanced up to see two stocky men wearing dark

suits approaching. "Oh no, not again." Ian thought as he reached for the tire iron and waited. He waited for a few seconds, then whipped around ready to rumble.

Both men started laughing, and the larger of the two said, "By God, Jake was right -- he is nuts." As Ian lowered the raised tire iron, the man continued, "Hi, Ian, we work with Detective Stewart. He wanted us to let you know that we nailed the two cowboys who assaulted you. He wants you to make a positive I.D. We can go to headquarters right now and get it done."

"How did Jake know where I was?"

"Oh, we've been on your tail for days. Just a precaution."

"I have all these groceries to deal with. I'll drop them off at my place and meet you at the station."

"No, I think you should come right now," the big man said, putting his hand on Ian's arm.

"Okay, just a second while I lock up my car. By the way -- go screw yourselves!" Ian yelled as he pulled free and took off running for the safety of the mall. If those guys were cops, he was Joan Baez. Since when did cops wear \$500 suits? One of the men chased him briefly, but gave up when he realized that Ian would reach the crowded mall before he could.

Just a touch out of breath from his sudden, adrenalin-induced exertion, Ian watched from inside as the two men walked back to their dark Ford sedan and sped from the lot. There were three pay phones just inside the door, and Ian used one to call Jake. After several relays, he was transferred to his car radio. Ian quickly filled him in on what had happened. As expected, Jake confirmed that none of his people had been following him. Ian gave him a description of the men and their car but, unfortunately, he had not been able to get their plate number. Nevertheless, he was fairly certain that they were the same two who had jumped him outside Pankos' store.

The ante had gone up another notch, from assault to attempted kidnapping. Jake had a patrol car swing by the shopping centre, and then it followed Ian back to his apartment. Christ! What do those guys want? he thought. It had to be the Beaudreau scroll. Why didn't they go and pound on Jack Elias for a change? With that in mind, he called Jack and told him what had happened -- just in case they did decide to go after him.

Jack said he was going to hole up in his house for the weekend, and would take "appropriate precautions." That sounded like a good idea to Ian, so he retrieved his 12 gauge shotgun from the bedroom closet and loaded it. He wished that he had some 000 buckshot on hand, but birdshot would certainly do the trick at close range. The shotgun leaning beside his bed made him feel marginally better. Maybe he should have been more concerned that a couple of goofs had just tried to abduct him, but all he could think about was seeing Swan again.

She was scheduled to arrive in about three hours. Rather than take her downtown to eat, he decided on St. Boniface across the river. It was highly unlikely that he would run into anyone he knew there. He might have made a stupid decision, but he wasn't crazy. If anyone saw them together and reported it to Carol, he would be a dead man.

A new French restaurant had opened on Provencher Boulevard. Ian couldn't remember the name, but thought it had the word, "Canard" in it somewhere. He

hoped they didn't require reservations. The time seemed to crawl by. He showered, shaved and changed, and still had two hours to kill. He tried watching TV, listened to some records, cleaned the bathroom, considered rearranging the furniture, rearranged the furniture ... and when he checked the time there was still an hour to go.

The phone rang. He picked it up, half dreading bad news -- that Swan was not coming after all. He heard a voice with a distinctly American accent say, "Mr. Stewart, my name is Michael Stanton. I wonder if I might have a few minutes of your time?"

Stanton, that was the name of the American college student who had gate-crashed the *midéwiwin* with Norman Beaudreau, and who had died accidentally at Spirit Rock. Was this Jeff Stanton's father? And if so, what could he want? He tried to sound nonchalant. "Hello, Mr. Stanton. What can I do for you?"

"I have reliable information that you have been in contact with a man by the name of Daniel Kukisew, and that you have information concerning the whereabouts of a number of important Chippewa artifacts. Is this correct?" Stanton tone was even and matter-of-fact.

His questions caught Ian totally off guard, but after a moment's hesitation he replied, "I'm sorry Mr. Stanton, but I don't see that this is any of your business."

"I can assure you that it is very much my business. Ten years ago my son, Jeffery, was doing some research on native art near Kenora, Ontario. He met with an accident and died. To this day, I have not received a satisfactory explanation as to the circumstances of his death. Some recent information has come to light concerning a man by the name of Norman Beaudreau. He had been employed by Jeffrey, and he disappeared about the time of my son's death. Unfortunately, Mr. Beaudreau is now deceased as well. I did learn that you and your colleague, Professor Elias, had been in touch with Beaudreau before his death, and that you had purchased some aboriginal artifacts from him. It is these artifacts that I wish to examine. Can you make this possible? I must stress that I am a man of almost unlimited resources."

Stanton obviously knew a lot more than he was letting on. To know of the meeting with Daniel and the reason for that meeting, he had to have had one or both of them under surveillance. Now Ian was sure that he finally knew who was behind the mysterious "they." It was certainly agents in Stanton's employ who had visited Norman Beaudreau prior to his death, and on a more personal note, it was more than likely that his own assault and attempted kidnapping had been on Stanton's orders. He was suddenly angry.

"Listen Mr. Stanton. I don't appreciate being spied on, or mugged, or abducted, so I suggest you lay off. I have nothing to tell you about the death of your son. I am simply a graduate student who went to Kenora to relay some information regarding a matter of academic interest. End of story. I'm sorry for your loss, but you will have to excuse me. I'm expecting company." Before Stanton had a chance to reply, Ian hung up on him. He was shaking with anger as he sat down. Then he had a thought: Surely Stanton must also have been responsible for the break-in at Jack's office and the theft of Beaudreau's journal. If so, he would know all about the way his son died, and would not need to have made contact. Then again,

maybe he had been a little too hasty in his assumptions. He was getting very confused.

Mercifully, there was a quiet knock at the door. Ian opened it, hoping that Swan had arrived early. She had. "*Raven hair and ruby lips, Sparks fly from her finger tips*" happened to be the lyrics of the brand new Eagles' song playing on the stereo as he gazed at the vision standing in the doorway. She was even more beautiful than he remembered. Her buckskins and jeans has been replaced with a white silk blouse and black suede skirt, and her jet-black hair flowed down her back almost to her waist. He was too stunned to speak. Fortunately, she took the initiative and gave him a big hug. "Aren't you going to invite me in?"

It had been a double whammy -- first, Stanton's call and now Swan's early arrival. His breathing slowly returned to normal and he was able to utter simple phrases. "Come in -- have a seat -- you look great." Beyond that he might as well have been trying to speak Swahili.

Swan laughed at his obvious befuddlement. "So, where are we going for dinner?"

Great! He couldn't even tell her because he couldn't remember the name of the restaurant. He became cagey, "It's a surprise," he replied. It would be -- for both of them. Taking the initiative, he asked about Katie and her father.

"Oh they're doing great. Dad is taking care of her while I'm here. He sends his best." Then, stroking his bruised cheek, "How are you feeling now?"

He thought maybe she was really asking how he was dealing with the shock of learning about the trauma he had experienced in Viet Nam. Rather than walk into that minefield, he tried making light of things, "Oh, I'm fine; it's nothing that ten or fifteen years of therapy won't cure. So, what brings you to the big city?"

"I came to see you silly," she teased, laughing when she saw the look on his face. "I haven't been away from Kenora for years, so I thought I owed myself a shopping spree. I would also like to meet your friend, Dr. Elias, and arrange the return of the midéwayan. I plan to head back on Sunday morning."

"Where are you staying?"

"I have a reservation at the St. Regis Hotel downtown."

Ian almost did the unthinkable and invited her to stay at his place, but an uncharacteristic moment of sanity overcame him. "Well, let's get going shall we? I know the way, so I might as well drive."

"That's okay with me. I hate driving in the city. Besides how would it look for us to pull up in front a fancy restaurant in Dad's pickup?" The image of a Native woman, even an extremely beautiful one, handing truck keys to the valet appealed to Ian's twisted sense of humour, but they went with Plan A and left in his 1967 Pontiac Laurentian, dents and all.

"Before we go, I'd better give Jack a call to make sure that you can meet with him tomorrow and collect the medicine bag."

He called, and Jack agreed to meet them at his office at 2 o'clock the next afternoon. Then, given Swan's dazzling appearance, Ian made a quick upgrade to his outfit -- donning tie and jacket just to be on the safe side.

When they reached his car, Ian realized that the interior looked like a hamster cage. His apologies only created more laughter. He tossed all of the larger debris into the back seat.

"It's just how I imagined your car would look," she said, chuckling. "Now, I want you to promise to concentrate on driving. I've seen how distracted you get."

They both laughed, remembering the potato-cutting episode. It wasn't far from Ian's apartment to the Marion Bridge, then over the Red River into St. Boniface. Once on Provencher, he scanned madly for any restaurant with "Canard" in its name. Only two blocks from Boulevard Taché, he spotted a promising candidate -- "Le Canard Noir."

"Here we are," he announced knowingly.

There was a parking spot on the street about a half block from the restaurant. Le Canard Noir was designed to look like a French country inn -- white stucco exterior and large exposed timbers. It actually looked fairly good to Ian, even though he had no idea of how a real French country inn should look. It was fortunate that he had chosen to wear a jacket and tie, for a sign inside the door proclaimed that they were mandatory. There wasn't much of a line-up, and in a few moments they were facing the maître d'. "Does monsieur have a reservation?"

Ian said no as he held up a \$10 bill. Suddenly, there had been a last minute cancellation. It was surprising that the place wasn't packed. Ian realized why when he scanned the prices on the menu. Holy smokes! It was a good thing that he still had most of the money that Connaught had given him. He would probably need it all. As they were guided to their table, there was a discernible hush as everyone, especially every man in the restaurant, turned to look at Swan. Even the waiter was not immune. Ian didn't think that he had ever received better service -- before or since.

They ordered aperitifs and hors-d'oeuvres, and then set about trying to decipher the menu. Given the name, it was not surprising that the speciality of the house was fish and game. They both laughed at the suggestion of having pan-fried walleye "avec herbes." Ian went with the venison and Swan the smoked Winnipeg goldeye.

Most of the wine on the vast wine list had "Chateau" on the label. Ian certainly did not claim to be an urban sophisticate, but he did know that meat required red wine and fish white wine. Therefore, following the waiter's suggestions, he ordered a bottle of each.

Swan had but to glance up from her meal to bring the waiter to fill her water glass, to sweep crumbs from the table, to replace a utensil, to bring more bread, to offer more pepper. Ian suggested to Swan that she ask him to stand on one foot and bark like a dog. After their laughter subsided, Ian had the sobering thought that *he* probably would do anything that she asked. Then, looking at her in the dancing candlelight, he knew that most certainly he would do anything she asked. With a slight sense of foreboding, he realized that he had fallen in love with Swan Kukisew.

They dallied over their meals, and then prolonged the experience with dessert and coffee. After downing most of a bottle of red wine, Ian definitely needed coffee. Swan seemed totally unaffected. He discovered why, for when the waiter was clearing, he noted that the bottle of white wine was still almost full. Ian's Scottish ancestry kicked in, and he wished that they had "doggy bottles," the liquid version of doggy bags. Oh well, it was only money.

It was nearly 11 o'clock by the time they finished. What an evening. If Ian knew how to dance, he would have suggested going dancing ... if he knew of a place where they had dancing. He paid the ransom and they left. The waiter fawned over Swan until the very end.

Swan suggested going back to her hotel for a nightcap. The little devil and little angel on Ian's shoulders started duking it out, and he quickly sided with the horned one. First, they stopped by his place where Swan retrieved her truck, then she followed him to the St. Regis. There were better hotels in Winnipeg, but it was okay and the rates reasonable. Ian carried her overnight bag into the lobby, then waited while she checked in. There was a little problem with her reservation until she showed the clerk her badge.

Once inside her room, Swan turned and took Ian in her arms and kissed him full on the lips. He almost fainted. "Thanks for a wonderful evening." She let go before he could react. All he could manage was to utter, "Nice room."

Swan wanted to "change into something more comfortable," so took her overnight bag into the bathroom. A couple of centuries later, she re-emerged in jeans and a sweatshirt. By then Ian had shed his tie and jacket and was watching TV. She joined him on the couch and snuggled up against him. "What about that nightcap? We can call for room service," she suggested.

He was feeling light-headed enough just touching her, so replied that he was doing just fine, thanks, but to go ahead if she wanted anything. She said she was doing fine, too. Swan noticed the lump under his shirt and asked what it was.

"My good luck charm." He pulled out the amulet, and as she reached for it he said, "Elsie Jackfish gave it to me."

Swan drew away slightly, and as a strange look crossed her face the temperature definitely dropped a notch. Here he was just getting used to snuggling when she moved away, and then stood up and said, "Well, I'm really feeling tired after such a long day, and I do need my 'beauty rest' for tomorrow's shopping expedition." The moment had passed. He had hoped to press on to bigger and better things, but suddenly found himself being propelled out the door with just the slightest of pecks on the cheek. "I'll call you tomorrow," she said. "Thanks again for a wonderful evening. Goodnight."

He stood outside the closed door with a stunned look on his face. What had he done to offend her? He wracked his brain. Sure, he had behaved like a total goof, but that was normal. Could it have been the amulet. Nah! Elsie had given it to him for good luck, not to drive away beautiful women. Oh well, he surmised, maybe Swan really was tired.

Ian almost drove into a bridge abutment on the way back to his place as he replayed the evening in his head. Once at the apartment, he realized that he was exhausted and still slightly tipsy, so he hit the sack. Unfortunately, sleeping soundly was not in the cards. Images of what might have been with Swan tormented him. Other, even more unwelcome images, began invading his dreams. A strange catlike creature prowled dark forests, and menacing beast-men held strange rites in vast underground caverns. He kept waking up, blaming the nightmares on rich food and red wine. In one dream, just before morning, a horrible she-monster wearing a white blouse and black suede skirt was chasing him through the forest. He remembered that she left a trail of fire as she ran.

The “Devil’s instrument” saved him from the she-beast. Ian reached for the phone and was gratified to hear Swan’s voice. She apologized for booting him out, but explained that she felt things might have really “gone too far” had he stayed. Ian *knew* they would have.

Swan said that she had plans to wander the downtown stores from Eaton’s to the Bay that morning. Ian was relieved when she didn’t invite him along -- he hated shopping. She suggested that they meet for lunch somewhere. Ian immediately thought of the Paddlewheel Room at the Hudson Bay store, which was only a block from the University. Since childhood, he had fond memories of eating lunch inside the “paddlewheel steamer” that gave the restaurant its name. Swan agreed to the plan. They would rendezvous in front of the “wheel” at 12:30. After lunch, they would head over to their meeting with Dr. Elias.

Ian spent the morning in the University library. Since the term was over, most of the books he wanted to look at were in stock. There was very little information about Ojibwa scrolls, and the same was true for local rock art. He had read everything else in existence dealing with Ojibwa religion and culture. What he was after was some information on the type of amulet that Elsie had given him. As far as he could learn, it was exactly what he thought it was, a charm, but not necessarily a “good luck charm” in the Western sense. Hunters wore them to ensure success, and most Anishinibeg wore them to protect them from sorcery, which to Ian’s way of thinking was just a paranoid way of looking at bad luck.

Not having achieved much success in the library, he drove over to the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature on Main Street. Maybe someone there could identify the tooth. Being Saturday, none of the curators was around, so he paid the admission and went directly to the Natural History Gallery. He knew they had taxidermy mounts and skulls of every large carnivore native to the province on exhibit. His plan was to compare the amulet to the teeth of the display animals. People must have thought him nuts as he held up the tooth and tried to compare it to those in the cases. Many carnivore canines appeared to be very similar. His was too small to be from a black bear, and not long enough to be a wolf, so by process of elimination it had to be from a cat. The closest thing to his tooth came from a lynx. It was approaching noon, so he backtracked to the University, parked and walked over to the Bay.

He reached the Paddle Wheel a few minutes early. By 12:45, Swan had not appeared and he started to worry. Maybe she couldn’t find the place? Nah! Anybody in Winnipeg could direct her here. Maybe she was still stuck in shopping mode? By 1 o’clock he was starting to get impatient. At 1:15 he phoned her hotel and was told that she had checked out that morning.

“Checked out?”

“That’s right, sir.”

“Did she leave any messages?”

“No, sir, no messages.”

By 1:30, his impatience had peaked, so he left and walked back to the university. Maybe she had been sidetracked and would show up for the meeting with Jack. He waited outside of his office. Jack showed up right on time, but no Swan. “Where’s Miss Kukisew?” he asked.

“Search me. I was supposed to meet her for lunch but she never showed. She also checked out of her hotel. Maybe some emergency came up back in Kenora and she had to split.”

They waited another half-hour. Jack mentioned that Natives tend to have a much different sense of time than whites. Ian said he knew that, but Swan was a cop for Pete’s sake. He apologized to Jack for dragging him out on a wild goose chase, and then they left for their respective homes.

The message light on the answering machine was blinking. Ian hoped that it was Swan, but it wasn’t. It was Michael Stanton demanding an explanation. He wanted to know why Ian had “made some serious allegations.” He suggested very strongly that Ian call him to “clear the air.” He left a number in Chicago where he could be reached. Fat chance, Ian thought. What the hell had happened to Swan? He considered calling Jake and having him investigate ... but investigate what? He could hear Jake’s reply: “Some bimbo doesn’t show up for a date and you want me to put out an APB? Are you nuts?”

All he could do was wait for her to make contact.

He called Carol around 3 o’clock and they made plans for the evening. One of her friends from work was having a barbecue and they were invited. She also wondered if he wanted to have drinks with her parents that evening before they left. To her surprise, he actually accepted. He even asked if there was anything he could bring. Ian could almost smell the wedding cake baking as he put down the phone.

Drinks with Carol’s parents, the party, and the entire weekend all went by like a flash. On Sunday evening, he called Swan’s number. The phone rang at least 20 times -- but no answer. Then he called Daniel Kukisew’s number, but the phone was out of order.

Ian did not really have much chance to pursue the matter. The next morning at 6 a.m., he started his summer job driving a Labatt beer truck, delivering cases of beer and kegs of draft to hotels, restaurants and Legions scattered throughout Greater Winnipeg. It was a great job -- good pay, lots of exercise and some tasty perks. He took all of the overtime he could, even working on Saturdays. To save money, he gave up his apartment and moved back home for the summer. He even sold his “piece of junk” Pontiac shortly after that.

His bruises faded in a couple of weeks, but it took a little longer to get over the psychological damage. Swan Kukisew and what might have been soon became a dim memory. He never did return Mr. Stanton’s call. What would be the point? Thugs in dark suits never again bothered him. Ian saw Jake a few more times that summer, but only at family gatherings.

He and Carol made plans to move to the West Coast together, and in mid-August they were married. By late August they had boxed up all of their possessions and sent them to Vancouver by train. It took five days to drive to the coast in their new Toyota. It was a combination honeymoon and camping trip, and they took their time. After reaching Vancouver, they quickly found an apartment near Simon Fraser University, arranged to have their furniture delivered, and began new lives. Carol worked at CBC Vancouver while Ian pursued doctoral studies in Archaeology. He never gave the medicine bag, sacred scrolls or secrets of the midéwiwin another thought, and he never saw or heard of Swan Kukisew

again. In fact, he had forgotten the entire episode until that strange call from Jack Elias many years later.

Chapter 8

Toward calm and shady places I am walking on the Earth.

—Ojibwa song

On the flight back to Winnipeg that late spring afternoon, Ian had plenty of time to mull over the past, and to speculate about the reasons for Jack Elias's strange invitation. Jack would no doubt ask what he had been doing since moving to the West Coast. Ian would tell him that like many former Prairie folk, he had hung onto his roots for a long time. He and Carol had associated with other "flatlanders," and they had rooted for Winnipeg sports teams like the Blue Bombers and the Jets for over a decade. At first, visits "back home" to Manitoba were frequent, but became less so as the years went by. In time, only funerals induced them back.

After their daughter was born, their ties to the Prairies almost faded away. They had moved to the Coast for career reasons, but stayed because of the lifestyle. Sure, it rained a lot in winter, but as the cliché goes: "At least we don't have to shovel it."

They went back to Winnipeg for Christmas after Sarah was born. The temperature never got above -30° for the entire week. That was the clincher. They were definitely West Coasters now, and the Prairies had become foreign territory.

Jack would certainly wonder why Ian had left Anthropology. He would tell him that his life, like many others of his generation, had taken some interesting twists and turns. When he had left Winnipeg, he was married and his university career was just beginning. Twenty-odd years later, he was no longer married and had long since lost his interest in academia. Now he owned a fishing tackle store. In between those two poles, he had taught at several colleges and universities, had raised a child, bought a couple of houses, got divorced, taken up writing, become a magazine editor, almost got married again, and finally became involved in the fishing tackle business. The only common theme through it all was fishing. No matter what was going on, he still put in as many days angling as possible. One year, even though he was a full-time lecturer, he managed to wet a line on 120 days. It was no wonder that Carol finally got fed up. Her life had gone through some dramatic changes as well. She had left the CBC, gone back to university and picked up a Masters in Education, became a school administrator, and was presently vice-principal of one of the largest high schools in the province.

Carol had remarried after their divorce. Their paths simply went in different directions -- it happens. Sarah, their daughter, was still a source of joy to both of them. Their split was quite amicable, so they had agreed on joint custody, and Ian had seen Sarah virtually every weekend since the break-up some 10 years earlier. Other women had drifted in and out of his life. It had been difficult to find a female

companion who fly fished, shot sporting clays and drank single-malt scotch. Oh well ... he would probably never give up the search.

It was almost 4 p.m. Winnipeg time as Ian rode down the escalator to the arrival area where Jack was waiting. Ian barely recognized him. He must have been having the same trouble, because he queried four or five other middle-aged men as they reached the gate. "Ian?" he asked hopefully as their eyes met.

"Jack, it's a real pleasure to see you again." Could this frail, little old man really be Jack Elias? Only his eyes seemed familiar. They still had the same gleam, so he was probably as sharp as ever. Ian supposed that they would be taking a cab, but Jack informed him that he had driven to the airport. He was parked in the taxi zone despite dire threats from the Commissionaire on duty. Ian liked his attitude: "What can they do -- shoot me?"

Jack pulled into the busy street without a glance. In the chaotic traffic of Vancouver he would have lasted about five minutes, but in Winnipeg the pace of driving was a lot less frantic. Still, Ian involuntarily closed his eyes several times as they drove across the city. It was also comforting that Jack was still driving the same vehicle, one of the heaviest pieces of machinery ever produced in Detroit -- a mint condition 1968 Cadillac Eldorado. Most modern cars would have simply bounced off that monster. Little old guys wearing hats and driving huge behemoths get a lot of respect.

They talked in generalities during the drive. Ian's concern was that Jack pay attention to little things like traffic lights and lane dividers, so he tried not to distract him with idle chatter. To Ian's surprise, Jack pulled into the underground parking garage of a fairly new high rise on Roslyn Road. He asked when he had sold his house and moved here.

"I didn't sell it -- it burned to the ground during the winter of 1978, while I was wintering in Arizona. Unfortunately, a former student who was house-sitting for me died in the blaze." The thought of his entire, incredible collection of aboriginal art going up in smoke, made Ian shudder. "What about all of your artifacts and art?"

"The loss there wasn't too bad. Prior to the fire I placed much of my collection in storage, or I should say what was left of it. I made donations to a few museums and auctioned off much of other material. The bulk of my book collection went to the departmental library. How about you -- are you still collecting?"

"Hah! Just debts I'm afraid. I started gathering West Coast Indian art -- baskets, carvings and paintings -- but my wife got most of it in the divorce settlement."

Jack asked if Ian would like a drink. When he asked for a scotch, his host indicated a decanter and ice bucket on the coffee table and told him to help himself, explaining, "I'm forced to abstain because of diabetes."

As Ian expected, Jack wondered about what else had occurred since he had left Winnipeg, so he essentially gave him the condensed version from thoughts he had dredged up during his flight. "My father died of a stroke seven years after we moved to the Coast. Mom is still alive and in good health, and she's now living with my sister in Nova Scotia. My brother, James, moved to Los Angeles in the early 1980s. I've pretty well lost touch with everyone else I knew from around here -- they've either moved away or died."

"Do you have a picture of your daughter?"

"Of course." He dug out his wallet and showed him a recent photograph of Sarah.

"Pretty girl -- she must take after her mother, eh?"

"I'll say, right down to the red hair and temper." Ian laughed. Then, he asked, "And how about you -- what have you been up to?"

Jack thought for a moment, then said, "Well, I took a sabbatical the same year that you left for the Coast. I eventually extended it into an academic leave for another year, and then decided quite abruptly to retire. Travel was taking up quite a bit of my time, and I was spending the winters in Arizona. I wrote a couple of monographs during that time, but essentially I turned my back on academia and walked away."

Ian was shocked. "Whatever for? I thought you loved your work."

"Oh, I did, all right. I can sum it up in two words: Michael Stanton."

"Michael Stanton," Ian repeated. "I know that name. It was his son that died at Lake of the Woods. In fact, he called me about his death, but he was such a jerk that I refused to talk to him."

"Well, unfortunately, he called me too. I didn't care for his manner, either -- very abrasive. He intimated that I knew something about his son's death, and that you and I were somehow in cahoots with that Beaudreau fellow. I told him that I had purchased some material for the University collection from a Mr. Beaudreau, and that was that. He became very agitated and demanded that I allow him to see the material. I had no reason to deny him access to it, so I agreed that he could examine the artifacts under my supervision at any time. I remembered that you had told me you thought he might have been responsible for some of the strange incidents involving you that took place that year. I felt that if he got to see the material, he would finally be appeased. I also intended to give him a copy of Beaudreau's journal, so he could learn the truth about his son. Actually, I only mailed him the last part -- Beaudreau's 'confession' to the priest. I thought that would satisfy him as to the involvement of his son in the theft of the material, his accidental death, and that this knowledge would give him the closure he was seeking."

"What ever became of Daniel Kukisew and his daughter, Swan?" Ian asked.

Jack had trouble trying to dredge up the memory, and then finally resorted to his file of news clippings in the den. He handed one to Ian. He felt his guts knot as he read that there had been a house fire at an Indian reservation east of Kenora. A local Native elder, Daniel Kukisew, had been badly burned, but he had managed to rescue his young granddaughter. From the date of the news item, Ian realized that the fire had occurred the same weekend as his dinner with Swan. No wonder she had left in such a hurry. "Do you know what happened after the fire?" he asked.

Jack was still leafing through the clippings. "I have his obituary here somewhere ... here it is. Apparently, he lingered for several more weeks after the fire, then after his death, his daughter and granddaughter left the area. I never did hear where they went."

"So that means you never got to return the medicine bag that brought on all of this weirdness? Is it still in the Anthropology Department storeroom?"

"No. "It and that old bark scroll are actually stored in a locker in the basement of this building. Oh, by the way, you'll never guess what I discovered while

clearing out my office at the University. I found the priest's journal that Beaudreau gave me. It had slipped down behind a filing cabinet, so it had never been stolen after all."

Ian tried putting all that Jack revealed into perspective: Daniel's death, Swan's disappearance, the persistence of the medicine bag being in Jack's possession, and the destruction of Jack's house. "But what has all of this to do with your leaving the University?"

"Yes, well, getting back to my dealings with Mr. Stanton. He must have gone mad after reading Beaudreau's account of the circumstances of his son's death. Apparently, he contacted the University President and members of the Board of Governors, and suggested that I had some stolen material in my possession. He seemed to have a lot of political clout and raised a huge stink. You remember how precarious the funding situation was for higher education back in those days. I can tell you the memos were certainly flying fast and furious for a while. Stanton even leaked information to the press that I was involved in the illicit buying and selling of aboriginal art objects. At least I think it was Stanton. Anyway, once my reputation was in jeopardy, my 'trusted colleagues' starting dulling their knives in my back, and the administration threw me to the wolves. I cleared out of there. Since I had paid Beaudreau with my own money and had never been compensated by the University, I felt that the medicine bag and its contents belonged to me."

"I don't recall the least mention of any of this in academic circles," Ian said. "I realize that information gets filtered by the time it reaches the West Coast, but I all I ever heard was that you had retired."

"It was all kept very quiet. No university likes to air its dirty linen in public. I was offered a substantial settlement to leave without a fuss. I suppose that I could have had my day in court, but I was glad to be rid of the whole lot of them. As someone once said about academics, "Never is the fighting so vicious as when the stakes are so low."

"What about Stanton? Why did he go after you?"

"As far as I can tell, he simply wanted revenge. Revenge against anyone and anything that he believed might have something to do with the death of his son. Anyway, I dropped out of sight and I heard no more from him. Did he continue to harass you?"

"No, I dropped off the radar screen as well. When I moved to the Coast, I severed almost all my ties here except for family."

"Then you wouldn't know that Stanton went in person to Pigeon River and offered money to anyone who could tell him about Norman Beaudreau, even the local priest and Elsie Jackfish. Of course, no one could tell him anything except that a man whom they had known by another name had lived in the community for ten years. He caused quite a stir there. Do you know what is even more interesting? On the return flight, Stanton's chartered aircraft crashed and burned near Atikokan, Ontario."

"That's amazing, I wonder what happened? Speaking of Elsie, I guess she's probably dead by now?"

"Oh yes, she died in a house fire on the reserve a long time ago. By the way, do you still have that amulet she gave you?"

“You know, it’s funny that you should ask. I put the thing away after I moved to Vancouver. I had forgotten all about it and probably would have never found it again. But when you called, I started looking through some old files, looking for the journal that I kept throughout my years at the university, and I found the amulet. It sure brought back some memories. It had been twenty years since I last looked at it. So, yes, I still have it, and I brought it along with me. It’s in my bag.”

There was a pause in the conversation for a moment, then Jack suddenly proved that his ESP was working. Ian was about to ask him why he had arranged for his sudden visit to Winnipeg, when Jack said, “I suppose you’re wondering why I would track you down after all these years?”

Ian could only nod mutely in reply.

“Like you, I thought that after so long the furore over the Beaudreau medicine bag had been forgotten. So many of those who were part of it back then are either dead or have moved on. I hadn’t given it any consideration for nearly two decades. Then, about a month ago I received a call that brought the whole issue back to life. It was from an American woman by the name of Katie Giese. She told me that she was attempting to locate the whereabouts of a medicine bag that had once been the property of her grandfather, Daniel Kukisew. She said it was vitally important that she get in touch with Ian Stewart, an old friend of her mother, Swan.”

Ian felt a shock run through him. Just hearing Swan’s name stirred something that he thought was long dead. It was like the clock had been suddenly turned back to the early summer of 1973, when the medicine bag, men in black, shaking tents and, of course, Swan, had created a brief but traumatic interval in his life.

“Miss Giese made it very clear that this was a matter of extreme urgency,” Jack continued. “I told her that I was no longer with the Anthropology Department, and that I had no interest in discussing the past. I guess I was a bit abrupt. A week later I received a letter addressed to you. I didn’t know where you lived at the time, so I didn’t forward it.” He handed Ian the envelope.

“When did you receive this?”

“It came in the mail a few weeks ago. It originally went to the Anthropology Department and they eventually forwarded it here. I considered dismissing it, but then Swan called me a few days ago saying she ... you ... and even me were all in danger if the medicine bag was not turned over to her immediately. She told me someone interested in the bag had found her, that they knew where I lived, and that you were now living in Vancouver. God knows how they found out. I am simply too old to deal with this kind of thing any more, and I didn’t know of anyone else to turn to. Ian, this matter must be resolved once and for all. I want to be rid of that damned medicine bag, and I don’t care where it goes.”

“I agree, its time to close the book on all of this bullshit.” Ian said as he opened the envelope.

It was a note from Swan. “Dear Ian, I bet you thought that I had vanished from the face of the Earth. That had been my intention after the death of my father. I took Katie back to my mother’s family in Minnesota and took their family name -- Geise. We have lived here all these years. I had hoped that we would remain safe but someone has found us again. They want the midéwayan and I cannot refuse. You are the only person I can trust to help me. Although many years have passed,

we must complete the task that we started. I'm sorry to drag you back into this mess. Swan."

He lowered the note and stared at the floor without really seeing anything. Talk about flashbacks. Swan had evoked the summer of 1973 all over again. She actually wanted to pick up where they had left off with the medicine bag saga. Who in hell would want that goddam medicine bag so badly that they would be willing to track it down after all this time? Actually, when he thought about it, someone had probably already killed for it. There had been a lot of suspicious fire-related deaths -- Beaudreau, the Oblate father, Daniel Kukisew, maybe Elsie and the innocent student in Jack's house. There had to be something more to this than met the eye. They all had something to do with the bundle at some time or another.

Ian handed the note to Jack. As he read it, Ian wondered aloud, "You know, I'm suddenly curious about what else might be inside that medicine bag. I know that it gave us both the creeps, but did you ever happen to look in again?"

"I almost did on several occasions, but to tell you the truth I lost interest and eventually forgot all about it. It might be interesting to find out what all the fuss was about. Did I ever tell you what I learned about the scroll?"

"No, but I remember that you were going to get it carbon dated. Did you?"

"Yes, but before I get to that, I just remembered something. Our old friend, Lawrence Connaught, never gave up trying to purchase the bark scroll. In fact, I had a letter from him just last fall suggesting that he would meet whatever price I demanded. I never bothered to reply. While I think of it, there's no reason why you shouldn't profit by this. I don't need the money. Give Connaught a call and see what he's offering. That way we can be rid of the scroll as well."

Ian now was uncertain about how and if the midéwayan and the scroll might be related. Jeff Stanton must have obtained the scroll prior to the theft of the Witch Island medicine bag. Beaudreau had simply found the scroll among Stanton's possessions and added it to the rest of the loot. There were at least two sets of players -- Connaught was after the scroll on behalf of a person or persons unknown, and a second party was after the medicine bundle for reasons as yet unclear.

"Anyway," Jack continued, "getting back to the scroll, I sent the sample to the Radiocarbon Dating Lab at the National Museum in Ottawa. It took over a year to get the results, but the date came back as 1810 plus or minus - thirty years. That makes it one of the oldest known scrolls in existence. I also discovered the specific area referred to by the map on the scroll. It is definitely Leech Lake, Minnesota, near the headwaters of the Mississippi. Much of the area is now an Indian Reservation. During the early 1800s, Leech Lake was the centre of midé activity for the Anishinabe. Later, the focus of traditional midé activity moved north to the Shoal Lake area in the Lake of the Woods region, and then even farther north to the Berens River area.

"I discovered something fascinating during my research. There has been a constant movement of the 'midé centre' for hundreds of years. At white contact, the focus of Anishinabe culture was east of the Great Lakes. Because of disease and intertribal conflict, the Anishinabe moved steadily westward from the early 1600s onward. Of course, the midé centre moved with them. After reaching the

western end of Lake Superior and north-eastern Minnesota, the movement turned northward, following the Winnipeg River to the Eastern Shore of Lake Winnipeg. This is all documented in the Anishinabe migration stories, including both the oral tradition and the Migration Scrolls.

“The most fascinating thing I discovered was that many Anishinabe believed that evil sorcerers were pursuing them. In other words, the fear of witchcraft had stimulated their migratory movements. This is not surprising in that the Anishinabe blame all misfortune on sorcery, including disease and warfare. The amazing thing is that as the *midé* centre moved, the area wherever it had previously been, became known as a place where witchcraft flourished.”

Fascinated by Jack’s account, Ian asked, “So this could mean that since the most recent centre of *midé* activity was Berens River, and since the *midéwiwin* has died out, that the region is now dominated by witchcraft? That would also mean that what we thought were *midé* gatherings in the western Lake of the Woods area were actually rendezvous for sorcerers. Which, by default, would make the medicine bag that Beaudreau sold you a sorcerer’s bag.”

“I don’t know if I’d go that far, but I know that many of the best-known living medicinal healers lived on the eastern shore of Lake Winnipeg. During the 1920s and ‘30s there was tremendous upheaval among the Anishinabe, especially in the Lake of the Woods area and to the south around Red Lake in Minnesota. The number of *midé* initiates dropped sharply, partially due to the high cost of apprenticeship, and partly because of the Depression. In any case, it cost nothing to be a sorcerer, so sorcery and other forms of occult shamanism came to predominate.”

Jack had done a lot of research on the subject while still a professor at the University. He went on, “With the breakdown of traditional values, western religion stepped in to fill the void, but was only partially successful. Modern medicine further eroded the prestige of the traditional *midé*. Unfortunately, the morale of the people sank, and with that came alcoholism and violence. People began to differentiate between the ‘good’ *midéwiwin* and a ‘bad’ one. I assume ‘bad’ in this case implied sorcery. About this time the *wabanowiwin* became active. As you know, sorcery is a seminal concept in Anishinabe society. It isn’t hard to understand how a group using fear of witchcraft would be able to influence many Native people from the region.”

Ian wondered what role Daniel Kukisew had played in all of this? Had he been a sorcerer? A member of the *wabanowiwin*? And if so, what did that make Swan?

Jack could not be certain, but he did not think that Daniel had part of the ‘bad’ *midéwiwin*. He was a Shaking Tent Practitioner, and a high-ranking *midé* in the plant healing or ‘good’ *midéwiwin*. Although he admitted that anyone could be involved in sorcery, he believed that Daniel had actually been one of the forces trying to maintain traditional values and stop the disintegration of Anishinabe culture.

Although Ian was fascinated by their discussion, he was tired and hungry, and said so. Jack suggested they try eating at a new Hungarian restaurant on Osborne Street that he favoured.

Later, after an excellent meal, they walked back to Jack’s apartment. Ian remarked how much Winnipeg had changed. Even Champs, his old watering hole

had been replaced, and Jack informed him that the place was now full of video lottery terminals, as were most of the hotels and lounges in Winnipeg. Manitoba had legalized gambling and there were even two large casinos in the city. Jack said that he regarded government sponsored gambling as the ultimate irony -- taxation through stupidity.

As they walked, Ian observed that there were many new high rises along the Assiniboine River. Jack agreed that much had changed in the area -- some for the good, some for the bad. Ian also noted the large number of Natives living in the area now, and commented on it.

"Winnipeg has a real problem on its hands," Jack said. "There are tens of thousands of status Indians and Metis living in the inner city. I've seen estimates as high as forty thousand, and that might be a conservative estimate. The do-gooders who seem to hold sway at city hall and in the provincial legislature, simply don't seem to know what to do. With welfare rates so high and other social programs so generous, there's no incentive for Natives to live on reserves any longer. Many reserves, especially those in the Interlake and on the east shore of Lake Winnipeg, are virtually abandoned. The concentration of Natives, along with poverty, alcoholism, and now drugs, has created a powder keg here. No one seems to be able to come up with a solution. Many parts of the downtown are no longer safe at night. There are even large gangs composed entirely of Native youths. I believe that each gang refers to itself as a 'posse.'"

"I remember what my cousin Jake used to say before he retired" Ian said. "He said that rather than waste tax money on the Department of Indian Affairs, it would be cheaper to buy every Indian in Winnipeg a brand new Cadillac and give them a thousand bucks each for beer. Then the problem would solve itself."

Ian and Jack had a good laugh at the "Carter solution." When Jack asked about his cousin Jake, Ian told him that he had retired over 10 years ago. He had moved back to his hometown, taken up grain farming, and died of a massive heart attack in 1991.

As far as the urban problems of Winnipeg, Ian certainly had no idea what could be done. American cities had been wrestling with similar problems involving the Afro-American and Hispanic populations for decades without much success. When they got to Jack's apartment, he suggested that Ian stay there. "There's a hide-a-bed in my den. I've been told that it's quite comfortable, but I wouldn't know because I've never slept on it. I would really enjoy the company, Ian, but if you prefer I'll book you a room at any hotel you choose."

Ian gladly accepted Jack's invitation to set up temporary residence in his den. According to his West Coast-adapted time sense it was still relatively early, but Jack was exhausted, claiming that he had not had so much excitement in years. He said goodnight and left Ian watching TV.

Ian wondered what his next move would be. As far as Connaught and the scroll were concerned, probably the best course would be to contact him and see what he was offering, and then turn the bloody thing over to him. He might come out of this considerably better off. As for the medicine bag return, he would get in touch with Swan and arrange to hand it over to her or her daughter. He was strangely excited at the thought of seeing her again. Then, it would no longer be his problem

and he could head back to the Coast and continue life, such as it was. He eventually fell asleep.

During the night, Ian experienced one of the most vivid and disturbing dream sequences of his life. In the dream, or more accurately, nightmare, he and Daniel Kukisew returned to the boulder mosaic site on Mikinak Lake. There, they erected the shaking tent, but this time Ian accompanied him inside. Daniel painted his face and upper body with ochre and handed him a drum. He began drumming and chanting and Ian accompanied him as best he could. Outside, he could feel some sort of presence. Soon, the drumming and chanting were almost drowned out by the sound of rushing wind and what he could only describe as loud, booming footsteps coming their way. Looking straight into Daniel's coal black eyes, Ian was not afraid. The tent was buffeted violently and something seemed to engulf the small structure. Although the sun had been shining brightly when they entered the tent, the light became so dim that he could barely see Daniel. The uproar outside grew to the point that he could not hear the drumming. Ian had the sense that someone or something was speaking, but not in sounds. Images flooded his mind. Most were like the pictographic drawings that he had seen at Spirit Rock, and on the bark scroll many years earlier. But now they were three dimensional and animated. There were also strange dark creatures that he could only catch glimpses of as they moved around in the background. Suddenly, there was a flash and fire filled the inside of the tent. Ian was catapulted high into the air.

The next thing he knew, he was soaring over the landscape at an amazing velocity. It was like being in a plane but the speed was far greater. Ian flew over vast tracts of forest, broken by rivers and lakes of every size and shape. When he began to descend, he could see a lonely camp on the shore of a lake in the distance. There was a crude log structure. A lone figure was standing in front of what looked like a small altar. He was a small man dressed in a black robe. He looked up as Ian rushed down toward him. He seemed to be staring straight up at him. As Ian got closer, he grasped his crucifix, his eyes widened and his mouth twisted in horror. Suddenly the entire scene filled with fire and in a flash Ian was soaring high above the forest again.

Many more miles of lake and forest passed beneath him. In the distance, he could see a small community on the shore of a vast lake. Houses and other buildings quickly filled his field of vision, and he had the sensation of hurtling toward a church in the centre of the village. Just as he thought that he would crash into the steeple, he passed right through it and then through the roof of a small house to the left of the church. An old native man sitting at a table looked up at him with horror on his face, and again the entire scene filled with fire.

Once again, Ian was back in the air, now soaring high above a huge lake. Moments later he began following a large river. He recognized it as the Red and knew that he was headed south toward Winnipeg. He could see large office buildings in the centre of the city, and in seconds had passed over them and began descending. Tree-lined streets came into view -- River Heights. Ian zoomed downward, approaching a house that was vaguely familiar -- Jack Elias's house! Again he passed through the solid structure. A young woman was lying on the couch in the living room. She appeared to be sleeping. The house was totally ransacked with Jack's possession scattered everywhere. What had happened? Ian

soared back up through the roof, then looked back to see Jack's house totally engulfed in flames. The hellish flight continued, retracing his most recent path north along the Red River and back across Lake Winnipeg. He recognized the next stop on his fiery flight: Pigeon River. He had a sick feeling that he already knew the next destination. Ian was relieved when the flight took him past Elsie Jackfish's house and away from the community.

Eastward he soared over what he knew to be the forests and lakes of south-eastern Manitoba and on into north-western Ontario. Far off, there was a small shining object. In seconds, he had closed the distance and recognized a small floatplane. He flashed past and turned. Michael Stanton and his pilot became wide-eyed but never had a chance to react before their aircraft exploded and fell from the sky. Skyrocketing westward once more, Ian soon recognized Lake of the Woods. Kenora came into view and his descent began. There was a small cabin on a lake. He flashed through the roof and looked directly into Swan Kukisew's eyes. She looked calmly at him and smiled. Instantly, Ian was back in the shaking tent. The sun was again illuminating the inside of the tent brightly and he could hear the sound of birds singing. The presence outside was gone and he was alone. Ian awoke at that point and found that he was totally drenched in sweat.

Glancing at his wristwatch, he realized that it was only 2:30 a.m. He lay there, trying to make some sense out of his nightmarish "flight." He was certain that he had just witnessed the deaths of Father Laviolette, Norman Beaudreau, Jack Elias's house sitter, and both Michael Stanton and his pilot. What had they seen at that last moment before the flames? A horrifying thought overwhelmed him -- the Wendigo! Somehow he had been shown the deaths of these people through the eyes of the most terrifying mythological monster known to the Anishinabe. Ian suddenly had a surging feeling in the pit of his stomach, and just made it to the bathroom before throwing up.

His violent retching awakened Jack, who got up and knocked on the bathroom door. "Are you all right, Ian?"

"Yeah," he replied weakly. "I'm okay now, thanks." After washing up, he opened the bathroom door and found Jack waiting for him.

"My God, Ian, you're as white as a sheet. What happened?"

Ian quickly related what he could remember of the terrifying flight of flames.

"Describe the young woman you saw in my house."

Ian did so and Jack gasped in amazement. "How could you possibly have known what Candice looked like? Your description was bang on." Jack sat down in obvious distress.

Clearly, this had been more than a dream -- it was a revelation of some sort. "The sensation of actually flying was unbelievably real. I could feel the wind rushing past and a constant roaring in my ears. It was weird, as I came to a building I'd pass right through it, but I could see the rafters and trusses as I went through -- like an X-ray."

Jack waited a few moments before replying, "The only way that I can explain what happened to you is that it must have been some sort of out-of-body experience, sometimes referred to as astral projection. Many cultures, including most Algonquians like the Anishinabe, believe in the concept of the spirit leaving the body and travelling to far off places. They call it 'spirit soaring.' Powerful

sorcerers are thought to be able to do this routinely. Also, the Ojibwa believe that men and supernatural beings communicate through dreams. Anyway, it's very late and I'm too tired to deal with this now."

Jack left him sitting in the living room and went back to bed. Ian needed a drink. After pouring himself a stiff scotch from the decanter on the coffee table, he walked over to Jack's Lazy Boy recliner. Sitting there, staring out over the dark city, he tried not to think about his "out-of-body" ordeal or whatever it was. He just knew that it was as realistic as any so-called real-life experience. Flashbacks of the "flight" kept invading his thoughts. He wondered at the connection between the victims in the vision. Certainly, it had to be the stolen bundle. The wendigowak were enraged and exacting some sort of retribution. The priest had burned one of the midéwayans that had been stolen by Jeff Stanton on Witch Island. Stanton had been dealt with summarily at Spirit Rock and Beaudreau had been his accomplice. Stanton Senior was related to the person who had stolen the material in the first place, and was meddling in the affair. They were all directly connected to each other and to the bundles. That being the case, what had the student, who was simply house-sitting for Jack, to do with it? Maybe the real target had been Jack, who was out of town at the time? Besides, Elsie Jackfish and Daniel Kukisew had also died in fires of mysterious origin. Were their deaths connected to the theft at the midéwiwin so long ago? There were too many questions and the scotch began to have the desired effect. Ian fell asleep in Jack's recliner.

Chapter 9

What the people believe is true.
—Anishinabe saying

The morning sun streaming in through the den window woke Ian. He could hear Jack busy doing something in the kitchen. It was 7 o'clock by his watch, but already 9 o'clock local time. He pulled on his robe and joined Jack, who promptly offered to make breakfast. Although famished, he decided to stick to juice and coffee. He was still feeling a little "air sick" from his previous evening's "flight."

Jack's eyebrows lifted and he looked slightly shocked when he saw the number of pills Ian washed down with his juice. "They're just vitamins" he explained. "I've been taking mega doses of them for years, especially Vitamin C and E. They must work because I've never been sick for a day, not even a cold."

Jack sipped his decaffeinated coffee, then said, "I take them too, when I can remember to, but I have so many other damned pills to choke down as it is. I spend about \$200 a month on medicine, everything from my diabetes medication to blood thinners. It's a good thing old coots like me get Pharmacare; otherwise, I'd be in the poor house." He chuckled cynically, then continued, "That's the main reason that I decided to stay in Canada rather than move back to the States."

They took their coffee into the living room. Neither had much interest in discussing the implications of Ian's nightmare. Instead, they continued with their

plan to re-examine the medicine bag and the scroll inside. Jack went into his bedroom and returned with a ring of keys. Handing them to Ian he said, "My locker number is on this key here. You might as well go downstairs and retrieve the stuff. They're in a box marked 'Christmas decorations.' Bring the whole thing back up here."

Ian showered and dressed before heading down to the locker area. He spent almost a half hour sorting through the cartons before finding the box Jack had indicated. By the date written on the tape, he knew that it had not been opened since the late 1970s. Well, here we go again, he thought while riding the elevator back up to Jack's apartment.

"I'm glad to see you back, I was beginning to get worried." Then he chuckled, "Did you ... ah ... have any trouble finding the box?"

"It's a bloody good thing that I have archaeological training," Ian managed to utter between sneezes. He placed the box between them on the coffee table. "How did you manage to pack so much bloody stuff in that little space?"

Jack laughed, "That's why I figured it was better you than me. Just the thought of moving all those boxes gives me angina."

Ian tore the tape from the box. Besides the medicine bag and scroll, he removed Lavolette's original journal and several bundles of files. Jack said they were various notes and references relating to the bag and scroll. There were a few other Ojibwa artifacts, including a small drum and several plastic bags containing dried plants. Jack explained that they were samples of indigenous plants used in native medicine. "I collected them with intentions of analysing them, but I never got around to it."

"Yes, I remember that was one of your interests back then. It's a good thing you kept notes with this stuff, otherwise you'd never figure out what anything is."

"Hell, you may as well toss those bags in the trash. I'll never get around to doing anything with it now, and I don't suppose you give a damn any more."

"Not really; dead plants only make me sneeze." Nevertheless, Ian replaced everything back in the box with the exception of the journal, scroll and medicine bag. Jack proposed that they simply pour out the contents of the bag on his dining room table. Ian wished they had access to an X-ray machine like the ones used at airports. At Jack's suggestion, he spread newspaper over the dining room table and opened the *midéwayan*. Just to be on the safe side, he went to the den and retrieved Elsie's amulet from his overnight bag. After placing the cord around his neck, he asked Jack if he thought it prudent for them to observe some sort of rite before proceeding.

"I wouldn't know what to do," he replied. "Do what you think might be appropriate. Just don't ask me to beat on the drum."

Not knowing any suitable Ojibwa prayers, Ian simply dumped the contents of the medicine bundle onto the newspaper. He half expected a thunderclap and the appearance of some fiery demon, but nothing sinister issued from the bag aside from a slightly mouldy smell that made him sneeze. They both laughed with relief, and then set about separating the objects so they could get an idea of what they were dealing with. There was a total of 30 separate items. Jack recommended segregating the material into two piles. In one pile they would place the things that were readily identifiable; in the other, things that required further examination.

Much of the bag's contents consisted of other smaller "packages" wrapped in cloth or leather. There were four crude animal carvings or totems of wood, five small boxes fashioned from wood or bark, and one metal tube with a screw top. It looked like something that might contain an expensive cigar, but was unmarked. They intended to open each of them in turn. The feeling of dread they had experienced the first time they had opened the bundle did not recur this time, and Ian felt extremely relieved.

In the spirit of "scientific inquiry" they decided to make notes, the kind of ritual behaviour that both understood well. After all, they were trained anthropologists. Jack fetched a lined pad and pen. They dealt with the identifiable items first. Jack described them and Ian wrote their description in the pad: redstone pipe; wooden figurines, each four; dried animal (probably amphibian), each two; headdress (fur - species unknown); bird bone tubes, each three; small turtle shell rattle; wooden whistle; bear claw necklace; raven (crow?) feather fan, and finally, what looked like a long wallet made of buckskin that was decorated with intricate beadwork.

Next, they turned their attention to the collection of smaller bags, boxes and other containers. One contained 17 *miigiis* shells, another was full of small rounded stones, six others were found to contain dried plants of various kinds, each wrapped within its own "mini bag." One box they knew contained the human foetus, three small bark boxes contained coloured pigments, another was full of trade beads, and one was empty. The metal tube contained a sealed glass vial full of what appeared to be grey powder. So ended that portion of their "analysis."

"Well, nothing in the contents seems extraordinary to me," said Jack. "Other than four exceptions it appears to be a very typical shaman's bundle."

"What are the exceptions?" Ian asked.

"Well, the box containing the foetus is unique," Jack replied as he replaced the medicine bag's contents except for the wallet. "The metal tube is quite strange, too, but it probably contains some medicinal preparation. I've never encountered dried 'toads' or whatever they are before. Most Woodland people are deathly afraid of frogs and toads. And this buckskin wallet is something new to me. It looks like a miniature *parfleche*."

Jack's description of the wallet as a small *parfleche* seemed apt. Ian recalled that a *parfleche* was a large, folded rawhide container used by many native peoples to store dried food and other possessions. Before they could continue their discussion the phone rang. Jack picked it up, and after listening for a few seconds without speaking, said, "Yes, he's here. It's for you," and handed Ian the phone.

Other than his daughter and assistant, Nick, no one knew Ian was back in Winnipeg. He took the phone. "Hello."

A vaguely familiar voice said, "Ian, welcome back to Winnipeg. It's been a long time. This is Swan Kukisew."

The sound of her voice awoke a sudden feeling of giddiness. God, he thought, she's still got it. "Hello Swan, how did you know I was here?"

"I didn't know for sure, but I hoped you would come. I'm sorry to disturb you like this, but the past has a way of coming back to haunt us."

"You're not disturbing me in the least. It's good to hear your voice. Jack just told me what had happened to your father. I'm so terribly sorry. I guess that explains why you left town in such a hurry."

“Yes, it was. God, that was such a long time ago. I hoped that by moving to the States and starting another life, Katie and I would be able to forget the past. For many years everything went along fine. Katie grew up and finished university, and I worked with the Tribal Police here on the Red Lake reserve. Then, I don’t know how, but someone found out about my life back in Kenora. It’s hard to believe, but the midéwayan that started all of this is still causing trouble. Someone wants it, and they made it very clear that anyone who stands in their way could be harmed, which includes Dr. Elias and you.”

“Why would the medicine bag still be that important?” Ian asked.

“I’m not sure, but if you have been following what has been happening with First Nations people back here, you know there is a lot of turmoil. Powerful forces among our people and on the outside are trying to control things. There are land claims and demands for compensation that are worth a lot of money. There is also gambling and the sale of alcohol and cigarettes on the reserves. I assume that the ownership of that particular midéwayan could influence the outcome of some very important negotiations. Anyway, Dr. Elias told me that he has access to the medicine bag and is willing to turn it over to me. Now that you are there, I’ll fly to Winnipeg this evening and take it back with me tomorrow. I’ll get a cab at the airport. Dr. Elias already gave me his address. I look forward to seeing you again.”

After hanging up, Ian relayed what Swan had said to Jack. He wondered how she could get to Winnipeg by that evening. Ian’s guess was that she would fly from Bemidji to Minneapolis and then take a scheduled flight. Jack suggested phoning the airport for information. When Ian called, he discovered that there was only one Northwest flight arriving from Minneapolis at 5:45 p.m., which had to be Swan’s flight. This gave them the rest of the day to continue their examination of the medicine bag’s contents.

Ian decided to open the small parfleche. In many ways it resembled a large trucker’s wallet, but it was made of buckskin and decorated with quillwork. There were several documents inside. The paper was quite old and stained. They carefully unfolded each document and were astonished to find that one was an original copy of an 1855 treaty that granted land and compensation to the native people of Leech Lake. The other document was a Presidential proclamation dated 1904, reinstating the 1855 treaty and reaffirming all of its provisions. In effect, the document returned control of most of north central Minnesota to the Chippewa. It was signed by President Theodore Roosevelt and Secretary of the Interior Ethan A. Hitchcock. The Presidential Seal of the United States of America was stamped below the signatures. The land described in the documents would now be worth untold millions, if not billions of dollars. They knew that it was unnecessary to continue their examination of the contents of the medicine bag. They had found the reason why someone would kill to get their hands on it. There was nothing supernatural about greed.

Holy smokes! Ian thought. This piece of paper could sure stir up a mess. If authentic, and there was no reason to think otherwise, it would mean that all of the land that had been whittled away from the Chippewa between 1855 and 1904 would have to be returned or made up for in other ways, like money -- lots of money. In addition, the Anishinabe would again have a homeland and a powerful

economic base with which to re-establish their culture. The prophesy of the *Seven Fires* might be fulfilled after all.

Ian had never read an original United States of America Indian Treaty before, and as he scanned the very wordy manuscript he was astonished at the complexity and implications of the document. Even a lawyer would have trouble understanding the thing, let alone a group of Ojibwa chiefs dealing through translators. Obviously, they were being screwed out of something that rightfully belonged to them. The government justified its actions as a “purchase” from the representatives of the Chippewa people. Nowadays, it would be recognized for what it really was: a con job. It was no different than some aluminium siding salesman preying upon the elderly. No wonder the Native people were outraged and demanding their territory back.

Jack said that he had some material relating to the Ojibwa treaty situation from the early 1800s onward, both in the United States and in Canada. After rooting through some files, he unearthed a research paper written by one of his former students. The paper documented the various treaties and their results. Ian was amazed at the duplicity of successive governments over the years. They changed the terms of reference and the boundaries of treaties whenever they wished. Two acts were especially heinous: the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887, which turned over millions of acres of Indian land to settlers, loggers and miners, all without compensation, and the Nelson Act of 1899, which ordered all of the Ojibwa people of Minnesota to move to the White Earth Reservation. There had also been several other “concentration treaties” between 1855 and 1887, which basically rewrote previous agreements and forced various Indian bands onto smaller and smaller reservations. It seemed unbelievable that any government could be so openly criminal. Obviously, Ian thought, as the saying goes, Might makes right.

There was a map of the treaties in Jack’s files. It showed the effects of various “new” treaties and revisions throughout the 1800s. After 1855, most of the Chippewa land in Minnesota was either “purchased” or simply taken, and the native people were herded into smaller and smaller reservations. If the proclamation written by President Roosevelt in 1904 was authentic, lawyers working on behalf of the Chippewa nation would have a field day in court. Millions of acres would be reclaimed, and there would be compensation reaching into the hundreds of millions of dollars. This document had the potential of making anyone who had it in possession very rich. He mentioned this to Jack, who commented, “Yes, very rich -- or very dead.”

They replaced all of the bundle’s contents in roughly the order they had been removed. Ian returned the bundle to the original box, but kept out the bark scroll, the priest’s journal, and the parfleche containing the documents. They had already decided to sell the scroll to Lawrence Connaught or at the very least see what he was offering. As far as the documents in the parfleche, Ian felt that they should go directly to representatives from the Leech Lake or Red Lake bands. Jack was dubious about to whom they should be turned over, especially since they were uncertain about the identity or affiliation of the men who had approached Swan Giese.

“Who knows who ‘they’ are?” Jack mused. “They might be legitimate representatives of the Chippewa, or they might be government agents out to stymie further land claims, or they might be people who have vested interest in retaining the land that had been taken from the Indians -- lumber and mining companies come to mind.”

“How about a sorcerer or society of sorcerers who simply want the bundle to exploit its power?” Ian asked.

Jack doubted that theory. “Why don’t we just wait until your friend Swan gets here? Then we can discuss the matter with her. I’m sure she will want some input after she finds out about the documents we discovered.”

Jack handed Ian a business card. “This was included with Lawrence Connaught’s last note to me. There’s a number for his cell phone. He wrote on the back that he could be reached at any time at that number. While we’re waiting for Swan, why don’t you ring him up? Let’s see what he brings to the table.”

As Ian dialled the number, he remembered the last time he had dealt with Connaught. He had ended up \$1,000 richer and, as far as he could tell, Connaught had received nothing in return. After only one ring a voice answered, “Connaught.”

“Mr. Connaught. My name is Ian Stewart. You may not remember me, but we once met in Winnipeg. You were looking for information about a birch bark scroll.”

“Certainly I remember you, Ian. I heard that you had moved away to the West Coast many years ago. What brings you to call me after such a long time?”

“Dr. Elias informed me that you recently asked him about the same birch bark scroll you had asked me about during our meeting. Well, he has decided to divest himself of various objects and suggested that I call you to see if you are still interested in finding the scroll.”

“Really? I’m amazed that Dr. Elias would stoop to deal with me, but ... yes; I am indeed still very interested in the scroll. Rather than discuss this further over the phone, I propose that I fly to Winnipeg in a few days and meet with you in person. What’s your schedule like for this coming Sunday?”

“Well, I’d like to get back to Vancouver as soon as possible, but I suppose I can stay for a couple of extra days. Let me know when you arrive and we can arrange a rendezvous.”

“Fine, I look forward to our meeting.”

As Ian hung up he had an unsettling thought. He’d have bet dollars to doughnuts that Connaught was already making flight plans, and would be in Winnipeg at least a day earlier than he proposed. Ian remembered how he had beaten him to Champs for their earlier meeting. He was the type of person who liked to control the “high ground.” Ian mentioned this to Jack and he concurred. “Connaught has not survived in this game so long by being stupid. It’s too bad your cousin Jake is no longer with the police. We could find out when Connaught’s plane actually arrives and perhaps keep tabs on him.”

“Well, Jake is no longer around, but as luck would have it, his son, Jim, joined the police force, and if I remember correctly he’s now a detective. I haven’t talked to him in years. I’ll call a couple of my other relatives out of town and see if they have a number for him.”

“Good idea, we might need a few reinforcements as we don’t yet know what the stakes are. We may know more when Swan arrives. By the way, she should be here in a couple of hours. Why don’t you check with the airport and find out if the Minneapolis flight is arriving on time. Then you can take my car and pick her up.”

“That’s a plan. I just hope I can recognize her. I’ll also have a chance to scan the other passengers to see who else gets off.”

Jack said he was worn out and needed a nap. There was still lots of time before Ian had to head for the airport, so he picked up the original copy of Laviolette’s journal, which was sitting on the dining room table. He noted that there were several pages in the original that Jack had not bothered to photocopy for him; particularly some notations on the inside back cover. There was a list of names and phone numbers in Norman Beaudreau’s unmistakable scrawl. Jack Elias and his old number at the university appeared. There were a couple of other Beaudreaus, probably family, Ian guessed. There were other numbers with no names attached, but one name and number virtually jumped out at him -- Lawrence Connaught! Boy, he sure gets around, Ian thought.

There was a small note down in one corner. It was the initials LC and a date: Jan. 12. Had Connaught arranged to meet with Beaudreau? Ian wondered if the meeting had anything to do with Beaudreau’s death? He made a mental note to ask Jack if he knew the exact date when he had died in the house fire. This was certainly how Connaught had connected the scroll to Jack and Ian. Now he was even more determined to stay one step ahead of him.

He picked up the scroll and wondered why it had such value. Turning it over, he noticed the symbols carved into the outer bark. They were definitely newer than the other marks, and certainly didn’t resemble any Native American iconography with which he was familiar. He remembered Jack mentioning that they might be runes, the earliest form of Germanic writing that is often associated with the Vikings.

It took him a couple of minutes to find a book with Runic characters in Jack’s bookcase. The accompanying text told him that runes had been derived from Greek writing, but had been modified for easy cutting into stone and wood. He compared the marks on the scroll with the symbols in the book. They were definitely runes. He copied them onto a piece of paper. Using a table in the book, he “translated” the marks as D, G, O, A and D. There was no way this was an actual word. Then he remembered that the letters of the alphabet were also used as numbers. What could such a number, if it was one, refer to? He decided to wait and see what Jack might make of his theory.

There was about an hour before he had to leave for the airport, so Ian called one of his cousins in Portage la Prairie to get a fix on Jake’s son. She gave him Jim’s current phone numbers at home and at the police station in Winnipeg. She also confirmed that Jim Stewart was, indeed, now a detective. He called the station and within a few minutes was talking to his cousin. After they got caught up with each other’s life histories, Ian told him of his concerns about Lawrence Connaught and asked for his advice about how to proceed.

“I’ll pull the files on Connaught and have a look at what’s on CPIC, the police computer system, and on the CSIS, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service computer. The Mounties have developed a very sophisticated database to handle

Canadian security interests, and CSIS has links to other security databases like the FBI, Interpol and the CIA. It may take me a while, so give me your number and I'll call you if and when I get through."

He was just giving him Jack's number when Jack wandered back into the living room. After hanging up, Ian related his discovery at the back of Laviolette's journal. Jack tried to recall when Beaudreau had died, and was pretty sure that it had been during the winter of 1972, but was unsure of the exact date. Ian was willing to bet it was shortly after the date he had discovered in the journal. He told Jack about contacting his cousin on the police force. "Jim may call while I'm picking up Swan. Tell him who you are and see what he has to say about Connaught. I have to get going."

Ian felt conspicuous as he wheeled the huge Cadillac across Winnipeg toward the air terminal. He was fairly certain that no one was following him, and was more concerned with keeping the big "road boat" in its own lane than scanning whether someone tailing him. Fortunately, he managed to find a large enough parking space that was fairly close to the main building. Once in the terminal, he checked the arrival schedule. The plane from Minneapolis would arrive on time at 5:45. He had 26 minutes to wait.

Ian wondered if Swan had changed much after 20 years, and if he would recognize her. He wandered around, checking out various shops, and ended up in a bookstore on the upper level at the north end of the building. Flipping through some magazines, he had the distinct feeling that someone was looking at him. As casually as possible, he replaced the fishing magazine back in the rack and sauntered out of the store. He pretended to look in the window of a gift store, but in reality used the window reflection to see if anyone was watching him. Sure enough, a man who had been in the bookstore had taken position near the pay phones and was looking directly at him. Ian continued along the concourse and down the escalator to the arrival area. Glancing quickly back he noted that his shadow was following at a discreet distance. There was something vaguely familiar about the way the guy moved. Then it struck him -- he was a cop and not just any cop -- it was his cousin Jim. He must have followed him from Jack's place or, on the other hand, maybe he had called and Jack had told him where Ian would be. Ian turned and walked directly toward him. As he drew closer, Jim started grinning. "Hi Ian, long time no see. I wondered how long it would take for you to recognize me."

"Jim, you twit. What are you doing here?" Ian asked as they shook hands. "Why didn't you introduce yourself right away?"

"Because I wasn't sure I'd recognize you after all these years. Dr. Elias suggested that I look for a middle-aged guy acting very paranoid." Jim laughed. "Sure enough, it wasn't hard to spot you."

Ian laughed along with him. "So you called Jack's and he told you I was coming here to meet someone. You must have discovered something fairly juicy to bring you out here in person."

"I wanted to say hello, anyway, but you're right -- things got really interesting when I entered a query concerning your buddy Connaught into the computer. His file was flagged by just about every police agency in the world. I had a quick look at his sheet. The list of shit he has been suspected of is amazing; but you know,

there wasn't one single conviction for anything, not even a parking ticket. You know what was really amazing? Your name showed up in the file, too, and there were entries listing transcripts of wiretaps that made my hair stand on end, including some between you and my dad, and one between you and Connaught. I would have needed some very heavy-duty authorization to get any more info from CSIS. My advice is to stay away from this one, dude."

"You know, that's funny -- your dad gave me the very same advice twenty years ago. He was ready to beat the crap out of me as I remember." Ian's mind was racing. He had been right when, years ago, he feared that his phone had been tapped. It had been -- by the police! But why?

"What went on back then?" Jim asked. "Who the hell is this guy?" Without waiting for an answer, he said, "I think he must be a goddam "spook" working for the US Government, mostly likely the CIA."

Connaught an agent? When Ian thought about it, he had certainly had the "James Bond" look and manner. He quickly filled Jim on Connaught's background as an "antiquities dealer," and his interest in the birch bark scroll. Ian told him about his one and only meeting with the man, and how the matter had basically ended right then as far as he was concerned. Finally, he related how Jack had contacted him concerning the bundle, and that he had decided to discuss the possibility of selling the scroll with Connaught. At that point, Ian begged off any further conversation with Jim, for the arrival screen and stated that the flight from Minneapolis had just arrived. Jim said that he had to be head home to take his son to baseball practice, anyway, and promised he would call Ian the next day.

Passengers were just beginning to trickle off the flight. Ian's pulse started racing in anticipation of seeing Swan again. He was beginning to think she wasn't on the plane when she appeared at the top of the escalator. Their eyes met and she looked surprised. She must have recognized Ian as well, because she gave a wave and a small smile. As she rode down, he thought how little she had changed. Sure, she looked older and a bit heavier, but she was still one hell of a beautiful woman. When she reached the lower level, Ian smiled and held out his hand. Instead of offering her hand in return, she grabbed him in a powerful embrace and hugged him. "Boy, am I glad to see you! How did you know what flight I would be on?"

"There was only one flight from Minneapolis, so I figured you had to be on it. You haven't changed a bit. You're as beautiful as ever." Ian reached for her bag and asked if she had any other luggage.

"No, just a carry-on. You look great, Ian. The years have been very kind to you."

Swan laughed when they got to Jack's Eldorado. "I don't know if this is a step up from your last car or not."

On the drive back to Jack's, Swan told him a bit about her life in Minnesota, and of her daughter Katie. Ian did the same, telling her about the ups and downs in his life on the Coast, and about his daughter, Sarah. The drive back to the apartment went by in a flash. He learned that Swan had worked for the tribal police on the Red Lake reserve, but had recently retired. She told him that she had never married. Katie had grown up and gone on to study Anthropology at the University of Minnesota. She was staying with friends until Swan returned. The subject of the medicine bag never came up. That could wait.

Chapter 10

*Make me wise, so that I may understand what you have taught my people
and the lessons you have hidden in each leaf and rock.*

—Ojibwa prayer

Jack greeted them at the door. “Miss Geise, it’s certainly a pleasure to finally meet you. I wish that it could have been under more pleasant circumstances.”

“Yes, I also wish things were different, but it is good to meet you, too,” she replied, still holding his hand. It seemed as though she was expecting him to say something more, but he released her hand and ushered them into the living room. Jack had ordered in Chinese food while Ian had been away.

“I thought we might as well eat here as I know that Miss Geise -- or is it Kukisew? -- doesn’t have much time.”

“It’s Geise now, but just call me Swan. I had a meal of sorts on the flight, but you two go ahead.” She accepted Jack’s offer of a cup of coffee.

Ian was starving, so as they ate, Swan filled Jack in on some details of her life after moving to the USA. He was interested in her perspective on the differences between Canadian and American Ojibwa societies. “I believe that the US First Nations people are far more acculturated, and in most ways they are indistinguishable from other Americans. While many Canadian Ojibwa still know something of the ‘old ways,’ and some even live traditionally by fishing, hunting and trapping just a few miles away in Minnesota, few know anything about their own cultural heritage. There have been some recent revival movements and a lot of tension over what the American Indian Movement is calling ‘cultural genocide,’ but I don’t think this has anything to do with the demand for the midéwayan’s return.

“How were you approached about that?” Jack asked.

“The first contact was about a month ago. I received a phone call from a man asking if I was related to Daniel Kukisew. The question caught me completely off guard, and at first I denied any knowledge of such a person. He said that he had reliable information that I was, in fact, his daughter, and that I was living in the States under an assumed name. He then suggested that it would be in my best interest to agree to a meeting. He seemed to know all about my life back in Kenora, my move to the States, and our lives since moving there. When I asked about the purpose of the meeting, he said he wasn’t at liberty to discuss it over the phone and would fill in the details when we met. As he obviously already knew where I lived, I decided to hold the meeting on my own turf. I told him to come to the house at 10 the following day.”

“Wasn’t that kind of risky?” Ian said. “You never know who or how many of them might show up, or what their intentions might be.”

Swan laughed. “You’ve forgotten that I was a cop for many years. I made some preparations for the meeting, including stashing my revolver and a can of Mace within easy reach. I also set up a hidden tape recorder. Anyway, by the next morning, I thought that I was ready for whatever might happen. I was surprised at

the two men who showed up at my door. They were white guys wearing suits, and looked every bit like government agents. I had seen enough Feds in my time to have a fairly good idea of what they look like, and these guys definitely fit the profile. Before I let them in, I asked for some identification. They both held up cards with the government seal on them -- and the letters FBI. They were Feds all right, but just to be on the safe side I made sure that I sat them down where I could keep a close eye on them -- and get a good recording of the conversation. And Katie was upstairs, ready to call in reinforcements if need be.

"I asked what they had in mind. One of them, whose voice I recognized from the phone call, opened his briefcase and showed me a picture of my dad and asked if he was my father. I said yes. He then pulled out copies of our Canadian birth certificates and asked me to authenticate them. After I did, he showed me various old news clippings, beginning with one concerning the mysterious death of Jeff Stanton; another pertaining to the loss of several items of local native significance, which I knew were the missing *midéwayans*; yet another about the death of Father Laviolette, an Oblate missionary; someone named Albert Keeper's obituary; and finally, a news item relating to the fire at my father's house. After he put those things away, he opened an envelope and spread several photos on my coffee table. There were pictures of you both, several men I didn't recognize, and some photos of a *midéwayan*. I'm quite sure they must have the same pictures you showed my father twenty years ago. The man then asked me if I knew the present location of the object in the photo. I just sat there saying nothing, trying to collect my thoughts."

"Well, at least now we know who 'they' were," Ian interjected. "It was the freaking American government! They have been after the medicine bundle all along. The guys who assaulted me and stole my jacket with the photos, the ones who tried to grab me, whoever trashed Dr. Elias's office -- it was the Feds. My God! People have died! They must really want those documents badly."

"Let's not get too hasty in our conclusions," cautioned Jack. "It might not be the documents they are after. Now, I'm interested in the rest of Swan's story, so please continue."

Ian sat there fuming as Swan went on. "After a few moments, I told the men that I had known at one time where the *midéwayan* was, but after my father's death and our move to the States, had no idea of what had become of it. I gave them a brief description of your visit to Kenora, and of my visit to Winnipeg and why I left without recovering the bundle. I asked why they were still so interested in it. They told me that information was on a 'need to know' basis, and they were not at liberty to discuss the matter. The agent in charge went on to state that they were quite certain that Dr. Elias either still had the item in his possession, or had access to it. I asked if that was the case, why hadn't they contacted you directly. He said they had tried but without success. Do you remember any attempts to reach you, Jack?"

"Dimly. I probably assumed it was Connaught or someone like him and brushed the caller off. I suppose I've become even crustier in my old age, not to mention senile. Most of the calls I receive are from people trying to sell me something, or get me to support some cause or another. Frankly, a lot of the time I don't even bother to answer the phone."

Swan smiled sympathetically and nodded, then continued, "The agent said I should re-establish contact with you in order to learn the bundle's location. He had your phone number and current address, so I had Katie call you. I suggested she do it because she has Anthropological training and could perhaps use that to arouse your interest." She paused and shrugged. "Unfortunately, she had no success. Then I decided to write to Ian in care of your address, hoping you might know of his whereabouts and forward it. Finally, I called and managed to convince you of the seriousness of the situation. You tracked Ian down, and now we are all here together."

"Yes," Jack said ruefully. "I must have called every Stewart in Vancouver before I finally found him." Then, as he got up and started clearing away the debris from their dinner, he suggested, "Why don't you tell Swan about the surprises we found in the bundle."

Ian filled her in on some of their discoveries, beginning with a capsule summary of the contents in the priest's journal. She was very surprised when he told her of the destruction of one of the medicine bundles by Laviolette at Fishing Lake. Then he related the circumstances of the priest's death, as well as the fiery ends of Beaudreau, Jack's house sitter, and Stanton Senior. He also described his flying nightmare, and explained his theory that it might have something to do with the Wendigo. Finally, he told of what they had learned about the scroll and the documents inside the parfleche.

Swan took some time to react to everything that had been told to her, then said, "This is far more complicated than I could imagine. I didn't know about the scroll or the treaty documents. But before we get to those things, I find your 'flying dream' very disturbing. My father used to describe such visions to me, especially after a shaking tent ceremony. I believe it was his spirit, not the Wendigo that caused you to see these things. He has become a pawáganak -- a dream visitor -- and is trying to tell you something. I think the death of the priest relates both Beaudreau and Stanton to the bundle's destruction. Stanton's son stole the bundle in the first place, Beaudreau helped him, and the priest destroyed it. My father told me that one of the stolen bundles had belonged to the Wendigo Society, and that it was extremely dangerous. It could be that the death of those three was revenge by the wendigowak, but the girl in Dr. Elias's home had nothing to do with that bundle. I think you were shown that she was murdered by someone looking for something in his house."

"I think we have to include your father's death as well," Ian said. "The timing and circumstances are simply too similar to be coincidental. Can you tell us about the incident -- if it isn't too painful."

"It's all right. I got over it years ago. Officially, there was an explosion in his house and he was badly burned. The fire investigators concluded there was a gas leak in the propane stove." She paused and shook her head at the memory. "As soon as he was out of intensive care he demanded to be released from hospital. They were against it, but he was adamant. I cared for him at my house as best I could, but his injuries and advanced age ... well, we knew the end was near. He lived for several weeks in terrible pain, but refused to use the painkillers the hospital gave him. Instead, he had me prepare native remedies. He said he would

die soon, anyway, and he preferred it be in my house, not the white man's hospital.

"Despite the pain, he remained amazingly upbeat and rarely showed many signs of discomfort. He told me what actually happened: He arrived home for lunch after a morning fishing with Katie to find his house ransacked. As he walked into the kitchen he smelled gas, but before he could react there was an explosion. He managed to push Katie outside, but his back and legs were badly burned. He was able to reach the lake and put the flames out. Neighbours heard the explosion and saw the smoke. They called for help, but being so far from town it took half an hour for the fire trucks and an ambulance to arrive. By then, the house was totally destroyed and Dad's condition was very grave. Relatives phoned me in Winnipeg that Saturday morning, and I left for Kenora immediately."

"How was Katie?" Ian asked.

"She was only slightly singed, but severely traumatized by what happened to her grandfather.

"Did Daniel say if he had any suspicion about who had trashed his house?" Ian asked. "Did he think that the fire was probably set to cover up the fact his place had been searched?"

Swan thought for a while, then answered, "Late that spring we noticed some men following my father. At the time we didn't know why. We thought it might be someone from the government. Native rights issues had just started heating up, and Dad was quite outspoken when it came to the Department of Indian Affairs and the police. And there had been some fairly heated confrontations over some disputed land being developed for a new golf course near Kenora. My position with the police allowed me to make sure that things never went too far, but this was different. When I think of it, it all began after Dad got a letter from Dr. Elias. Shortly after that a note was shoved under his door suggesting very strongly that he make every effort to reach Dr. Elias and obtain the bundle, and that someone would make contact after he had it in his possession. The note also suggested that he and those he cared for would be at risk if he didn't comply. Well, Dad was never one to act hastily and, besides, he was rather stubborn. He had just begun to put together a game plan when Dr. Elias called that June, and then you arrived in Kenora. After that, Dad and I decided that I should go to Winnipeg to retrieve the bundle from Dr. Elias."

"Hmm," Ian mused, "it's no wonder Daniel had 'the cousins' watching our back. I remember how weird I thought all of the 'cloak and dagger' stuff was during our meeting. Now, in retrospect, I'll bet the bastards thought that my visit to Kenora was to deliver the bundle. It was after I left Lake of the Woods that things really started to happen. I got mugged, Jack's office was trashed, and then I almost got kidnapped. Then you left for Winnipeg, and while Daniel was taking care of Katie, they took the opportunity to search his cabin. Maybe the fire was accidental. I can't see them wanting any harm to come to Daniel before they got what they wanted."

"That's what Dad thought. He and Katie had simply come back too soon from fishing. He also thought that maybe it was intended as a warning to show they were serious. Whatever, they didn't get the bundle then, but even after all this time, someone still wants it badly. It was Dad's idea for Katie and me to go to the

States. He was sure that if I changed my name and kept a low profile, it was unlikely that I'd ever be found."

Swan paused in thought for a few moments, then continued in a softer voice, "We talked a lot during his last days, you know. He told me about his life, and how he became a midé back in the early 1920s. He also had me write down a lot of things dealing with medicinal plants and cures. He didn't want all of his knowledge to die with him. I must have filled up two notebooks with his thoughts. He told me that this day would come -- someday -- and that you would be there to help me. I wanted to call and tell you what happened, but Dad told me to wait. By the time I did call, you had moved away. I suspect Dad knew what was going to happen all along. In fact, he wrote you a letter and told me to give it to you the next time we met. Well, even though it took twenty years to deliver, here it is." She reached into her bag and pulled out a wrinkled manila envelope with Ian's name on it.

Ian felt the hair on the nape of his neck and forearms standing erect. Christ! Not only had Daniel started to haunt his dreams, now he had reached from beyond the grave to write him a letter. He tore the end off the envelope and pulled out several sheets of lined paper.

"Ian, by the time you read this, I will be sitting at the council fire in the land of ghosts. If you are reading this it means my vision was true and Swan has come to you for help. I know that you are a man of honour and that your Manitou is strong. You will help her. At Mikinak Lake in the shaking tent I saw many things. Some things I could understand, other things I could not. I saw you as a young man, a soldier. I learned of your pain. I can tell you that the fault for the deaths of the others was not yours. None would have survived without your action. Let your spirit be healed.

My mandido took me backward and forward in time. A white man dressed in dark clothing with his face painted black took some things from a midéwegan on our sacred island, the place you call Witch Island. His fate was sealed. Another man, an Anishinabe, who had been with the white man travelled far to the north with the stolen things. Later I was shown a place by a lake where a black robe and the same man sat by a fire. The black robe threw a midéwayan into the fire and it was destroyed. I felt great anger among the spirits. His fate was sealed. The Anishinabe man took refuge near a place of power and lived alone for many years. When he no longer protected the sacred things and gave them to another, his fate was sealed. There was much fire in my visions. From this I knew that the thunder spirits were angered. I knew then that the midéwayan that had been destroyed had belonged to a bear walker, an evil shaman who used his powers to attack others. I was glad it was burned. It was an evil thing. The other midéwayan belonged to a great midé who had come from Red Lake to the south many years ago. He had lived at Shoal Lake until he died. His medicine bundle was a good thing used for healing. He gave it to me to take care of.

Then came a part of the vision that I could not understand. I saw a place where many people in white suits that covered their bodies were working with many shiny pipes and machines. They put some powder into two small things that looked like a piece of pipe. They hid the pipes in a room with many heavy doors. Later another man came and took the pipes. He was the same white man who died

at Spirit Rock. He hid the pipes in the *midéwayan* that Dr. Elias bought later at Pigeon River. I feel there is much danger to whoever has the pipes. Be careful.

Something else I did not understand. Often there was a man standing in the shadows. He was there in several parts of my journey through the spirit world. I did not know him and the spirits did not reveal why he was there. I feel that he is someone to be feared.

The spirits showed me another time, perhaps far in the future when you and Swan would be together again. There is great danger for both of you and many others. Much will happen. Your *mandido* will show you the path. Believe in your dreams. All will be well. Daniel.”

Ian spent some time digesting what he had just read. He handed Swan her father’s letter. “Daniel knew everything. He saw the past and the future during the shaking tent. I wish he had given me a few more details, though. I’m really getting worried about what might be inside the ‘pipes’ your dad referred to. I’m sure that the tube we found in the bundle is one of them. It must be an experimental compound of some kind -- maybe a new explosive or a chemical warfare agent. Daniel said that it was dangerous. No wonder the feds are so hot to get their hands on it.

“Daniel mentioned two containers. I wonder where the other one is? I bet the marks on the bark scroll were made by Jeff Stanton, and they are some sort of clue about what the tubes contain.”

Swan finished reading her Father’s letter. “Maybe we should take the metal tube out of the bundle? If the substance inside is so dangerous, those able to deal with it should have it.”

“No one can possibly know that Jeff Stanton hid the tube inside the *midéwayan*. The feds are just on a fishing expedition, hoping they’ll come up with something. The real mystery is the ‘dark man’ that your dad mentions in his letter. I bet it’s Connaught. He could be working for someone else who wants the stuff in the tube, like a foreign power. Who knows?”

“I guess the next few days should provide the answer,” Swan said.

“Weren’t you and Katie bothered by the jerks that had followed your Dad?”

“After the fire it became very unhealthy for anyone non-Native to come near Katie or me -- unless I wanted them to. My father was beloved by many people. I won’t go into details, but tourism suffered badly for a while. As you know, Kenora is a small town. My cousins made it tough on the “suits,” and anyone else they suspected might be from the government. You know -- lots of slashed tires and broken windows. The authorities blamed the problem on “militants.” The result was that Katie and I were left alone and managed to fade out of sight.”

The phone rang. Jack picked it up, listened momentarily, then handed it to Ian. It was Jim. “Well, the shit has definitely hit the fan, Ian. I don’t know what you and the professor are up to, but I was called back to headquarters just after I got home from ball practice. There was a very tense meeting with my boss. It seems that the local CSIS big shot and some government prawn from External Affairs in Ottawa have been burning up the phone lines. Apparently, they took turns squeezing my boss’s balls about my interest in Connaught. He repeated the process on me. My little query set alarm bells ringing from here to Ottawa, and from there to Washington. I played dumb and said that his name had come up

during a routine inquiry. I didn't let on that either you or Dr. Elias were involved. By the way, I'm calling from a pay phone. This is to let you know that I won't be of any more help. I was given the word that if I stick my nose where it isn't wanted, it will get chopped off. My advice, for what it's worth, is go back to the Coast and forget you ever heard of the guy."

"It's too late, Connaught's already on his way to Winnipeg. The process has started, so I might as well stay and see an end to this whole goddam mess.

"Well, if you insist on following through, I'll try to help. After all, you are kin. You can get in touch with me through my sister, Judy. She's living out on the family farm. We can relay any messages through her. Have you got her number?"

"Yes. In fact it was through Judy that I found your number in the first place."

After hanging up, Ian told Jack and Swan what Jim had said. Swan, of course, had no knowledge of the scroll and the dealings with Connaught, so Ian related what had transpired after the last time they had met.

"Let me have a look at the scroll," she said. "I'm very curious about why it should cause such a fuss. Besides, I've never handled one before."

Ian suggested adjourning to the living room. Once they were seated, he untied the cord and unrolled the scroll on the coffee table. While Jack explained what he thought the scroll depicted, Swan studied the marks on the bark intently. "I think it's a so-called 'migration scroll,'" Jack said, "and that it's actually a map showing the area around Leech Lake at the headwaters of the Mississippi. The various symbols along the shoreline show the locations of a number of sites important to the midé. I had it dated to the early 1800s, which is about the time that the Leech Lake area was the centre of Anishinabe culture. I have no idea what the various locations are or what their significance is. Perhaps Connaught or the person who hired him to obtain the scroll can decipher them. Anyway, I really have no interest in what it might mean. I simply wish to be rid of the thing."

"I wish my father was here to see this," said Swan. "I'll bet he would have a good idea what all this means. As for me, I don't have a clue. I'm ashamed to say it, but I really don't know much about the history of my people. Katie knows a lot more about the Anishinabe culture than I do. Did I mention that she was taking Anthropology at University? She would be fascinated by this."

"Yes, you did." Jack replied. "It's too bad you didn't bring her along."

Ian mentioned that there were some more recent marks on the outside of the scroll. As he rolled it back up, he indicated the symbols and said, "I think they might be a combination of numbers and letters."

"I'd say so," she agreed. "Maybe the number of a public locker or a safety deposit box." Her suggestion suddenly made sense.

"I'll bet that's what Connaught is really after!" Ian said. "There's something of value stashed somewhere and this is the key. Hey, wait a minute, let me show you something else." He went into the den and retrieved the amulet that Elsie Jackfish had given him at Pigeon River. He took the tooth out of the pouch and showed it to Swan and Jack. "Anything look familiar?"

Jack looked at the marks on the tooth. "These look like the same kind of symbols ... runes. They certainly aren't aboriginal. Did Elsie tell you why she gave you this, or where she got it?"

"I can't remember. Beaudreau must have given it to her. When she gave it to me, she told me that it might come in useful some day. I think that maybe it and the scroll are connected somehow. What I might do, is when Connaught contacts us I'll ask him outright if it's the scroll itself he is interested in or the number. That way he can get the information he needs, and we can turn the scroll over to a museum or give it back to some representative of the Leech Lake Band. His answer should prove very interesting."

Jack was dubious. "I don't think Connaught's the type of man you want to provoke. Anyway, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Swan, here's a list of the material we found in the medicine bundle, and that leather wallet beside it contains the treaty documents we told you about."

Swan spent a few moments studying the bundle's contents. "I really don't know anything about this kind of stuff. I saw the inside of my father's *midéwayan* a few times, but that was many years ago when I was still a child. He never explained anything to me, and actually discouraged any interest that I showed in *midé* activity. The metal tube sounds strange to me. I really doubt that an old bundle would contain such a thing. Do you think maybe Jeff Stanton put it in there at the same time as the bark scroll?"

"That might be a possibility," Ian responded. "Both Jack and I thought it was out of place when we examined the bundle this morning. Perhaps we should remove it as well?" He reached for the bundle and, after a little fishing around inside, removed the tube. "You know, this looks like something laboratories might use to transport rare or dangerous material. This adds another possibility to the list of things 'they' might be after."

Jack snorted derisively. "God! You've been reading too many mystery novels, Ian. My inclination is to try to think of the simplest possible solution. Applying the principle of Occam's razor -- the simplest explanation that fits the facts -- is usually the correct one. The government wants the bundle because of the documents in the parfleche. Connaught wants the scroll for some wealthy collector. The metal tube contains some mineral used in *midé* ceremonials."

"Normally, I would go along with you," Ian said, "but I don't think all the facts are known yet. The next day or two should provide us with the rest of the pieces of the puzzle. The possibilities as I see them are that those after the bundle might include First Nations people who simply want the return of an important cultural relic, or who intend to use the bundle as a symbol to gain some advantage for reasons unknown. Those after the documents inside could include First Nations people who know of their existence and wish to use them to further their land claims; agents working for special interest groups like the mining and lumbering industries in Minnesota, who would lose a lot of money if the land was returned; agents of the government, which doesn't want to pay massive compensation to the First Nations; or someone else who simply wants to profit by gaining possession of the documents.

"So far, Connaught is the only person who has shown interest in the scroll. Either he is after it for its intrinsic value, for some important information contained in the 'map,' or for the number or whatever it is written on the outside. Finally, we come to the metal tube. What if it contains some extremely rare compound? I remember that Stanton Senior was the head of a big pharmaceutical

or chemical company. What if Stanton Junior stole it from his dad? That would explain why he was so determined to get his hands on the material 'collected' by his son. His behaviour, especially toward Jack, was a little too extreme to be simple bereavement."

"This is getting far too complicated for me," Swan said. "Over twenty years ago my father simply wanted to return the bundle to its rightful owners. I don't think he knew about anything that Jeff Stanton might have placed inside after he stole it. In a way I'm glad that the priest destroyed the other bundle. It was an evil thing. As far as who is after this midéwayan, I can only tell you that the men who came to my house were not native -- they were Feds. No Anishinabe has ever approached me about the bundle. Other than the man who originally owned it, who, by the way, has been dead for well over twenty-five years, I'm sure no one even remembers its existence. So, I think this rules out a couple of your scenarios, Ian -- at least the ones dealing with the return of a 'sacred relic,' or its use to gain some political advantage among my people. I tend to go along with the suggestion that the Feds want to get the papers so they can avoid a lengthy and expensive court battle over most of the land in Minnesota. But how could they possibly know about them? As for the scroll; who knows? Mr. Connaught is the only person who has the answer at present. We'll probably never know what the metal tube contains." She turned to Jack and said, "I'm starting to run out of steam. Can you suggest a local hotel where I can spend the night?"

For a number of reasons, Ian suggested, "I have a better idea. Why don't you stay here? I can move out of the den and crash on the couch. That way we don't have to deal with any logistical problems. Besides, there really isn't a decent hotel nearby."

Jack agreed. "I think it's a good idea for you to stay here as well. I have plenty of bedding, so setting up Ian on the couch isn't a problem. Anyway, you two sort it out, I'm going to bed. It's been another long day for an old coot like me." He paused at the doorway and added, "Help yourself to anything in the liquor cabinet. Goodnight."

"When's your return flight?" Ian asked.

"Tomorrow afternoon. I figured that this would provide time for brunch in the morning, then you could turn the bundle over to me and I'd be on my way back home again -- hopefully to a normal life. But if I'm staying here, that's even better."

"Definitely. We need to spend more time talking about what we're going to do. I have no problem turning over the bundle to the Feds, but I'm damned if they are getting their hands on those treaty documents. They should go directly to the Anishinabe people. Anyway, we can talk about that in the morning."

It was only about 8:30, so walked over to the liquor cabinet and opened the door. "Holy smokes! There's enough booze here to stock a nightclub. Jack will never drink this stuff, he has diabetes. I'm going to have a brandy, can I pour you a drink?"

"Sure, I'll try some brandy, too."

He poured the drinks and handed one to Swan. They touched glasses. "I don't know what toast to make," he said.

"How about, 'To old friends?'"

“That’ll do. To old friends.”

They sat sipping their drinks. Ian was just about to ask Swan if she had ever married when she spoke, “So, Ian, tell me all about the women in your life.”

“There’s really not much to tell. Currently, I’m living alone. In fact, I have been batching for several years now. I just don’t seem to meet many women with similar interests.”

“Oh, what interests are those?”

“Well, I still do a lot of fishing and a fair bit of hunting. Other than that, I’ve spent most of my spare time with Sarah, hiking and camping. Working six days a week tends to cut down on my free time. Besides, not a whole lot of single females come into the store, so I really don’t get much chance to meet many women. A few years back, while I was still in the magazine business, I did meet a few likely candidates and, in fact, lived briefly with a couple of them. Enough of my pitiful love life. Did you ever find Mr. Right?”

Swan laughed. “Not really. I dated a bit and even got serious for a while, but it just didn’t work out. Most of the people I met were either cops or lawyers, and neither group interested me much. Besides, like you, I preferred to spend my time with my daughter. We do a lot of the same things you and your daughter do -- camp, fish and hunt. You and Sarah should visit us. We know some great places to camp and fish.”

“That sounds like a plan -- once we get all of this medicine bundle stuff straightened out. You and Katie are welcome on the West Coast any time. We could go salmon fishing. I have a Boston Whaler geared up and ready to go at a moment’s notice.”

They continued chatting about what might be and what might have been. The time passed very quickly and Ian was surprised when he looked at his watch -- it was after midnight. By this time they were both tired, so he retrieved the bedding Jack had set out and arranged some blankets and a pillow on the sofa. Swan said goodnight, gave him a peck on the cheek and retired to the den. Ian lay there for a while trying to develop some sort of game plan, especially how he would deal with Connaught. The next thing he knew it was morning and he could hear someone fussing in the kitchen.

Chapter 11

N’babaumizeekundowauh.

I care for the woman.

—Ojibwa song.

Ian felt stiff as he sat up. Jack’s couch was not the most ergonomic piece of furniture he had ever slept on. Hearing his groans, Swan looked into the living room. “Good morning, Ian. Did you sleep well? You must have because your snoring woke me up a couple of times.” She disappeared back into the kitchen before he could reply.

As he pulled on his robe, Ian tried stretching some of the kinks out of his back and neck. God, he hated getting old. His mouth felt like the bottom of a birdcage. He must have fallen asleep on his back, which would explain the dry mouth and sore throat. He staggered into the bathroom, hoping that a hot shower and long gargle would solve some of his physical problems. By the time he emerged, Jack was up and helping Swan find things in the kitchen. With his help, she managed to assemble the ingredients for pancakes, juice and coffee. Much to their amusement, Ian went for the cold Chinese food in the fridge and washed it down with a Coke.

As they ate, the talk centred on the bundle's return. Ian felt that neither the *parfleche* containing the treaty documents nor the metal tube should be turned over to anyone until they had more information. Jack just wanted everything to be out of his hair. Swan was uncertain. She did not wish the documents to get into the wrong hands. They could be of immense importance to her people. Therefore, she agreed that the *parfleche* should not be placed back inside the *midéwayan*. As for the metal tube, she thought it was probably something that had been added by Stanton or Beaudreau, and that it should also be set aside. Jack found a small box in the closet. He suggested they stuff the *midéwayan* into it, tape the box shut, and when Swan got to the airport she should check it as baggage. He felt she should carry the treaty documents with her, then, after getting back to Minnesota, she could turn them over to the tribal council of the Red Lake Band in some kind of public way. As for the metal tube, Jack hid it inside a clay figurine on his bookcase. If asked, Swan would deny any knowledge of either the documents or the tube. She could claim that she had acted in good faith, and did as the men had asked by retrieving the bundle for them.

Swan phoned the airline to confirm her flight back to Minneapolis, which was scheduled to leave at 1:35 p.m. That didn't leave much time. Since it was a sunny and warm morning, Ian suggested taking a walk together along the river. She thought it was a great idea. Jack said he would bow out and hold the fort while they were gone.

Before leaving the lobby, Ian scanned the street -- just in case anyone appeared to be waiting for them. There were people strolling by and others walking their dogs, but no obvious bad guys. It was several blocks to the Osborne Street Bridge that crosses the Assiniboine River just south of the Legislative Buildings. Ian intended to walk along the river to the Forks, a Parks Canada historic restoration project with a very upscale food market, various specialty stores, and several restaurants. It is located where the Assiniboine flows into the Red River. However, the river was in flood and had covered the sidewalk under a metre of water. Ian said it was a good thing the Floodway diverted most of the Red River's overflow around Winnipeg; otherwise, the Forks and much of the downtown would be under several metres of water.

With the path along the river flooded, they ended up walking across the grounds of the Legislative Buildings and then along Broadway to the Forks. They wandered through the market and Swan bought a sweatshirt for Katie at a nature store. Ian bought a silver broach for Sarah at a Celtic store. After an hour or so of window-shopping, they reversed their route and arrived at Jack's apartment around 11:30. Jack had packaged up the medicine bundle in a box and taped it shut. He had

even added some string “to attach the baggage tag.” There was just enough time for Swan to pack her overnight bag and say goodbye to Jack. She gave him a hug and said, “I look forward to seeing you again, soon.”

“I wish you could have stayed longer, Swan. You and your daughter are always welcome -- any time.”

“I should be back in about an hour,” Ian said before pulling the door shut.

As they drove across the city toward the airport, they discussed how Swan should handle things back at Red Lake. Ian suggested that she call the agents, or whatever they were, as soon as she got back to her house, and tell them to pick up the bundle there. That way she would control the situation again. If they left her alone after that, then the matter would be ended as far as she was concerned.

As they turned on to Broadway, heading west, Ian happened to glance in the rear view mirror. There was a car scarcely 15 feet from the Cadillac’s rear bumper. A dark sedan with two men in it. He sped up a bit, so did the car behind. There was nothing even slightly subtle about this tail. “Swan, I think we have trouble. There’s a car right on our ass.”

Swan swivelled in the seat to look. “They look just like the two guys who came to my house in Red Lake, but it isn’t them, just their clones. Do you think maybe your cousin Jim arranged an escort to the airport?”

“I doubt it. By the sounds of it, he wasn’t included in the loop. Besides, cops would follow at a discrete distance, not kiss the bumper.”

As they turned from Broadway onto Portage Avenue, Ian decided to stick to the left curb lane. There he would have the most options; just in case the car following tried anything. The dark sedan remained tucked right in behind them. After a few blocks, the driver in front of them flicked on his left turn signal. “Shit!” Ian knew that despite having space to pull into the wide boulevard, he would block the lane. He wondered if Jack’s car still had the same oomph it used to have. In its day, the Eldorado had been one of the fastest cars around. He quickly found out. He punched the accelerator and laid a strip of rubber for 50 feet. With a car length gap to his right, he shot into the next lane. In a few seconds, he was a half block ahead of their pursuers. Anyone familiar with traffic behaviour in Winnipeg knows that constant and erratic lane changing is *de rigueur*, especially along Portage Avenue. Besides, years of evading the mindlessly aggressive drivers in Vancouver had also finely honed his driving skills. Winnipeg drivers were easy by comparison. He wove through the traffic, using all four lanes, and had soon widened the gap to well over a block. He ran several ambers and one red light, and by the time they reached Polo Park shopping centre he was certain they had lost whoever was following them. He turned off at St. James Street and headed north toward the airport.

Swan had said nothing during the rapid manoeuvring, but now exclaimed, “Holy smokes! What a ride. Where did you learn to drive like that?”

“In Vancouver. That was nothing; everybody drives like they are either brain dead or drunk. This was like an everyday commute for me.” Ian knew he was exaggerating, but not by much.

It took only about 10 minutes to reach the air terminal. “I’ll drop you off out front. Go directly to the check-in counter and confirm your ticket. Check the box as baggage, but ask for ‘special handling.’ That way it won’t come out on the

luggage carousel; you'll have to pick it up at the luggage counter. If there's anyone there waiting for you, they won't be able to get their hands on the bundle until you want them to. In the meantime, I'll park this beast and catch up with you in a few minutes."

The lot was almost full, so it was several minutes before Ian found a parking spot. As he fed the meter, a car screeched to a stop behind the Cadillac – the same one that had been following them. Ian had a brief thought of making a run for it, but the two guys who got out looked far too young and fit for him to have made it very far. They split up and soon had him braced in front of the car. He was waiting for the black jacks to start descending when one of the men growled, "Mr. Stewart?"

"Yes, what can I do for you boys?"

They both pulled out badges and identified themselves. They were RCMP undercover cops. The one who had asked his name answered, "We would like to ask you some questions about your involvement with a man by the name of Lawrence Connaught. We assume by your presence here that you are here to meet his plane."

"Well, you assume wrong. I'm here to drop off a friend. Connaught was a man that I briefly met over twenty years ago, and I certainly don't know anything about his current travel plans. By the way, why were you guys following me so close back there?"

"We thought that you might panic and abort your meeting with Connaught. We expected you to turn around and head back.' He shook his head in disbelief. "And we didn't think you could outrun us in that antique. Anyway, we would like you to accompany us back to our office to answer a few questions. For that matter, we might even arrest you for reckless driving."

"Jesus, you guys are really something. I'd *love* to explain the reason why I drove the way I did to a magistrate and see what he might say about your tailgating. That aside, I'll be glad to meet you at your office later, but first I want to say goodbye to my friend. Give me your card and I'll come by later this afternoon. There are a few questions I want answered as well." He started to walk toward the terminal when the younger of the two moved to block his path. Ian stopped and said, "Look, you can make this easy on all of us, or you can turn it into a real incident. I have done nothing wrong; you are about to detain me illegally. If you want, come into the terminal while I say goodbye. Afterward, I'll follow you back to your office without making a fuss."

The two men eyed him coldly for a moment, and then one handed Ian his card, "Okay, meet us back at RCMP headquarters at 2:30. Ask for me at the front desk. Don't do anything stupid. We'll be watching." They turned and got back into their car and pulled away.

As Ian walked back to the terminal, he saw their car take up a position near the only exit to the lot. They could watch every car leaving. They also had a view of the doors to the building. Ian went back inside. Swan rushed up to him, obviously quite concerned.

"What took you so long? I was worried sick."

"Our friends in the dark sedan caught up to me. They were cops, undercover Mounties, probably connected to CSIS. They thought I was on my way to meet

Connaught. Can you believe it? I wonder why in hell they are so interested in him? He must be arriving sometime today. Talk about coincidences. After you leave, I'm going to meet with them. There are a few questions I want answered. Did you get your seat assignment and check the bundle in?"

"Yes, I'm all set. The flight doesn't board for about twenty minutes, but if you want to get going I understand."

"There's no hurry, besides I want to spend as much time with you as I can. Who knows when we'll see each other again? Let's grab a quick drink in the lounge."

They found a seat near the window and each ordered a beer. There were many things that Ian wanted to say to Swan, but he could not find the words. She carried most of the conversation. "I want you to be very careful, Ian. The police are watching your every move now. If you go ahead with the meeting with Connaught tomorrow, you could get into a lot of trouble. Who knows what he's involved in? When you talk to the Mounties later, try to find out what's going on. Tell them about the medicine bundle and the scroll, and see what they have to say."

"I thought about just playing dumb and telling them that I was simply helping out an old friend sell off some of his collection of Native artifacts, and that Connaught, a well-known antiquities dealer, was interested in purchasing an old bark scroll. I don't think it would be wise to mention the bundle or your involvement. What they don't know can't hurt you."

"Maybe you're right. Well, it's time to board." She looked deep into his eyes. "I can't tell you how much I enjoyed our time together, Ian. You really should consider coming to Red Lake for a visit."

"I will. It's just a matter of time."

Ian walked her to the International Departure area. Just outside of the security zone, she turned and gave him a hug, then a gentle kiss that sent his thoughts reeling. As they parted, he said, "Give me a call late tomorrow evening after you deal with the Feds and turn the bundle over to them. By then I should be finished with the Mounties and Connaught. We'll compare notes." On impulse, he reached into his pocket and took out the amulet that Elsie had given him at Pigeon River. He handed it to Swan. "I have a feeling that you should have this now."

Before she could reply, he turned and walked away. It was strange, although they had spent only a total of about two days together over a span of 20 years, he felt like he had known her all of his life. Oh well, despite his assurance to her, he would probably never see her again. The thought made his gut tighten.

He stopped on the way out and gave Jack a call to fill him in on the latest development, and to say he would be late getting back. "Okay, Ian. Try to find out as much as possible from the Mounties, preferably without giving away our game plan. By the way, I have some news, too. Connaught phoned. He has just arrived in town and is eager to arrange a meeting. I told him that you would call him later."

So, he was right -- Connaught had arrived early. As he left the parking lot, Ian didn't see his new Mountie friends. Obviously, they trusted him to show up. He drove directly to RCMP headquarters on Portage Avenue. At the reception desk, Ian asked for Inspector Lewis. He was given a visitor's badge and directed to an office on the third floor. Inspector Lewis introduced his partner, Sergeant McDonald, and asked Ian to take a seat. "Did your friend get away okay?"

“Yes.” Then, hoping to gain the initiative, he asked, “What’s this all about? Why the interest in Connaught?”

The Inspector replied, “If you don’t mind, Mr. Stewart, I’ll conduct this interview. Now, what exactly is your connection to Mr. Connaught?”

Ian gave them a brief rundown on Jack Elias’s intention to divest himself of some of his Native art collection, and that he had contacted him because of his involvement in the original acquisition of the object, a birch bark scroll, which he hoped to sell to Connaught. He described the meeting with Connaught many years earlier, and said that as far as he was concerned, Connaught was simply a man who bought and sold antiquities. He added that while they were both aware of Connaught’s somewhat shady reputation, Jack was simply interested in getting a good price, not in the buyer’s character.

“Tell me about this bark scroll that Connaught is so interested in,” said the inspector.

Ian briefly described the scroll and the images engraved on the inner bark. He did not mention the symbols written on the outside. Without commenting on what Ian had just told him, the inspector surprised him with his next question. “Have you ever heard of a man by the name of Jeff Stanton?”

Ian tried not to look surprised as he answered, “Yes. Years ago, a man named Stanton contacted both Dr. Elias and me about some artifacts that he thought his son, Jeff, may have collected. Neither of us knew what he was talking about until later, when I read a diary that had been given to Dr. Elias by a fellow named Norman Beaudreau. Stanton Senior caused quite a stink when he didn’t get what he wanted. In fact, I’m pretty sure that he caused Dr. Elias to lose his faculty position at the University. Anyway, to answer your question -- yes, I have heard of Jeff Stanton, but he died accidentally in Lake of the Woods over thirty years ago. What has he got to do with Connaught?”

Without answering, Inspector Lewis continued, “Tell me about this Norman Beaudreau. What was his connection with Stanton?”

“He worked as a guide and interpreter for Jeff Stanton, who was doing research on the Ojibwa. From reading the diary, I discovered that he had been with Stanton when he died accidentally, and decided to cut and run rather than face the music for a possible manslaughter or murder charge. He hid out with a priest for a while, and then moved to Pigeon River, where he lived under the name of Albert Keeper. He contacted Dr. Elias back in the early 1970s and sold him some artifacts.”

“What sort of artifacts?”

“There was a medicine bundle or *midéwayan*, and a drum as far as I remember.”

“What is a medicine bundle?”

“It’s like a doctor’s bag. It contains various items used in Native medicine -- plants and shells -- things like that. Each one is assembled by its owner over the years.”

“Where is this bundle now? I’d like to have a look at its contents.”

“Unfortunately, that’s not possible. Dr. Elias recently returned it to a representative of the people to whom it had originally belonged.” Ian was determined not to mention Swan or the fact that she had just left town with the *midéwayan* in question.

"I suppose that you and Dr. Elias examined the contents of the bundle. Did you see anything out of place or unusual?"

These guys were definitely fishing for something. Ian decided to play dumb. "Unusual, like how?"

"Anything that didn't seem to be related to the other items." The Inspector was probably a pretty fair poker player.

"That's hard to say. Each bundle is unique, so the contents can vary widely. There were some strange things, like a small box containing a human foetus and some dried toads."

"Interesting. Let's get back to the diary you mentioned. Is it possible for me to see it?"

"No problem at all, in fact there's a photocopy that I can give to you. Now, if you don't mind, I have to be getting back to Dr. Elias's. I'll give you the number there and you can call when you want to pick up the diary." Ian stood up to leave.

Neither man made any attempt to stop him, so he wrote Jack's number on the back of his business card and handed it to the Inspector. "I don't suppose you guys will tell me what in hell is going on?"

The inspector merely smiled slightly. "Thank you for your cooperation, Mr. Stewart. I'll be in touch."

As he drove back to Jack's, Ian replayed the interview with Inspector Lewis. He hadn't learned a whole hell of a lot. They knew about Jeff Stanton, which would indicate that something he had acquired was of interest to the authorities. Because of their concern regarding Connaught and his interest in the scroll, he assume that it was the common link. On the other hand, even after he had told them about the scroll, they were still asking about something "unusual" in the bundle. They couldn't possibly know about the treaty documents, so by process of elimination the metal tube was the only answer. It must contain something pretty important, and given the interest of the governments of both the United States and Canada, something of strategic or economic value. Oh well, maybe Lawrence Connaught could shed some light on the subject. He would call him as soon as he got back to Jack's.

It was just after 3 o'clock when he arrived at Jack's apartment. He related the gist of the interview, trying to remember as much detail as possible. Jack agreed with his analysis of the situation. It had to be the metal tube they were after. "I think it's time that we turn the damned thing over to the authorities."

"I agree. When Inspector Lewis comes to get the diary copy, simply hand it over to him and say that it didn't fit with the rest of the bundle's contents. That means one less headache, and then we've got only the scroll and Connaught to deal with."

"That sounds excellent."

"I might as well get this over with," Ian said. "What number did Connaught leave, or did he want me to call him on his cell phone?"

"He said to use his cell phone number, and to use a pay phone."

Given the intense interest in Connaught shown by the authorities, they agreed that it was highly likely that Jack's phone was being monitored. Since Ian wanted to pick up a few things at the store, anyway, he said he would make the call from a pay phone there. Jack suggested that he leave through the side entrance and cut between a couple of buildings to reach the store.

Ian followed that advice, and in five minutes was at the Safeway in Osborne Village. One of the pay phones was free, so he dialled Connaught's number. As usual he answered immediately, "Connaught."

"Ian Stewart."

"Ian, good of you to call back. When can we get together?"

"As soon as possible. Both Jack and I want to get this whole thing over with. By the way, why are the Mounties so interested in you? They almost arrested me because they thought I was going to the airport to meet you?"

"Really? I have no idea. Anyway, I wouldn't worry about them. We'll get our business out of the way as quickly and discretely as possible. Now as far as a price for the scroll, I was thinking in terms of \$25,000. Does that sound reasonable?"

Ian almost had a heart attack. Twenty-five grand! He tried to compose himself. "I'll check with Jack, but I'm sure that will be okay with him. Do you have a plan for the exchange yet?"

"Yes, I think we should meet where we can make sure that we are not disturbed. Are you familiar with Assiniboine Park?"

"Yep, I grew up just across the river."

"Good. There is a pay phone at the south end of the parking lot for the Conservatory. Do you know it?"

"Yes."

"I assume that you have access to a vehicle?"

"Yes."

"Good. Tomorrow morning, place the object in a small green knapsack or something similar, and then drive to the Park. Use the Roblin Boulevard entrance and drive toward the Pavilion. Park in the parking lot at the extreme north of the Conservatory. It is a short walk to the pay phone. Be at the phone at 10:30 precisely. Carry the packsack with you. Do you have any questions?"

"No. I've written it all down and I'll be there."

"Goodbye, then."

Ian knew why Connaught had selected Assiniboine Park. There were several entrances, miles of winding roads, a maze of footpaths, and many vantage points from which to watch for unwanted intruders. He knew that park like the back of his hand, so was quite comfortable with the planned rendezvous.

Ian bought a few groceries, then walked down the block to a little outdoor store where he purchased a small green nylon packsack. All the while he tried to detect whether there was anyone obviously watching him. There didn't appear to be anyone on his tail, but he felt sure that he was under surveillance. Oh well, it would all be over soon.

Back at Jack's, he relayed the result of their conversation. Jack was surprised by the amount of money Connaught was willing to pay. "No scroll would be worth even twenty per cent of that amount, even to the most avid collector. There is definitely something else that Connaught wants. It has to be the number, or whatever it is written on the outside. Anyway, as I said before, I don't need the money. Spend it in good health."

Ian certainly did not have a problem with his proposal. That kind of money would cover the amount he still owed on the store, with maybe enough left over to

pay for an exotic hunting trip in the fall. Maybe even a trip to Minnesota to visit Swan....

He had purchased two pounds of fresh walleye fillets at Safeway and told Jack that he was going to pan-fry them for dinner. He was quite enthusiastic about the prospect, having not tasted walleye for years. Ian was extremely careful as he breaded and fried the fish, because he had paid a king's ransom for such a small package. Walleye must be getting fairly scarce if they were able to charge over \$10 a pound for it. Oh well, 25 grand would buy a lot of fish.

To go along with the walleye, he fried potatoes and made a tossed green salad. They both enjoyed the meal, in fact Jack jokingly offered to hire him as a full-time cook. Later, while Ian was loading the dishwasher, the phone rang. Jack answered, and then waved him over. It was Inspector Lewis. He wondered if it would be convenient to swing by and pick up the copy of the diary. Ian conferred quickly with Jack, who said he had no problem. The Inspector said he would be there within 30 minutes.

Jack was interested in asking a few questions of his own. While they waited, Ian decided to make a few phone calls and touch base with some relatives. There was the expected litany of deaths and illnesses, which bummed him out within minutes, but he felt better for having made the attempt. When he mentioned this to Jack, he responded, "Well, at least you still have some relatives above ground."

He was right, of course, for even though almost all of his parents' siblings were dead, Ian still had plenty of cousins kicking around in town.

About 7:30, Jack's buzzer sounded. It was Inspector Lewis and Sergeant McDonald. Ian let them in the building, and when the elevator arrived he made the introductions. Jack invited them to sit down and asked if they would like a cup of coffee. They were obviously interested in scanning the place, so accepted his offer.

While Ian got the coffee going in the kitchen, Jack wasted no time. "What are you fellows after? Why all this interest in Connaught? What has that rascal been up to now?"

Inspector Lewis maintained his cool. "You obviously have dealt with Connaught in the past. What can you tell me about his activities?"

Jack snorted. "Deal with that bastard - not very bloody likely! He refers to himself as an antiquity dealer, but I believe a more apt description would be art thief. He has created an international market in looted and stolen artifacts. Until a few days ago I wouldn't even speak to the man."

"Why the change of heart now?" asked the inspector.

"As you can see, I am not long for this world. I decided that my old colleague here, Ian, should benefit from the sale of the scroll, and that the buyer no longer really matters to me. Connaught is, in fact, the only one who has expressed an interest in it."

Inspector Lewis had obviously spotted the roll of birch bark on the table. Just as Ian entered the room with the coffee and cups, he asked, "Is that the scroll that Connaught is so interested in?" He pointed to it.

"Yes, would you like to see it?" Ian asked.

"If it isn't too much trouble, I would, thank you."

Ian untied the babiche cord and, with Jack's help, they unrolled it. The Inspector and his partner studied it intently. "Can you tell me what these marks signify, Dr. Elias?"

Jack explained that he believed the scroll depicted a phase of the Anishinabe "migration" story, and that most of the document was a map of the area around Leech Lake in Minnesota. The various symbols showed locations of importance to tribal shamans. After a few moments, the Inspector asked, "Is it possible that there is a message in the symbols that Connaught might be trying to decipher?"

"We considered that," Jack replied. "I guess it's possible -- but highly unlikely. The Anishinabe used such scrolls as mnemonic devices to help them remember things like songs, rituals and herbal recipes. It would be unlikely that Connaught would be able to conjure up those memories. No, I'd say that he's probably in the employ of some wealthy collector who wants to add this scroll to his art collection. But I'm curious -- why is the RCMP interested in such an insignificant thing?"

Given his earlier reticence to reveal any information, what the inspector said next surprised Ian, "This is not to leave this room, but there is far more to this situation than some scratching on a piece of old birch bark. Connaught buys and sells things far more valuable than stolen art. Let's just say that a more accurate description of him would be 'international villain.' He is a man who can obtain anything, for anybody, for a price. That includes some very important military and industrial secrets. He has used his antiquities dealer cover for decades now, which has allowed him to travel around the world freely. He has been charged on various occasions -- not many, really -- but has never been successfully prosecuted. Every police force in the world goes on alert whenever he shows up. Naturally, our attention was aroused when he filed a flight plan for Winnipeg. Then our American colleagues in the intelligence community gave us a transcript of a phone conversation that Mr. Stewart had placed to him. We did a background check on both of you and couldn't find anything out of place, other than a reference to an earlier meeting back in the late 1970s." He glanced at Ian and said, "Which reminds me, Mr. Stewart, did you realize that you have retained a very high level security clearance. Just what did you do when you served in the military?"

"I just filled in reports and attended seminars. Anyway, that's ancient history. Let's get back to Connaught. Now that you have seen the scroll, I trust you have no objection to my meeting with Connaught and completing the transaction? I hope not, because I have arranged a rendezvous of sorts for tomorrow morning." He quickly outlined his conversation with Connaught, and told them that he was supposed to be at the phone booth in the Park at 10:30. Inspector Lewis had no objection -- just as long as Ian was aware that he would be under constant surveillance.

At this point Jack interrupted and asked if he and Ian could be excused for a few minutes. Once out of earshot, he whispered, "I think you should point out the symbols on the outside of the scroll. I'm going to give them the metal tube -- so don't say a thing. I'm going to tell them that I removed it from the medicine bundle some time ago, and that you knew nothing about it. Okay?"

Ian nodded. "Got you."

They rejoined the two Mounties. Ian spoke first, "Gentlemen, my friend reminded me of something that had slipped my mind. I think I should point out

something that may or may not be important.” He picked up the scroll and showed them the markings on the outer bark. “These are definitely not aboriginal in nature, and are likely fairly recent in the great scheme of things. Jack and I think they might be a number, perhaps a locker number or a safety deposit box number. Given that the scroll has little intrinsic value outside of academic circles, we think it is likely that this is what Connaught is after.” Ian showed them his “translation,” and the inspector made a careful copy of the original symbols in his notebook.

“We also have an excellent photocopy of the drawing on the inner side of the scroll. Which reminds me, here’s that copy of the Laviolette journal I told you about.” Ian handed it over along with a photocopy of the scroll.

It was Jack’s turn. “Ian had no knowledge of this, but some time ago I examined the contents of the medicine bag that I bought from Mr. Beaudreau. One of the items inside was definitely out of place. I removed it, and had forgotten all about it until Ian informed me that you asked him if there was anything ‘unusual’ in the bundle. Well, this item definitely qualifies as ‘unusual.’” Jack strode over to his bookcase and retrieved the metal tube from the figurine in which he had hidden it. He walked back to the table and handed it to the inspector. It was as if he had handed him a live snake. Lewis recoiled, visibly in fear. He quickly put the tube down on the table and both he and his partner stood up and backed slowly away a few paces.

“Call Hazmat,” Inspector Lewis said to Sergeant McDonald, “and tell them we have a code orange package. Give them this address and tell them that you’ll meet them at the entrance of the parking garage in twenty minutes.”

Ian knew that the sergeant would be calling the Hazardous Material Team, which was trained to handle chemicals and biologically hazardous materials. Great! Just what in hell had Jack and he been exposed to?

While the sergeant made the call on his cell phone, Inspector Lewis asked Jack if he had tried to open the tube. “Of course not. I may be senile, but I’m not stupid! You’re not telling us that this stuff is radioactive are you?”

“No. If this is what I think it is, it isn’t radioactive, but it might be extremely dangerous. You say that there was only one tube -- are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m certain there was only one tube in the bundle, but as I recall, Ian read the priest’s journal and learned that Jeff Stanton had obtained two bundles. One of them was destroyed by an over-zealous priest at a lake somewhere northeast of Pigeon River on Lake Winnipeg. Perhaps if there were more tubes, they were in the other bundle.”

“Yes, that’s true,” Ian said. “Norman Beaudreau took both bundles with him when he joined Father Laviolette on Fishing Lake. The priest burned one of the bundles, after which Beaudreau fled to Pigeon River where he lived for many years as Albert Keeper. He died back in the early seventies.”

Inspector Lewis questioned Ian very closely about the exact location of Fishing Lake, and the Ojibwa camp where the priest had tried to establish his mission. Ian told him that he could only go on what was in the journal, and that he did not know the camp’s exact location. He mentioned, however, that the priest had died mysteriously, and the RCMP had investigated his death. Perhaps they still had the report pinpointing the location.

Sergeant McDonald, who had borrowed Jack's keys so he could open the garage doors for the Hazmat Team, excused himself to meet them in the parking garage.

"Is Connaught after this tube?" Ian asked. "What in hell's in it? And how in the name of sweet Jesus did Jeff Stanton get his hands on it?"

Lewis took a moment to answer. "Again, I must caution both of you, nothing of this can ever be repeated. Yes, this is certainly related to what he's after. I can only surmise that Jeff Stanton hid the rest of it somewhere, and that the scroll is the key. I don't know what the material is specifically, but I have been told that it is potentially dangerous. The American government is *extremely* anxious to get it back, whatever it is."

As they drank their coffee, Lewis asked Jack about some of the pieces in his collection. Just then, Sergeant McDonald arrived with two men wearing white coveralls and heavy gloves, and carrying a container that looked similar to a picnic cooler, except it was constructed from what appeared to be stainless steel. One of the Hazmat crewmembers picked up the tube and placed it carefully in the "cooler." Then they picked up the cooler and left, carrying it between them, without saying a word. The scene had been almost surreal. Jack had a smirk on his face, and Ian heard him mutter something about "horses and barn doors."

Inspector Lewis and his partner prepared to leave a few minutes later. There was plenty that Ian wanted to ask them, but he had a suspicion that they didn't really know much more than he did. As he left, the Inspector advised Ian to be careful.

Screw you, thought Ian, for that much money I'd snort whatever was in that tube through a straw. Well -- maybe not....

Jack looked tired, so he said his goodnight and went to bed. Ian sat up watching TV and sipping scotch. There was a bottle of 16-year-old Lagavulin in Jack's stash, and it seemed blasphemous to let one of the greatest single malts ever distilled go to waste. He dozed off while watching the news.

Chapter 12

*„Gaa wiin daa-aangoshkigaazo ahaw enaabiyaan gaa-inaabid.”
You cannot destroy one who has dreamed a dream like mine.*

Dreams. For years Ian wondered if he even had them. He could never seem to remember any. Now they plagued him. He awoke to the hiss of white noise from the television. Straining to read his wristwatch, he discovered that it was shortly after 4 a.m., and he had just experienced another very disturbing "flying dream." It had started the same way as the last one -- in the shaking tent at Mikinak Lake with Daniel. As in the previous dream, Ian had soared over miles of forest, lake and river. On this flight, however, the terrain was unfamiliar. After some time he started descending toward a large metropolitan area that he did not recognize.

What appeared to be a motel complex began filling the frame. As before, he passed right through the roof of one of the units. Next, he was hovering above a

young man sitting at a table, working on something spread out in front of him. It looked like a birch bark scroll. Then he could see it more clearly -- it was the very scroll now resting on Jack's coffee table. What he was viewing had happened many years in the past, and he was certain that the person he was observing was Jeff Stanton. What in hell was he doing?

As Ian watched, he used a sharp knife to separate the layers of bark. After a few minutes, he had opened a slit several inches wide. He reached into an envelope sitting on the table and took out what appeared to be a flat piece of black plastic. Ian knew exactly what it was -- photographic film. He slid the small rectangle into the opening in the bark. Afterward, he carefully glued the slit shut and rolled the scroll back up. Suddenly, the flight resumed. Ian shot back up through the roof of the motel room and flashed over the landscape. In moments, he was back in the shaking tent, alone. Then he woke up.

No wonder Connaught was so willing to cough up so much money for the scroll. Besides stealing the metal tube or tubes, Stanton junior must have removed some related documents that had been stored on microfiche. Was it plans for some device or a chemical formula? Perhaps Jeff Stanton and Connaught had been working together? Or, on the other hand, Stanton Senior might have hired Connaught to recover the material after his son stole it. Whichever, Connaught obviously knew about the film, and the authorities obviously knew as well. They were watching Connaught closely, and were well aware of Jeff Stanton's activities prior to his death. Ian wondered why Inspector Lewis had agreed to his handing the scroll over to Connaught. One could only assume that they wanted to catch him red-handed with the film in his possession. Or maybe they hadn't twigged to the scroll's real significance?

Trying to get any further sleep was out of the question. The scroll was sitting on Jack's coffee table. Ian had to confirm that his dream had, indeed, revealed a truth. After unrolling it, he examined the edge. There was a minute trace of glue that he had not noticed before. Running his finger over the inner surface of the bark, he could feel a very slight difference in thickness. By God, there was something hidden between the layers of bark! Ian could hear Jack stirring, and after a few moments he came into the room. "I heard you rustling around out here. What are you up to?"

Ian told Jack of his latest "flight," and the vision of Stanton junior hiding the microfiche in the scroll. He showed Jack the place where the slit had been glued, then told him to feel the slight change in thickness.

"My God!" Jack exclaimed. "I thought we were near the end of all this. How can we, in all conscience, hand the scroll over to Connaught now?"

"Well, I suppose we have some options. First, I could call Inspector Lewis and tell him about the piece of film. It's possible that he already knows about it and wants to catch Connaught red-handed. Even if he doesn't know about it, I'll bet he has plans to nab Connaught. I could tell him about the film then. Option two is that I contact Connaught and tell him we have changed our plans and the scroll is no longer for sale. If he is half as dangerous as Inspector Lewis seems to think he is, that might bring on some unhealthy consequences for both of us. Or, he might offer even more money, concluding that we are simply trying to squeeze him. Option three is that I slit open the scroll and remove the film, glue the layers back

together, and then proceed with the exchange. That might have the same result as option two. What do you think?"

"I think I should go back to bed. Obviously, I'm having a bad dream. Would you mind making some coffee? I can't get my brain working."

Jack sat handling the scroll while Ian ground some coffee and placed it in the coffee machine. This promised to be a very long morning, so he made a large pot. After Jack had sipped his coffee for a few minutes, he opined, "There are other options, of course. We could destroy the scroll. We could hand it over to the Mounties, or you can go ahead with the exchange without doing anything. I favour the latter plan. That way this whole thing becomes someone else's problem."

"I'll go along with whatever you decide, Jack. I have to tell you, though, I'm extremely curious. If there is a piece of film hidden in the scroll, what harm would there be in having a look at it?"

"None, I suppose. I'm interested as well. You'll have to be very careful, though, to make sure your tampering goes undetected. There's an X-acto knife in my desk, as well as some rubber cement."

Ian retrieved the knife and glue while Jack unrolled the scroll. He held it down as Ian reopened the slit and removed the film with tweezers. Holding it up to the light, it looked like a schematic for some kind of electronic device. The diagram was extremely detailed, and a lot of magnification would be required to make out any detail. Jack looked as well, but could not make anything of it, either.

"It's too bad we don't have some way of making a copy of this," Ian said. "I'd like to see a blow-up on regular paper."

"Perhaps we do," Jack replied. "You probably didn't notice when you were down at my locker, but there's a box full of photographic equipment, including cameras, lenses, a Nikon enlarger, photographic paper, and all of the necessary chemicals. We could shoot a positive enlargement on nine-by-twelve-inch photographic paper."

The sun had not even come up yet, so Ian had plenty of time to retrieve Jack's photographic equipment from the basement. After the inevitable sneezing fit had subsided, he set up the enlarger in the bathroom. He was a bit rusty at preparing the chemicals and adjusting the equipment, but with Jack's help he got everything set up. First, he replaced the bathroom light bulb with a red bulb. Jack showed him how to load the film into the carrier, and after a couple of dry runs he was ready to proceed.

It was not difficult to focus the image on the photographic paper. At Jack's suggestion, Ian tried a range of exposures to make sure that they got at least one good copy. Jack gave him directions about the rest of the process, and about 30 minutes later he emerged from the bathroom. The prints were hanging to dry over the bathtub. Ian decided that espionage at the crack of dawn was kind of fun.

While they waited for the prints to dry, Ian boxed up the equipment and returned it to the locker. By the time he got back up to the apartment, Jack had prepared some soft-boiled eggs and toast for breakfast. It was just after 8 a.m.

When they finished eating, Ian went to the bathroom and retrieved the prints. Several were underexposed, one was blurry, but three were very clear. The diagram, or whatever it was, was amazingly complex. In one corner, there were dozens of columns of very long numbers. "This must be the plan for some device

that makes use of the chemical in the metal tube,” Ian said. “I wonder what it can possibly be?”

Jack simply shook his head. “Whatever, one might think it could be obsolete by now, given that these plans are at least thirty years old.”

“Yeah. Either this is something far ahead of its time, or it’s something that might be dangerous at any time in the wrong hands. Lots of people are still keen to get this, so it must still have relevance today.”

Jack nodded in agreement. “Yes, whatever this is, it must still have some application. That doesn’t surprise me. Things like the internal combustion engine and jet propulsion have not changed fundamentally in the last fifty years.”

“That’s true, the biggest development since the sixties has been in computers and electronics. Whatever this is was created at the height of the Cold War, long before the silicon chip. I wonder if it had some military application?”

“Quite probably, given the amount of interest shown by the two governments. Anyway, I think you should put the film back inside the scroll and glue it shut. That will give the glue at least an hour to set before your meeting with Connaught. If push comes to shove, we can turn these photos over to the authorities.”

Ian had just enough time to shower and shave before he had to leave for the meeting in Assiniboine Park. He placed the scroll in the small packsack as Connaught had directed. “Well, I guess once this scroll is out your door, your involvement with all of this is over, Jack. You must be relieved.”

“In a way I am, but you know, I haven’t felt so alive for years. Anyway, my boy, you’d better get going -- be careful.”

It was a beautiful, sunny, spring morning, and the drive to the park was uneventful. Ian wondered if the Mounties were following him. They had no reason to as he had told them the itinerary. Pulling into the parking lot of the Conservatory as directed, Ian noted he was 11 minutes early. Sitting in the car before walking over to the phone booth at the south end of the lot, he noticed that there seemed to be an inordinate number of workmen for a Sunday morning. Men were mowing the lawn, trimming the bushes, planting flowers, sweeping... He was certain that they were all cops, because he knew Winnipeg City workers were unionised. They were strictly Monday to Friday, 9 to 5. Besides, he decided cynically, they were working far too hard to be city employees. Connaught would spot them instantly.

Two minutes before the expected call, Ian walked over to the phone booth. At precisely 10:30 the phone rang. He picked it up immediately. It was Connaught. “Good morning Ian, how are you today?”

“Just great, Mr. Connaught, how about you?”

“Very well, thank you. As you are probably aware, you are under police surveillance, and I have little doubt that this conversation is being monitored. Did you bring the item we discussed?” Ian confirmed that he had. “Good, here is what I want you to do. After I hang up, walk directly to the Pavilion. Go to the west side and walk toward the playground area. Proceed to the large picnic shelter at the west end. Do you know it?”

“Yes.”

“There is a marked trail leading to the zoo. Follow it. That’s it. Is everything clear?”

“Perfectly clear.” The line went dead.

He left the booth and headed west, passing the swings in the playground and the picnic shelter. The trail leading to the zoo went through a thickly wooded area. After walking about 100 metres, he reached a fork in the trail. Suddenly, someone on a mountain bike approached from the trail to the left at a good clip. The rider wore a helmet and sunglasses. He skidded to stop beside Ian. Without a word, he handed him a green packsack and indicated that Ian should give him the one he was carrying. He put it on and sped away down a side trail.

Ian looked around. There wasn't anyone else in sight. He knew that there was a maze of trails in this area of the park. In minutes, the rider would be gone and almost impossible to find, even with an army of cops. Oh well, that was quick. Ian looked in the bag and was relieved to see two thick packages of American \$100 bills. Just to be on the safe side, he removed the packages and stuffed one in each side pocket of his jacket. Then he simply retraced his route back to the car. By the time he got there, he noticed that all of the “workmen” had vanished. There was a car parked next to the Cadillac. Inspector Lewis and Sergeant McDonald got out as he approached.

“Well, did you make the exchange?” asked the inspector.

There was no reason for Ian to lie. “Yes, just down the trail. A guy riding a mountain bike took my pack and gave me his. He zoomed off toward the river. Are your men following him?”

“That's not necessary. We have Mr. Connaught's plane. He isn't going anywhere until we say so. Well, I guess your involvement in all this is at an end. Thank you for your cooperation.” The inspector and his partner got into their car and left.

Ian had been tempted to tell them about the film hidden in the scroll, but decided that he would mail Inspector Lewis one of the prints - anonymously, of course. That would insure that the plans would at least end up in the hands of the authorities, and there would be no way to connect either Jack or himself to them. Back at Jack's he told him what had transpired, and that he intended to mail one of the prints to the Mounties. Jack agreed with the plan, then said, “Thank God, it's finally all over. The scroll, the medicine bag, treaty documents and everything else are gone. Good riddance! Thank you for all your help, Ian, I'm sorry to have imposed on your time like this, but I couldn't think of anyone else to turn to. Now you can head back to the Coast and resume your life.”

“You're more than welcome, Jack. I was well compensated for my time. You know ... it was kind of fun, but you're right, it's time I headed home to Vancouver. This is a very busy time of year at the store. I'll call Air Canada and book a return flight for tomorrow.”

There was nothing available in economy for Monday afternoon, so he asked for an upgrade to Business Class, thereby using up most of his accumulated Aero Points. After confirming the time, he suggested that they go out for lunch -- his treat. Jack laughed as he accepted. “Lunch on Lawrence Connaught. That appeals to me. Let's go someplace pricey.”

“Rae and Jerry's Restaurant has a pretty good Sunday luncheon menu as I remember. What do you think?”

“That's fine with me. To hell with my diet. I haven't enjoyed a hedonistic lunch in years. At my age, what difference will it make?”

It took about 20 minutes to drive across the bridge and down Portage Avenue to the restaurant. Ian was sure the waiter thought they must have just won the lottery. They drank a very expensive bottle of wine, and dined on two of the most exorbitant items on the luncheon menu. It was a great lunch, but just as they were enjoying their coffees, Ian heard a familiar voice behind him.

"Ian -- Dr. Elias, do you mind if I join you?" They both sat speechless as Lawrence Connaught pulled out a chair and sat down. How in hell did he find them?

"I see that you are putting my money to good use." He smiled.

"Mr. Connaught, this is a surprise," Ian said. "We thought you would be on your way back to the States by now. How did you know we would be here?" He was still not quite over the shock of seeing him sitting at the table. He seemed to have aged very little since the last time they had met. His skin was well tanned and his hair had turned silver, but he was as dapper as ever, sporting a beautifully cut silk suit.

"Simple, I had you followed. Or more accurately, I had the people following you followed. Your Mountie friends are still very interested in your movements. Your phone is no doubt monitored as well. There are even probably bugs in your apartment and car, Jack. By the way, it's very good to see you again after all these years. You are looking well."

Jack looked very upset and refused Connaught's outstretched hand as he answered, "Well, it's not good to see you, Connaught. I wish that you would take your booty and leave us alone. The only reason the Mounties are interested in us is because of you and your shady dealings. You have just spoiled one of my most enjoyable outings in many years."

Connaught withdrew his hand with a slight smile. "I'm genuinely sorry that you feel that way, Jack. Believe me, my last intention was to spoil your meal. Unfortunately, I still need your help. It seems that we still have some unresolved business. By the way, Ian, an old friend of yours, Rex Gregory, says hello."

Unresolved business! He must have discovered that they had tampered with the scroll. Rex Gregory was another whammy. How could Connaught possibly know about their connection? Ian put on his best poker face as he replied. "Rex who? I'm sorry but I don't know anyone by that name. As for any unresolved business -- I don't think so. What you want from us?"

Throughout this exchange, Jack remained silent, but Ian knew he was bursting with questions. Before he could speak, Connaught replied, "Come, come, Ian, surely you didn't think that I wouldn't notice the fresh glue on the scroll. What did you do? I hope that you didn't by any chance tell your friends in CSIS about the film? I am inclined to think that you did, especially in light of the fact that they have detained my aircraft. Well?"

"I admit that I opened the edge of the scroll to have a look. I knew that there had to be something more to your interest in the thing than a little-known Ojibwa legend. I simply had a look at the piece of film and replaced it. It meant nothing to me. As for the cops, they have their own agenda. Besides how can a piece of technology that is over thirty years old still have any relevance? You have the film, what more could you want?"

“Obviously I want to deliver the material to my client. But I have a problem, in fact, a number of problems -- only one that you can help me with. There is a missing component. I’m sure that both of you noticed the group of symbols on the outside of the scroll. They are in fact, ‘part’ of a cryptographic key -- I stress the word part. There are some symbols missing. I don’t have to tell you how difficult it would be to generate the rest of the key when I don’t know how many other symbols there are, let alone what they might be -- even with the aid of a super computer. I believe that you have the information I need, Ian. May I see the amulet that you obtained from Elsie Jackfish?”

“Sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Connaught, but I no longer have the amulet.”

A look of anger flickered across Connaught’s face. Ian continued, “But before it left my hands, I made a copy of the symbols that were engraved on it. They are undoubtedly what you are looking for. Our original deal was for the scroll, this is something entirely different. What do you propose?”

Connaught smiled, “Now we are getting somewhere. How does another twenty-five thousand dollars sound?”

Another twenty-five grand sounded pretty good. Connaught obviously wanted the information very badly. He could probably squeeze him for a lot more, but replied, “You’ve got yourself a deal. I can write down the symbols for you right now if you wish.”

“That would be more than satisfactory. I can give you a cheque now or have the cash delivered to you later. I can assure you that the cheque is good. To whom should I make it out?” He glanced at each of them in turn.

Jack simply pointed to Ian. Connaught reached for his chequebook, filled one out and handed it to Ian. In the meantime, Ian had drawn the symbols on a napkin. He pushed it toward Connaught. He glanced at it, carefully folded the napkin and placed it in an inside pocket of his suit jacket. He stood, “Well, then, this concludes our business. It was a pleasure seeing both of you again.” With that, he turned and quickly left the restaurant.

Jack had said nothing during the entire exchange. He shook his head in disbelief and said, “I can’t believe that bastard followed us here. How did he know about the amulet? What happened to it? You had it just yesterday.”

“I gave it to Swan as a ... keepsake.”

Jack nodded. “So, what about this Rex Gregory he mentioned? I saw the look on your face when you heard the name.”

Ian owed Jack an explanation. “Back in the late sixties I considered a career in the military. For various reasons, I ended up in Viet Nam doing equipment assessments for a company with Canadian government contracts. I didn’t know it at the time, but the firm I was working for had ties to the American CIA.” He snorted derisively. “Who didn’t in those days? Anyway, I was wounded and shipped home. I enrolled in university and thought that I was out of it. As it turned out, I still remained on ‘active status,’ and was called upon from time to time by intelligence people whom I at first naively assumed were working for the Canadian government. I eventually discovered that it was the CIA who ultimately pulled the strings, and that I was simply regarded as a ‘foreign asset.’ The contacts were infrequent, the money very good, and the things I was asked to do seemed innocent enough.

“Rex Gregory was someone I came into contact with, the first time in Costa Rica. He worked for Transworld Airlines, which was simply a CIA front company. Both the States and Soviet Union maintained large ‘listening posts’ in Costa Rica. It was like the Switzerland of the Americas, and treated by all of the major powers as neutral territory. The super powers monitored everything that happened in Central America from the capital, San José.” He paused and shook his head slowly at the memory. “It was all so bloody obvious, you know, because the Soviet and American embassies were just bristling with communications antennae -- like quills on a porcupine. My cover for being there was that I was an outdoor journalist on a big game fishing trip arranged by the Costa Rican tourism people to promote their angling opportunities.

“As we fished for sailfish and wahoo off the west coast, and for snook and tarpon on the east side, I came to realize that Rex was a CIA ‘spook.’ As I got to know him better, I learned that he had been a combat pilot in Viet Nam. Besides speaking fluent Spanish, his Russian was also excellent. Oddly enough, he was an expert saltwater fisherman as well. He turned out to be my ‘control.’ Some of the other ‘journalists’ on that junket were Cubans. They had originally represented themselves as Cuban exiles who were earning a living as photographers and journalists in Miami, but they were actually ‘patriots’ who were actively involved in trying to overthrow Castro. Costa Rica was a convenient middle ground where meetings could be held in relative obscurity. As a Canadian journalist, I could travel anywhere in the region, even to Cuba with ease, despite the American embargo. To make a long story short, I made a number of ‘fishing trips’ to Latin American countries, including Cuba. In later years, my travels took me to many other places -- Europe, Africa, the former Soviet Union. My cover as either an academic or an outdoor journalist always held up. With the end of the Cold War, it seems that my services were no longer required. I haven’t been contacted by anyone in the intelligence community for years. I must be still on the books, though, if my security clearance is still valid, as Inspector Lewis indicated. The very fact that Connaught knows of Rex Gregory means that he is either very well-informed, or is still in the game.”

Jack sat and digested this information along with his lunch. After a few minutes, he announced, “Well, that certainly clears things up. I wondered why you seemed so comfortable dealing with all of this. You are -- or were -- one of them. Does Swan know about any of this?”

“Just that I was in Viet Nam.” He then told Jack about the revelations following the shaking tent episode with Daniel.

Jack sat in thought for a few moments, then said, “Yes, I vaguely recall you telling me about the shaking tent, and how much I envied you the experience.” He glanced at his watch. “Well, my boy, I guess we should be getting back. I’m feeling a little tired.” Jack seemed to have trouble standing up, and then he staggered, slightly off balance. Ian grasped his arm and steadied him. “Are you all right.”

“I feel a bit woozy. Overindulgence, I fear.”

Ian continued supporting him as they walked slowly to the car, and as they drove back to the apartment, Jack seemed to drift off, his head lolling against the window. Alarmed, Ian nudged him on the arm and asked if he was all right. When he didn’t respond, Ian pulled over to the side of the road. At least he was still

breathing. After a minute or so his eyes fluttered, then opened. "What happened -- where are we?"

"I pulled over when you dozed off, and I couldn't wake you up. Has this happened before?"

"I suppose all the excitement and rich food was too much for me. Don't worry -- I nod off all the time."

Slightly reassured, Ian continued back to the apartment. Jack seemed to rally a bit and was able to walk to the elevator without assistance. Once in the apartment, he said he felt fine, and was going to watch some late Saturday afternoon golf on television.

"Okay. I'm going out for a walk, Jack. I need to work off that wine buzz from lunch. I'll give Swan a call when I get back. Are you sure you're okay?"

"I'm fine, believe me." He chuckled and flipped his hand toward the door. "Now bugger off and let an old man watch his golf in peace and quiet."

Ian's walk took him west along Wellington Crescent. The area had not changed much in the 20 years since he had moved to the West Coast. Some of Winnipeg's largest and most expensive homes are located on either side of the wide boulevard. The number of houses with For Sale signs in their yards surprised Ian. Then again, he thought, the property taxes must be horrendous. He turned south on Cambridge Street and walked up to Corydon Avenue, which had become a trendy shopping area. There seemed to be an incredible number of new restaurants. At Osborne Street, he turned north and returned to Jack's apartment. He noted by his watch that he had been gone for just over an hour.

Jack was sound asleep in his recliner chair when Ian entered. He decided to let him snooze and went into the den to call Swan. He dialled her number and was relieved when she answered on the second ring. "Swan, it's Ian. How did it go after you got back?"

"Ian, I just called and no one answered."

"I just got back from a walk, but Jack's here. He was watching a golf tournament, but he dozed off. He tends to ignore the phone when it rings, anyway."

"Well," Swan continued, "when I got home I called the agent who originally contacted me and told him I had the bundle, and that he should come by and pick it up. He and his partner were here within an hour and took the box away without even examining the bundle inside. I haven't heard anything since. They must have inspected the contents by now. I just about fainted when the phone rang -- I thought it had to be the Feds. So tell me, what's been going on there."

Ian told her about his latest dream and the discovery of the film hidden in the scroll. He did not tell her about making any enlargements. Next, he gave her details about the rendezvous in the park and the exchange -- money for the scroll. He also related their strange meeting with Connaught at the restaurant. Although he suspected that the entire conversation was being monitored, he was not worried. None of them had done anything wrong; besides, if someone was listening in, it was a good way to impart some information he wanted them to have. Finally, he told Swan that he would be leaving for Vancouver the next day. "I really hope to see you again -- there are a few things about the future that I think we should discuss. I'll give you a call when I reach home."

"I think so too, Ian -- I really do. I'll look forward to hearing from you."

After hanging up, he went back to the living room. Jack was still in exactly the same position, the remote clutched to his chest. Something about his appearance bothered Ian. He went over to take a closer look. Jack was very pale and his eyes were slightly open. "Jack?" he asked loudly. There was no reaction. Ian felt a sudden dread and put his fingers on the side of Jack's neck. No pulse -- Jack Elias was as dead as a post. His skin felt cool to the touch so he must have died shortly after lying down. At least he went peacefully. There was nothing else to do, so Ian called 911 and asked for the Ambulance Service.

Eighteen minutes later, two paramedics showed up at the door. After a brief examination, they decided that any attempt at resuscitation was pointless. Following some standard questions, they placed Jack's body on the gurney and told Ian they were taking it to the Health Sciences Centre, the new name for what Ian remembered as Winnipeg General Hospital. Given Jack's age and condition, a post mortem was highly unlikely, but they had to take him there to be pronounced dead by a physician. Ian told them that he would go down later to help with the paperwork.

After they left, he sat down and tried to put Jack's death into perspective. In reality, he had barely known the man, so could not say that he felt any real grief. In fact, he envied him somewhat. He had lived to a ripe old age, and died peacefully while watching golf on television. He wondered if Jack still had any living relatives whom he could contact. He must have left a will, but Ian had no idea where it might be. Surely it wouldn't do any harm to poke around his apartment and see what he could find -- better him than some stranger. A thought struck him -- he would call his cousin Jim and find out what the proper procedure would be in this case. He called his home number and talked to his wife briefly. Jim was at a Little League game with their son, but would be home soon for supper. She would have him call.

While he awaited Jim's call, Ian began looking for Jack's personal papers. He started in the obvious place, the filing cabinet in the den. Not surprisingly, most of the material dealt with anthropology, but in the bottom drawer he found what he was looking for. Jack had been meticulous to the end -- there was a thick file titled: Personal Papers. Ian removed it and took it to the living room. Just as he was about to start examining it, the phone rang. It was Jim.

Ian quickly explained about Jack's sudden demise and asked what the protocol was. Jim said he was just sitting down for dinner, but would come over later.

Ian went back to examining the file. There was an envelope marked *Last Will and Testament*. A local law firm had drawn it up, and it named one of the firm's lawyers as executor of Jack's estate. That was good -- at least he could turn things over to the lawyers knowing the disposition of Jack's property would be properly handled. There would be ample time on Monday morning to contact the law firm and turn over the documents. Then he would climb aboard the plane to Vancouver, fifty thousand bucks ahead and clear of conscience.

When his cousin arrived, Ian related the circumstances of Jack's death. He also told him about the meeting with the Mounties, the exchange in the park, and the encounter with Connaught in the restaurant. He also informed him that he was leaving for home the next day.

"I don't see any problems with that," Jim said. "In fact, I'll go with you to the hospital and help complete the paperwork."

As they drove, he commented about Ian's good fortune. "Fifty thousand bucks for a few days effort - not bad -in cash, no less. I assume, of course, that you're going to declare this income to Revenue Canada?"

Ian laughed. "Sure I will -- in a pig's ass. Those bastards have almost buried my business. Besides, most of this money is already spoken for. Maybe now I can do some renovations on my store."

"Tsk, tsk," Jim admonished, shaking his head in mock sorrow. "Well, I guess my silence can be bought if you offer to take me salmon fishing -- if and when I ever get enough money scraped together for a vacation."

"You're on! Hell, you can do it cheaper than you might think. We'll start making plans after I get home."

At the hospital, the formalities took only a few minutes. Ian had to identify Jack and briefly relate the circumstances of his death. When asked if he knew the next of kin, he told them there were documents at his apartment that probably contained such information, and that he intended to turn them over to an attorney in the morning. Jim drove back to the apartment, where they enjoyed the last of Jack's Lagavulin. Ian offered a toast, "Here's to you, Jack -- rest in peace."

Later, Jim said that he had to get going. "I'm glad to be of help, Ian. Things seemed to have turned out for the better -- at least for you."

"Yeah. I guess time will tell, eh?"

After his cousin left, Ian decided to call his daughter to inform her of his arrival home the next day. Besides, he missed her. When she answered the phone, he asked if she could give him a ride home from the airport. She said that she had no plans. He told her the flight number and arrival time, and she said she would be there.

Ian felt strange being alone in Jack's apartment. As it had been an extremely long and tiring day, he hit the sack early. There was no doubt in his mind that his sleep would be filled with dreams.

Chapter 13

N'zussigodaetchigawiyoun.

Bad signs will I heed.

—Ojibwa song

Just as he was dozing off, the phone rang. He let it ring 10 times, hoping it would stop. Finally, he picked it up. It was Jim. "When I got home, I thought about your situation. You must be pretty uncomfortable staying in Dr. Elias's apartment. Why don't you come over here for the night? We have a spare room."

"Thanks, Jim, but I'm already sacked out. Besides, I don't really have a problem with it. But thanks, anyway."

"Okay. Just thought that I'd check. Goodnight."

“Goodnight.” Ian lay there smiling at Jim’s thoughtfulness. However, he lived halfway across the city in St. Vital, and he would not have been keen on packing up and driving all the way over there. He was just snuggling down and getting comfortable when the damned phone went off again. He snatched it up before the second ring. “Ian, its Swan! I just had a feeling that I should call you. Has something happened?”

“Swan, this is very weird, I planned to call you in the morning. Yes, something’s happened. Jack passed away this afternoon. In fact, that’s the reason no one answered your call earlier -- apparently he was already dead. When I tried to wake him up, I discovered that he was gone. At least he went peacefully, watching golf on the tube.”

“I’m so sorry, Ian. Although I didn’t know him well, I could tell he was a good man. Did he have any relatives in town?”

“To tell you the truth, I don’t know where his relatives are, or even if he has any. I found a will among his papers, so I’m turning everything over to his lawyer tomorrow. He can sort out his estate.”

“That’s so sad. There might not be anyone to say a prayer for him on his way to the Path of Souls.”

“Oh well, I don’t suppose it matters much to Jack. He wasn’t a religious man. Anyway, I’ll do what I can before I leave. Maybe he’ll become a ‘dream visitor’ like your father.”

“Don’t joke about that. Dreams are as important to some people as so-called real life.”

“Who’s joking? I can assure you that I have been taking my dreams very seriously lately. I just hope the ‘flying dreams’ stop when I get back to the Coast.” They continued talking for a few more minutes. Swan made Ian promise to call her when he got back to Vancouver.

After she said goodbye, he seriously considered unplugging the phone. Why bother? He was wide-awake now. Swan’s question about Jack having any relatives bothered him. The package of personal papers was sitting on the coffee table. He decided that it wouldn’t hurt to have a look. His will was straightforward: He left his small remaining collection of books and papers to the University library; what little remained of his Native art was to go to the Anthropology Museum; the remainder of his personal property was to be sold and the proceeds donated to the Salvation Army. His considerable estate, including property (he owned his condominium in Winnipeg as well as one in Scottsdale, Arizona), stocks, bonds and cash, was to be divided between several nieces and nephews in the States. Ian noted that there was to be no funeral or service of any kind. Jack stipulated simple cremation with no disposition of his remains. Most of the other material in the file dealt with his finances. Boy, when he had told Ian to take Connaught’s money because, “he didn’t need it,” it was an understatement. Jack had died a very wealthy man, indeed.

Eventually, fatigue caught up with him and he went back to bed. Mercifully, any potential dream visitors left him alone and he awoke early Monday morning relatively refreshed, both physically and mentally. The law office opened at 9 o’clock. Ian called and got in touch with Jack’s attorney. He told him of Jack’s sudden death and arranged to drop off the documents later that morning.

He decided to use the Cadillac to drive to the lawyer's office. After turning over the documents and spare keys to Jack's apartment, the next order of business, as far as he was concerned, was to deposit Connaught's cheque at the first banking machine he came to. He hung onto the cash, never having carried so much money in his life before. Returning for the last time to Jack's apartment, he parked the Eldorado in the underground garage, packed up his stuff in the apartment, tidied things in the den and kitchen, and then called a cab to take him to the airport.

With two hours to kill before his flight, Ian reasoned that it would be more fun to spend time in the airport lounge than Jack's apartment. He placed the car keys and keys to the apartment on the coffee table. Ian wondered what would become of the huge Cadillac, musing that it would be kind of fun to pilot that big road boat around in Vancouver. Oh well....

As he awaited the cab, it seemed like he had been in Winnipeg for a month, not just five days. God, a lot had happened. Seeing Swan again had been a real jolt to his system, while dealing with Connaught and dancing around with the Mounties had been ... entertaining. Finally, there was Jack's sudden end that only now was starting to affect him. Just as he began to feel maudlin, the apartment intercom buzzed. He walked over to it and said he would be right down. After a quick look around the room, he pulled the apartment door shut behind him.

When the elevator door opened in the lobby, Ian was surprised to find Inspector Lewis and his partner waiting for him. "Come to say goodbye?" he ventured, smiling, trying to conceal his surprise at seeing them.

"No actually, we are here to ask you some questions regarding the suspicious death of Dr. Elias," replied the inspector without a hint of humour.

This had to be some kind of joke. "What are you talking about? Jack died while watching TV. I called the paramedics myself after I got back from a walk and found he'd passed away. I went to the hospital with my cousin, Jim, a local cop, to complete the paperwork. There was nothing to suggest that his death was anything but natural causes."

They led him to their unmarked car and opened the back door. The inspector got into the back seat with Ian while his partner drove. Inspector Lewis explained, "We received an anonymous tip late yesterday. That was how I learned of Dr. Elias's death. The timing looked a little suspicious, so I ordered an autopsy and toxicology screen. Guess what? We discovered that the Professor had a lot of insulin in his blood. There was also a fresh puncture wound in his thigh. Ordinarily, insulin is very difficult to detect, but the amount in his system was so high that it showed up immediately. The effects of an insulin overdose can easily be mistaken for heart failure."

"Wait a minute! Jack told me he was diabetic. Maybe he accidentally gave himself too much insulin? He was feeling quite ill after lunch. In fact, he passed out in the car on the way back here. Anyway, why are you hassling me? I had no reason to harm him? In fact, who did?"

"That's the sixty-four thousand dollar question. Now tell me about yesterday, starting after you left the park."

"After the exchange with the guy on the bike and my talk with you guys, I went directly back to Jack's. We decided to go out for lunch on Connaught. We went to Rae and Jerry's and had a very expensive meal. But, of course, you already know

that. Anyway, Connaught showed up and that really upset Jack. When we left, I had to help him to the car. After we got back to the apartment, Jack said he was feeling better, so I went out for a walk. I was gone about an hour. Some time after I got back, I discovered that he was dead. You know the rest. You've been following me and monitoring all of my calls. What's the mystery?"

"Sorry to disappoint you, but we never monitored any of the calls from Dr. Elias's apartment, and any surveillance came off after the exchange in the park yesterday. Tell me about the meeting with Connaught at the restaurant -- what was that all about?"

"He just showed up. By the way, he claimed that he found us by following the Mounties watching us. If you weren't tailing us, I wonder who was. Anyway, he wanted an amulet that I once possessed. When I told him that I no longer had it he almost went ballistic, but he calmed down when I was able to provide the information he was seeking. Even after he left, Jack was very upset. He didn't like Connaught much."

"So you think that Connaught might have had some reason to harm Dr. Elias?"

"I didn't say that. There was history between the two of them, that's all. Jack never told me what had turned him against Connaught. For his part, Connaught didn't seem to bear any grudges. Why don't you ask him about this yourself?"

"I'd love to have a chat with Mr. Connaught. Unfortunately, he has left the country. We could no longer hold his plane and he left Winnipeg en route to Chicago last evening. Let's backtrack slightly: you mentioned that although you didn't have the amulet he wanted, you were able to give him some sort of information. What did you tell him?"

"There were a couple of symbols engraved in the amulet. I simply gave him a copy of the marks. Hand me a piece of paper and I'll draw them for you. Jack and I were certain they were possibly runes, and in no way aboriginal."

Inspector Lewis opened his Field Message Book to a blank page and handed it to Ian. He drew the two symbols on it, then handed it back.

"Did Connaught tell you the significance of these particular symbols?" the inspector asked.

"Yes, he said they were part of a cryptographic key to some other information."

"You're saying that these symbols are somehow related to the ones on the outside of the birch bark scroll?"

"In a nutshell, yes. I wasn't going to tell you this until later, but there was something else hidden in the scroll. Jack and I found a piece of film inserted between the layers of birch bark. We removed the film and made a print of it. I had planned to mail a copy to you from the airport. What the heck, you might as well have it now." Ian reached inside his jacket and pulled out a manila envelope addressed to Inspector Lewis, then handed it to him. By this point, Sergeant McDonald had turned off Broadway onto Portage Avenue headed west.

The Inspector tore the envelope open and examined the photograph closely. "Do you have any idea what this might be?"

"Not a clue, but Jack and I thought it might be a schematic for some sort of device. We also thought it might be somehow related to the metal tube from the bundle. Anyway, the film is undoubtedly what Connaught was really after."

"I'm sorely tempted to arrest you for obstruction, Stewart. Why in hell did you hand the film over to Connaught? You could have given it to me at the park."

"We considered all the options, but given Connaught's reputation and the fact that we had made a copy for you, we thought it more prudent to carry through with the exchange with the film in place. Besides, I thought that you had Connaught's plane and would have him in the bag within minutes of the exchange."

"You might have called to consult with me, but I suppose now that it's a done deal there's no use crying about it. Thanks for the photo. I'll get it scanned into our computer back at headquarters."

"You're welcome. Now, if you don't mind, I have a flight to catch in a little while, and a life to get back to. Either charge me or drop me off right here. I can catch a cab to the airport."

"Take it easy. I'm certain you had nothing to do with Dr. Elias's death. Just give me a few more minutes of your time and I'll be glad to drive you to your flight. I want you to consider something else: If the Professor was indeed murdered, the killer may have similar plans for you. While I'm thinking of it, you mentioned 'copies' when you spoke of the print that you made of the film hidden in the scroll. If there are other copies, where are they?"

"That's right, two of the prints turned out sharply in focus. One, I placed in the envelope for you and put it in my jacket. As far as I remember, the other one was on Jack's coffee table. You know, when I think of it, it wasn't there when I got back from my walk. I assumed that Jack had squirreled it away somewhere."

"Here's a 'what if?' for you to consider," suggested the inspector. "What if someone came to the apartment in search of that print, and with the intention of getting rid of anyone who might have seen it. What if you had just missed being killed along with the professor?"

"That's a 'what if' that I don't care for much, but supposing for a second that you're right, how did they get into Jack's apartment?"

"A professional could have been in and out of there in minutes. I'd like to examine the lock on the Professor's apartment to see if a lock pick was used. Anyway, the local police are in charge of the investigation. Given the circumstances, they aren't enthusiastic about trying to establish wrongful death. I'll let them know that you're in the clear, but they might still want a statement from you at some point."

Just then Sergeant McDonald interrupted, "We've got company. There's a dark sedan tailing us. Whoever he is, he's good, I almost didn't spot him. What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing at this point," the inspector answered. "Just continue driving west. Don't put it over the air, use your cell phone and call headquarters. Ask them to put an unmarked car on the vehicle tailing us." The sergeant quickly complied, giving their position and direction of travel.

Ian thought it ironic that they were passing right in front of RCMP headquarters at the time. He wondered what kind of nut case would follow a police car, and then realized that it was probably him they were following. Perhaps they had plans to have him join Dr. Elias in the Land of Ghosts? He relayed this sentiment to the inspector, who replied that he was thinking the same thing.

"Listen," Ian said, "why don't you pull into Polo Park and drop me off at the entrance to the mall? I can cut across to one of the other doors, call a cab, and get to the airport from there. That way, you guys can play around with the twit following us."

"That's not a bad idea." He directed Sergeant McDonald to do as Ian suggested. They let him off with a quick goodbye at one of the eastern entrances underneath the car park, then sped off.

Ian hustled inside and walked quickly north through the mall to the northwest entrance in the Eaton's store. He used a pay phone to call a cab. A few minutes later, he was headed north on St. James Street on his way to the airport. He looked behind several times, but saw no dark sedans in pursuit. Once at the terminal, he checked in and immediately went through security, even though he still had over an hour to wait for his flight. No one would dare make a move on him inside an airport security zone. Nevertheless, he scanned his fellow passengers very carefully. Eventually, he became bored with the exercise and turned his attention to an outdoor magazine he had purchased at the newsstand.

He had a sudden thought: What if those who had been following him knew he was headed to Vancouver. It would be a simple matter to intercept him there. Sarah would be waiting for him at the terminal. She might be placed in harm's way if someone tried to ambush him. He decided to call and tell her not to bother picking him up -- he had made other arrangements. Fortunately, his daughter was home when he called. He informed her that she need not meet him, explaining that he had made other plans and would call her after he got home in the evening. She sounded slightly relieved, because as a novice driver she had not relished thoughts of navigating through downtown Vancouver, and then trying to find parking at the airport.

That accomplished, Ian waited for the boarding call. What the heck? He had plenty of dough to take a cab home, maybe even a limo. Besides, Connaught's cash was burning a hole in his pocket. He wondered if the cheque he had given him would clear. The pre-boarding announcement for his flight broke his reverie. A few minutes later he found his seat in Business Class and the flight attendant stowed his bag.

The flight was uneventful and he managed to nap most of the way. Because of the time difference, he gained two hours and it was only mid-afternoon when they touched down. One of the great blessings of sitting near the front was getting off without the usual elbowing and shoving.

Outside the terminal, Ian ignored the melee at the taxi stand and flagged down a limo. He knew from past experience that it would cost more, but was worth it. It was highly probable that the driver would speak English, and would actually know where he was going. At least 90 per cent of the cabs in Vancouver seemed to be driven by East Indians, many of whom seemed to have just arrived from their homeland. Besides, many of the cabs were in dubious mechanical condition with interiors to match. A lot of travellers arriving at Vancouver International for the first time often wondered what country they had landed in. Ian remembered one cabby who had no clue where North Vancouver was, and who did not seem to know a single word of English. Many tour operators had started to complain about the taxi situation in Vancouver. In sharp contrast, the limo driver, most certainly

an East Indian, held the door for Ian and asked in perfect English his destination, his choice in music, and whether he had a preference as to the route taken. When they arrived, even with the flat \$50 fee and a \$10 tip, Ian figured it would cost scarcely \$5 more than if he had taken a cab.

They reached his townhouse complex on the North Shore about 4 in the afternoon. He was glad to be home. Although quite large, the complex had only a single entrance. Groups of townhouses were built around a series of traffic islands and cul-de-sacs. Ian instructed the driver how to navigate through the maze to the back, where his townhouse was located. Many first-time visitors got hopelessly confused and ended up calling for more directions. As the limo rounded the second of four traffic islands, Ian noticed another car enter the complex. It was a dark sedan with two men in it. Oh no! 'They' had followed him to Vancouver. Ian made a quick decision -- rather than go directly to his unit, he had the driver drop him off in a different section of the development. He would cut through and reach his townhouse on foot.

Ian paid the driver and swiftly made his way down the sidewalk between two units. If 'they' were indeed following him, this tactic would at least buy him a little time. He was relieved when he reached his unit, entered and locked the door behind him. After resetting the alarm, he quickly went to his gun safe in the dining room and dialled the combination. Swinging the heavy door open, he opted for maximum firepower -- his Winchester Defender, an eight-round riot gun. He began stuffing shells into the magazine as he went upstairs. There was a good view of the street from the spare bedroom. He opened the slats slightly on the Venetian blinds. He was not surprised to see the dark sedan enter his cul-de-sac a few minutes later. The car hesitated almost imperceptibly as it passed his townhouse, then continued to the end of the cul-de-sac. He got a good look at both the driver and passenger and, for a change, the license plate. The car continued past without stopping and drove out of sight. Ian maintained watch for another 10 minutes, but it didn't reappear. He went back downstairs and wrote down the plate number.

Let the fun begin, he thought. I half hope they try something, because now I'm on my own turf. Anyone trying to get at me now is going to face some interesting problems, beginning with the design of the complex itself.

His townhouse was near the end of the last cul-de-sac and backed onto a heavily forested area. In addition, he had installed a very sophisticated security system, which included both active and passive sensors and, finally, his gun safe was full of useful toys, including shotguns and rifles in a wide variety of calibres and gauges. "Go ahead -- make my day" was the motto taped to the inside of the gun safe door.

Ian's truck parked in the garage also featured an excellent alarm system. He had beefed up the Ford F250 diesel 4X4 with oversized tires, a bush bar, and heavy-duty suspension. He knew that if push came to shove, he could drive over most obstacles with ease, including dark sedans.

There was a small stack of mail to deal with, plus a few calls on the answering machine, so Ian poured himself a scotch and started catching up on daily life in Vancouver. Most of the mail consisted of bills and banking correspondence. He could hardly wait to pay off his bank loan and be finished with those sharks. That would be the first order of business tomorrow. The few telephone calls were either

business related or from his fishing buddies, wondering where he was. There were a couple of hang-ups, but that was normal, some people could not make themselves talk into a machine.

With a loud thump, Booger, a huge black Manx stuffed himself through the cat door. He immediately jumped on Ian and began purring loudly. "So you missed me, you hairy fiend?" Ian asked as he rubbed behind Booger's massive head. The last time he had managed to get the immense feline on a scale, he weighed in at 15 pounds, all of it solid muscle. There were only two people on the entire planet that Booger tolerated -- Ian and Sarah. Everyone else was advised to keep hands off -- or else. A few foolhardy, self-professed 'cat persons' had attempted handling him, and the result was always the same -- bloodshed. No one ever tried to touch him a second time. Even the mailman was terrified of him, just from the sounds emanating from behind the mail slot.

Needless to say, other cats in the neighbourhood gave Booger's domain a wide berth. He was a great cat by Ian's standards. After all, was there another cat on the planet that loved to go fishing? Yes, every time he headed to the Interior for some trout fishing, Booger went along. In the truck, he draped himself over Ian's shoulder and peered out through the window like some mindless Labrador retriever. In the boat, he constantly prowled the gunwales, staring intently into the water while looking for fish. Once in awhile he got so excited that he would actually jump into the water and attempt to catch one he had spotted. Ian swore that he could even hold his breath and open his eyes underwater. Which was why he was getting to be known as "the guy with the giant fishing cat."

Another thing Ian liked about Booger was that he was low maintenance. Whenever he went away on business, all he needed to do was to fill a large mixing bowl with cat food and leave the toilet lid up. Booger handled the rest. Sometimes he came back to bloody footprints on the rug and furniture, or the half-eaten carcass of some woodland creature, but he thought these a small price to pay for the privilege of being Booger's human.

Ian knew that Booger now craved something besides kibble. He went to the kitchen and opened two cans of tuna, marvelling at the Manx's strength as he pushed against his legs, purring like an outboard motor. Ten seconds after the food hit the floor, it was gone and so was Booger, out the cat door like a rocket. He cleared the eight-foot-high fence and disappeared. Ian wondered where he went all day, but there were endless hiding places in the forest, so he had never pursued the matter. Booger came and went as he pleased.

It was now around 5 p.m., so Ian called Nick, his assistant, to see how things had gone at the store while he was away. He planned on giving Nick a \$1,000 bonus for holding the fort during such a busy period.

Nick answered and seemed relieved to hear his voice. "It's been an absolute friggin' madhouse, especially on Friday and Saturday. On Friday all that stock you ordered showed up. I didn't have time to do anything with it because the place was packed. I did around three grand in sales, but on Saturday it was closer to five."

This was music to Ian's ears. "Great job! I'll go in early tomorrow and deal with the new stock."

"I'll come in early and help."

"No you won't! I can handle it -- you come in at your regular time or I'll kick your ass."

The store was usually closed on Sundays and Mondays, and sometimes Tuesday as well if they learned that the fishing had heated up somewhere. They made up for this casual business plan by staying open as long as there were customers still in the store. One had to "make hay while the sun shines." Besides, there was plenty of slow time in the winter to rest up.

Next on the calling priority list was Swan. He told her that he had arrived home unscathed. There didn't seem to be any point in worrying her, so he failed to mention that the ubiquitous 'they' had followed him. Besides, he was more concerned about Swan's situation. "Have you heard any more from the Feds?"

She said there had been no further contact, and hoped there never would be. "I plan on approaching the band council concerning the treaty documents during the next tribal meeting, at the end of this month. In the meantime, I've placed the parfleche in a safety deposit box at my bank."

"That's a wise move."

They chatted for a few more minutes, and promised to keep in touch. After hanging up, Ian wondered if, realistically, they would ever see each other again. They lived half a continent apart, and while they obviously liked each other, neither of their track records offered any great promise of a lasting, let alone long-term relationship. I guess we'll just have to wait and see, he concluded.

His final call was to Sarah. She was glad he was home and suggested coming over for a visit that evening. Ian invited her for dinner. "How about barbecued moose steaks?" He knew how much she loved wild game, having been raised on it almost entirely. She quickly accepted and said she was on her way. Ian went to the freezer and pulled out two T-bones, then placed them in the microwave to defrost. After washing and scrubbing two potatoes with water, he wrapped them in tinfoil and walked out onto the back deck. Removing the barbecue cover, he placed the potatoes on the grill, then lit it.

Sarah arrived just as he was pulling the salad fixings from the refrigerator. After hugging each other, she volunteered to take over the salad.

"When Booger gets a whiff of that moose meat, he'll be back in here like a shot," Sarah said. "We'll have to make sure he doesn't try to snag a steak off the barbecue again."

They both had a good laugh at the memory. Booger also loved game meat and turned into a wild beast while he eating it -- growling and snarling like a cougar. They always gave him a share, but sometimes he became more than a little impatient. Once they stood in amazement as he reared up on his hind legs, flipped a half-cooked sirloin off the barbecue, and then bounded off into the forest with it clamped in his jaws.

While they made the salad, Ian told Sarah of his adventures in Winnipeg, describing the contents of the medicine bundle, the scroll, and the strange metal tube. He told her how Jack and he had dealt with Connaught and the police, and how Swan had taken the bundle back to the States.

Sarah was intrigued by his description of Swan and her daughter, Katie, and said she would like to meet them. She was saddened when told of Jack's passing, but her mood brightened when told of the double windfall and what it meant to his

business. She was delighted and kidded her father when he presented her with the silver broach. "Only silver?" she chided. "You old cheapskate -- why not gold?"

Ian knew she was teasing. "Ingrate! You're lucky to get anything."

As soon as the steaks went on the grill, Booger scaled the fence and began whining for his share. Sarah picked him up like a baby and carried him into the living room. Lolling on his back in her arms, he gazed up at her lovingly. In the kitchen, where they had set aside several strips of moose meat, she lowered him on the floor. She held one out, her arm raised above head level. "Is this what you want, you big sissy?"

Booger launched straight up, clamped his fangs on the meat and landed back on his feet. A six-foot vertical leap was nothing to him. He greedily devoured the first piece and in a moment was begging for another.

"It's amazing," Ian remarked. "I fed him two cans of tuna only an hour ago, and now you'd think he was starving. What a pig!"

Sarah gave him the remainder of his meat. After he had finished, Booger staggered into the living room, flopped over on the carpet and immediately went to sleep. If cats smiled, then the look on the purring Manx's face definitely was a smile.

"Well, at least he won't bother us while we eat," Sarah remarked.

Ian removed the baked potatoes from the grill and tested them with a fork. A minute later he removed the steaks -- both medium rare. Meanwhile, Sarah had brought in the salads. It was a delicious meal and he couldn't think of another person with whom he would rather share it. Afterward, the cleanup was minimal, then they sat back and watched a movie from Ian's large collection.

They shared the same taste in movies, and decided on one of their favourites -- *Reservoir Dogs*. Both had watched it at least a half dozen times, but never tired of it, especially Mr. Blond's antics. When it was over, Sarah said goodbye and drove back to her mother's house. Ian turned the lights off, poured himself a brandy, then sat back listening to the stereo. Booger roused himself only long enough to climb onto his human's lap, and went back to sleep. The cat's body heat and contented purring, amplified the effect of the brandy, and it wasn't long before Ian was sound asleep as well. Yes, it was very good to be home.

Chapter 14

It is at this time that the Light Skinned race will be given a choice between two roads. If they choose the right road then the Seventh Fire will light the Eighth and final Fire, an eternal Fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood. If the Light Skinned race makes the wrong choice of roads, the destruction which they brought with them in coming to this country will come back at them and cause much suffering and death to all the Earth's people.

—Anishinabe legend

Dreaming, Ian returned to the shaking tent on Mikinak Lake. Daniel Kukisew sat opposite, dressed in full midé regalia. There was someone else seated beside him -- Jack Elias! He had become a 'dream visitor' after all. His grinning face was painted and he held a water drum. Daniel began chanting while Jack drummed. The tent started shaking violently. The next instant, Ian was projected skyward and soared westward toward Winnipeg. In minutes, he descended toward an apartment building near the Assiniboine River. A moment later he was hovering outside Jack Elias's condominium, looking in through the window. Inside, he saw two men in dark suits. They were doing something to Jack. As he watched, one man injected him in the thigh with a syringe. Then they quickly and efficiently searched the apartment, even going through the garbage. One picked up the photo on the coffee table, while the other rapidly dismantled the phone and removed what appeared to be a small electronic device. Jack's apartment had been bugged. The biggest surprise was that Ian recognized them as the same two men who had cruised by his townhouse hours earlier that day.

As the intruders exited Jack's apartment, his 'flight' resumed. He soared westward over the Prairies, flashing over farms and towns. In a few moments the Rockies loomed ahead. He zipped between peaks and over countless valleys. Soon he passed the other mountain ranges between the Rockies and the Coast. He sped over the verdant Fraser Valley and saw Vancouver's smog in the distance. The sun had set as he flew over the bedroom communities of Chilliwack, Abbotsford and Surrey, over Eastern Burrard Inlet and then toward the North Shore Mountains. Ian began descending and realized his destination -- his own townhouse. He zoomed downward and through the roof of his unit. Amazingly, he found himself looking down at his own sleeping body with a large, black cat lying on his chest. Booger suddenly woke up and looked straight up at him. The Manx's eyes widened and he let loose with a loud hiss. Before his corporeal body could react, the flight continued but only briefly -- to the forest behind the townhouse. A man was positioned so he could observe the place unseen. He was dressed in excellent camouflage and was watching the townhouse with a large set of binoculars. What was he going to do, shoot him?

At that instant, he woke up. Booger was standing on his chest, peering intently toward the woods behind the townhouse, the fur on his back erect. Ian couldn't tell whether it was Booger's bulk pressing down, or the hiss that had awakened him. All he knew was that he was going to crawl over to his gun safe and retrieve a few things he might need. He had briefly considered calling the cops, but that could wait for a while. First, he was going to have a little fun. Opening the safe, he pulled out a Remington 700 in .308 calibre. This target rifle was a heavy-barrelled version of the standard sniper rifle used by many military and civilian shooters, and favoured by SWAT teams. It was fitted with a very powerful Sheppard scope. He also grabbed a second-generation night scope that someone had given him back in his magazine days.

So armed, he crawled across the living room and up the stairs to the second floor. Rather than move the blinds in his bedroom, Ian chose the bathroom window, which was already open. By positioning the shaving mirror, he could see the woods behind while he remained hidden at the back of the bathtub. He switched on the night scope and began scanning the woods. It didn't take long to

spot the man about 50 metres away. Just as in the dream, he could see that he was fully camouflaged and set up in cover. He was obviously watching his place. Why?

Well, if he was looking for a fire fight, he had picked the wrong target. Years in the outdoor business had provided Ian with ample opportunity to build up an awesome arsenal. Each year at the SHOT Show (the Shooting and Outdoor Trades Show), he got to play with some of the latest available in firearms and accessories. Sometimes he was even given free samples, and at worst he had to pay the jobber's list price for something he wanted. Over time, he had acquired a lot of equipment. To hold most of it, he had purchased a large Liberty gun safe weighing half a ton. It was bolted to the floor in the corner of his dining room. He shot every gun in his collection on a regular basis. Throughout the year, he spent at least one day a month at the range. He even reloaded most of his own ammunition. To say that he was an avid shooter would be an understatement. If he had chosen to, he could have shot holes in the man hiding behind his house wherever and whenever he wanted to.

Ian considered slipping on his own camo gear and sneaking into the woods, but knew he was better off where he was -- on familiar ground and armed to the teeth. Time to call the cops. His cellular phone was in the truck and the garage entrance was located off the kitchen. He left his rifle upstairs and crawled downstairs into the kitchen, retrieving a six cell Mag-Lite on the way. Carefully opening the garage door, he scanned the garage with the flashlight's powerful beam. It was clear of intruders, so he switched off the truck alarm and grabbed his cell phone.

He crawled back upstairs and into the bathroom, where he could watch the guy in the woods while he called the cops. His reaction would tell him whether his phone was being monitored. Also, it would be fun to watch the action should the cops move in to investigate. He thought about what to tell them. If he reported that there was an armed man out there, the Emergency Response Team would arrive en masse, sirens howling. On the other hand, if he told them that he suspected there was a prowler in the woods, a single patrol car would be dispatched. He went with plan B, telling the officer who took his call that he had seen someone sneaking around behind his complex. He gave them the address, knowing that the police were well familiar with these particular woods. Teenagers had often staged noisy parties there in summers past, and the police were called in to break them up every time.

He continued watching the man. After a couple of minutes, he quickly assembled his gear and melted out of sight. Ian realized that he didn't need to monitor his phone -- all he had to do was scan police frequencies, which obviously he had. As soon as a sector car was dispatched to the area, he was gone. Five minutes later, Ian saw the beams of flashlights and watched as two constables crashed through the bush behind the complex. Finding nothing, they soon left.

Well, thought Ian, so ends round one. He would call Inspector Lewis in the morning and inform him of these latest developments. There was no chance that he could get back to sleep, so he checked front and back every 10 minutes until sunrise. Booger made no attempt to go outside, sticking to him like glue. "It's too bad you're such a wimp," Ian chortled. "You could have scared the crap out of that guy."

Ian elected to go right to work after he showered and dressed, and had to forcibly restrain Booger from coming along. Rather than go directly to the store, he drove to the nearby 7-11 and bought a coffee and two doughnuts. He did not think there was any reason for someone to be following him. After all, 'they' already knew where he lived and worked. He parked his truck behind the store. A sharp chirp and brief flick of the parking lights indicated that the truck alarm had rearmed itself. Once inside, he relocked the back door.

The amount of stock that had arrived from the tackle suppliers was staggering. Boxes and rod tubes half filled the stock room. The invoiced amount was just over \$32,000. It would take him hours to enter the new inventory into the computer, price the items and stock the shelves. For starters, there were thousands of trout flies to deal with. Oh well, they sold like hotcakes. By 9 o'clock he had entered most of the stock numbers and quantities into the computer database. Next, he would start applying price stickers, but it was time for a break. Then he remembered that he intended to call Inspector Lewis in Winnipeg.

After a short delay, he was transferred to someone who identified himself as Sergeant Howe. He informed Ian that he would relay any messages to Inspector Lewis. Ian quickly described being followed to his townhouse, and gave the sergeant the car's license number. He also told him about the watcher in the woods the previous night. Ian asked if they had learned anything about the vehicle that had followed the inspector's car in Winnipeg yesterday afternoon. The sergeant knew nothing about that, but said he would relay the message to Inspector Lewis. Ian gave him both his cell phone number and the one at his store. Just as he put the phone down, Nick let himself in. It was about 15 minutes before they usually opened the store for business at 11. "How long you been in, boss?" he asked.

"About four hours, I got a good start on the new inventory. By the way, thanks for covering last week. You did a great job." He reached into his pocket and handed Nick an envelope.

Nick looked at the 10 crisp bills. "Holy cow! A grand in US currency! Thanks boss."

"No, thank you." He knew Nick was pleased with his reward, and hoped that he would put the money to some use other than buying more fishing tackle but doubted it.

"I'm going to the bank. I should be back in about an hour. Wait until noon to open up. I'll pick us up some lunch. See you later." Ian unlocked the back door and walked to his truck. He dealt with a bank located in West Vancouver, a drive of about 15 minutes. First, he went to a teller and deposited \$20,000 in US currency. Converted, it came to just over \$30,000 Canadian. The bank was accustomed to seeing large amounts of cash, and the teller didn't bat an eye as she handed him his deposit slip.

If anyone had asked, Ian planned to say he had just enjoyed a very profitable vacation in Las Vegas. He noted on his statement that Connaught's cheque had not yet been credited to his account. Oh well, large cheques took longer to process.

Next, he asked to see the manager and was immediately ushered into her office. Within minutes, he had written a cheque to cover the amount owing on his loan. The store was all his. On the way back, he stopped at a Subway and picked up two

12-inch sandwiches and two cartons of chocolate milk. God, but it felt great to finally be out of debt.

Later that day he would phone a carpenter friend and arrange for some renovations. Now that he had the money, he was going to turn his store into a first-class tackle shop, one with special sections for each type of angling: fly fishing, steelheading, standard freshwater tackle, saltwater ... everything. He would also build a new rod rack to emulate one he had seen in Seattle, and expand the section devoted to books, videos and CDs to at least double. Finally, he planned on moving the reel display case and cash register to the front of the store. If the carpenter got right at it, the renovations could be finished within a week, just in time for the peak of their retail season.

Ian was preoccupied as he pulled into the lot behind the store; otherwise, he might have spotted the dark blue sedan parked next to the dumpster. As he stepped inside, he was instantly grabbed and very efficiently immobilized. The food went flying. While one assailant pinned him face down on the floor, the other blindfolded and gagged him with duct tape and secured his hands and feet with plastic ties. He was then jerked to his feet and plunked unceremoniously onto a chair. He and the chair were dragged to the wall and tilted back until his feet were off the ground. Ian thought, This is it -- I'm dead.

"Are we having fun yet?" asked a neutral voice off to his left. Ian could not detect any trace of accent. The tape was suddenly ripped from his mouth.

"Ouch! What the hell do you assholes want? Where's Nick?" It was perhaps not the best approach given his predicament, but he was furious, mostly at himself for being such an easy mark. He expected a rap across the mouth, but instead heard one of the men chuckle, "Feisty, isn't he? Don't worry about your pal, he's okay."

"What next, am I about to have a fatal accident like Jack Elias?"

"Listen buddy," growled one of his captors from about two inches in front of his face, "I tried to save that old geezer's life ... hey ... wait a minute ... how did you know about that?"

Another voice, "Forget it, he's only guessing. Let's wrap this up."

Ian decided to rattle their cage a bit more. "When did you put the bug in the professor's phone?" The long delay in replying spoke volumes. He definitely had their attention. Sure that he was no longer in mortal danger, he said, "So, if you're not here to terminate me -- what do you want? I saw you cruise by yesterday and then skulk around in the woods behind my house last night"

"Yeah, we drove by, but as far as 'skulking' -- that must have been somebody else. Anyway, you know damn well what we want. Did you make a copy of that schematic you found in the bark tube, and if so where is it?"

Having no reason to do otherwise, he told them he had made several prints, and turned one copy over to Inspector Lewis. He knew that they had recovered another copy from Jack's coffee table, but he could hardly tell them how he knew. He certainly had no intention of telling them that there was another copy, and that he had it safely tucked away. "Why are you so concerned about any copies? Lawrence Connaught has the original film. I'm not the bad guy here -- he is."

"Connaught is on the same team as we are. By the way, I hate to rub it in, but Connaught had been authorized to pay any amount to get that film, and I stress -- *any amount.*"

“Crap!” thought Ian. He knew that he should have asked for more money. Oh well, he was happy with what he got. “Who the hell are you guys: CIA, NSA, CSIS, independent? And why are you so hot to get your hands on thirty-year old technology?”

“That’s none of your business. All you need to know is that we wear the white hats.”

“So why all the rough stuff? You could have simply asked me about the film.”

“The way you kept popping up made us think that you might be in the game, perhaps on the other side. You also have a bit of a form chart with the ‘company.’ In this business, it’s always better to be safe than sorry. Anyway, I’m going to cut you loose now. Don’t be in a hurry to rip off the tape over your eyes. You’ll tear your eyebrows off. Don’t call us ... we’ll call you.”

Ian felt the pressure on his wrists release. He was still leaning back against the wall. As he pushed himself forward, he heard the back door open and close, and a moment later, a car started and quickly pulled away. He gingerly pulled the tape off his eyes. Despite being careful, he still managed to rip out what felt like half of his eyebrows. He reached for the scissors on the desk and cut the plastic ties securing his ankles. There was no use checking out back, his assailants were already long gone.

Hearing a muffled noise from the far corner of the stock room, he strode over and found Nick bound and gagged the same way he had been. He quickly cut his bonds and helped remove the tape.

“What the hell happened?” Nick demanded. “Was it a robbery? What did they get?”

“No, it wasn’t a robbery.”

Nick rubbed at his eyebrows. “The back doorbell rang. I thought it was you, but the second I opened it -- wham! Do you want me to call the cops?”

“No. It was just a case of mistaken identity, Nick, there’s no reason to call the police. Let’s just forget the whole thing and have lunch.” He noticed that the subs and chocolate milk had been placed neatly on his desk.

Nick knew better than to press the issue. “Cool -- you’re the boss. What kind of subs did you get?” His ability to adjust quickly was one of the things that most endeared him to Ian. The same trait made him a very good fly fisherman.

While they ate, the conversation turned to fishing. Nick had heard that a couple of the lower elevation lakes south of Kamloops in the Interior, were hot right now. Both were keen to hammer some trout ASAP, and neither mentioned the “bondage episode.”

Ian opened the store shortly after noon, and despite a steady stream of customers, he managed to get most of the new stock placed on wall hangers and arranged on shelves. He almost went blind distributing 2,400 flies into the right compartments, and by day’s end hoped he would never see another fly smaller than number 14 again as long as he lived. They closed up at 6, and he never did get around to calling the carpenter -- he was just too bagged.

Booger met him at the door and whined until Ian picked him up, then slung him around his neck like a bloated fur stole. Although the cat loved being carried around this way, the weight was killing his neck. He carted the beast into the

kitchen and bribed him to get off with a piece of halibut -- another of his favourites.

The rank odour emanating from Booger's litter box suggested that he had not been out all day. Last night's action had really freaked him out. Ian needed a drink before he could deal with the litter box situation, so he poured a stiff scotch and headed into the living room to open his mail. At least Booger had not chewed any letters up, as he did occasionally. One letter immediately caught his attention. It was simply addressed to Ian Stewart. There was no stamp. Obviously someone had shoved it through the mail slot. He was filled with apprehension as he tore the envelope open. There was a typed note inside with a very terse message in capital letters:

TOMORROW. 10 A.M. THE FISH DOCK AT RICE LAKE. COME ALONE.

Now what? Whoever had delivered the note obviously had local knowledge. Rice Lake was a tiny body of water located in North Vancouver's Seymour Demonstration Forest. It was heavily stocked with trout, but because of the short walk in and a prohibition on watercraft, not as popular as one might think among local anglers. Ian liked conducting fly-casting lessons there, as it was only a 10-minute drive from the store and there was a well-constructed fishing dock at the lake's southeast corner. At 10 in the morning there would probably be only a few regulars drowning worms. What the heck? He never needed an excuse to wet a line. He micro waved some chilli for dinner, then, on a whim, tied a half dozen tiny chironomid patterns to try at Rice Lake. He spent the rest of the evening staring at the tube with Booger at his side.

Ian awoke at 7 a.m. as usual. He had half hoped that his "dream visitors" would make an appearance and clue him in on what was going on, but they didn't. He had slept like a log. The few hours before his clandestine meeting were a good opportunity to pay some bills and get caught up with his e-mail. He had missed surfing the Internet while he had been in Winnipeg. He had established a website for his business, providing among other things, information on local fishing and links to other angling-related sites. The mail order side of the site was growing almost exponentially, and he could see that it would soon develop into a very important part of the business.

The time passed quickly and it was soon time to head to Rice Lake. As he pulled out of the garage, he wondered if he should take along some sort of equalizer -- bear spray came to mind. Nah! He would try to keep an open mind.

Within minutes he had passed Capilano College and through the gates of the Demonstration Forest. The 3 km of dirt road ended at a barricade and parking lot. Beyond the parking lot, the area was generally closed to the public, as it was part of the Greater Vancouver watershed. Five other vehicles were already parked at the lot's north end, all that he recognized as belonging to regulars. He retrieved his rod and pack from behind the seat, then started the 10-minute walk to the lake.

It was a perfect morning for fishing -- overcast, no wind and warm. The chironomids would be popping off all over the lake. Chironomids, more commonly known as midges, were a very important part of the trout diet. Knowledgeable fly fishers can duplicate their tiny size and unique behaviour, but it is tough,

challenging fishing. Under the right conditions, the pupae wriggle their way to the surface of a lake. There they hang in the surface film while they shuck their pupal case to emerge as adults similar in shape to mosquitoes. They often do so in incredible numbers, and trout gorge on them as they rise from the muck at the bottom, and again as they hang just below the surface.

Ian loved to fish for “smutting” trout. They usually cruise in circular patterns, sipping the midge pupae delicately from below. Techniques have been developed, both in England and North America, which allow fly fishers to catch smutting fish. It requires an exact imitation of the chironomid -- size and colour being the key. The fly is presented in such a way that it hangs just below the surface. To accomplish this, floatant is applied to a 15-foot-long leader, leaving the last two inches free to sink. Then, after casting out, the leader is watched very carefully, for the slightest twitch means that a trout has sucked in the fly. A lift of the rod tip at that point often results in a hooked fish. The technique is highly technical and requires intense concentration, but once mastered it is absolutely deadly.

The night before, Ian remembered from experience that a number 14 black chironomid pattern would be productive at Rice Lake at this time of the year. Despite having several boxes filled with imitations of every size and colour imaginable, he had tied up a new pattern and was eager to test it. After saying hello to several familiar faces on the dock, he quickly set up his tackle and within minutes was laying out fairly long casts to the rings created by feeding trout. He had a trout on immediately. Not too large, but certainly acrobatic, it bounced on the surface three times and shed the hook.

“Hah!” cracked a fellow angler. “A long-range release.”

“You’re just jealous ... damned worm-dunker,” Ian said. He lifted his line into a back-cast then shot it smoothly forward again. Within seconds he was into a second fish. “See,” he said smugly, “nothing to it.” Unlike its predecessor, this trout dove down and fought deeply, obviously of a much more decent size. He would never know, though, for his line went suddenly limp. The good-natured banter between the men continued as he stripped in and inspected his barbless hook. The point was still needle sharp, so it was just the luck of the draw.

He felt it was up to the note writer to approach him, and he didn’t have to wait long. A fellow who had been leaning against the north-facing rail on the dock, slowly made his way toward him. He chatted casually with the other anglers, and soon reached Ian’s side. “How’s the fishing?” he asked amiably.

He was tall, middle-aged, and had the “Eddie Bauer” outdoor look. All of his clothing was top-of-the-line and brand new, from his hiking boots to his Goretex jacket.

“The fishing is great, but any day fishing beats the alternative, Mister?...” Ian reeled in his line and turned to face the stranger.

“Just call me Harry. Let’s go over to that table, we can talk there.” There was a covered picnic table just onshore, a great place to get out of the rain during the many showers that blew through the North Shore Mountains. Harry began their conversation on a surprising note. “What do you know about fuel cell technology, Ian?”

He was caught completely off balance by the question. Had Harry arranged this meeting to play the science round of Jeopardy? He decided to play along. “I know

that a fuel cell is a kind of battery that uses a chemical reaction to produce electrical current. The process produces no pollution, only water vapour. Beyond that, I only know that they're too expensive to be in general use. Some company in Vancouver is supposedly at the forefront of current research."

"Very good. Yes, you're quite correct. Fuel cell research began in earnest in the early sixties. The space program required a portable source of non-polluting energy. The oil crisis further spurred research. In early cells, a common fuel like hydrogen gas was acted upon by an electrolyte like potassium hydroxide, with the aid of a catalyst like platinum. Simultaneous oxidation and reduction reactions took place. Hydrogen gas was oxidized to form water, and the electrons liberated by the process flowed through the circuit. Using such corrosive electrolytes was very problematic, though, because of the high temperatures created. In the eighties, proton exchange membranes were developed. They were much more efficient, but the membrane was very expensive and short-lived. Even today, fuel cells are expensive to produce -- very heavy and extremely fragile. What if I was to tell you that back in the 1960s, a brilliant scientist invented a fuel cell that solved all of these problems? Further, he developed a durable membrane that allowed for the use of far less expensive catalysts, and with little loss of efficiency. Finally, the entire fuel cell could be scaled to any application, and it was relatively cheap to produce. Can you imagine what such a breakthrough would mean?"

Suddenly everything became clear to Ian. Now he knew what was on the film he had found hidden in the bark scroll -- the plans for the fuel cell, and the substance in the metal tube was the catalyst. Jeff Stanton had stolen the plans and catalyst from his father's plant, and had probably destroyed all other copies. He wondered what happened to the scientist who had made the breakthrough. It was no wonder that everyone, including Jeff Stanton's own father, had been so interested in his movements and the disposition of his property after his death. A cheap and efficient fuel cell would impact the entire world, and could vastly reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. The oil and automobile industries could be big losers.

"Very interesting, Harry, but did you get me all the way up here to give me a lecture on energy technology?"

"I know of your trip to Winnipeg and the dealings with Lawrence Connaught. By the way, he is working for a consortium of energy-related industries, including the oil industry, the 'Big Three' automakers, and the power companies. With government help, they are determined to suppress this technology and to release it only when they can reap the benefits. Jeff Stanton, the fellow who stole the information back in the 1960s, imagined himself to be a bit of revolutionary. He had intended to give the information to the world. Can you imagine what would have happened if cheap and efficient stored energy had become available to everyone on Earth?"

"Well, that might still happen," Ian said. "I gave a copy of the plans and a container of what I imagine was the catalyst to the RCMP."

"Yes, I know for a fact that material has already been turned over to US agents who are working with the same people as Connaught. Call it the US 'military industrial complex' for want of a better term."

“Well that does it then, they have the original, both copies and the catalyst. So, what’s your involvement in this, Harry?”

“I would like to say that my interest is altruistic and that I would share the knowledge with all of humanity, but I can’t. My motive is good old-fashioned capitalistic greed. A very large Japanese company has hired me to obtain the document. Our representatives tried approaching you several times in Winnipeg, but your activities made contact impossible. Between Connaught’s people and the police, a window never presented itself until now.”

“So, make your pitch, but I must warn you, I made only two copies of the plans. One was retrieved from Dr. Elias’s apartment by Connaught’s people and the other I turned over to the Mounties as I just said.”

“Well, if another copy does happen to exist, I have been authorized to offer the person who possesses such a document, two million dollars.”

Ian tried to maintain a poker face. Two million bucks! Holy shit! Instinctively he knew that if he admitted to possessing the plans, it would be unlikely that he would ever survive to spend the money. He was also fairly sure who had been skulking behind his townhouse the other night. “Sorry, Harry, much as I could use a couple of million, I can’t help you. I only made two copies. Now if that’s it, I have to get to my store. It’s about time to open up. Nice meeting you.”

Ian began packing up his gear. Harry waited while he placed his fly rod back in its tube and put the reel in his pack. “I may as well walk back with you back to the parking lot.”

They chatted in generalities. Ian wondered how he knew about Rice Lake. Harry replied that one of his colleagues lived in the area and told him about it. He thought it a pretty lame explanation, but it would have to do. They reached their vehicles and said their goodbyes. He waited until Harry was on his way before pulling out of the lot.

Two million bucks! *Two million bucks!* Oh well, it had been fun almost being a millionaire. Even if he turned the plans over to Harry and received the money, there would be no place on the planet where it would be safe to spend it. He knew that Connaught’s people had the resources to track him down anywhere, and they would. It really didn’t matter, anyway, just the suspicion that he might have a copy made it very unlikely that he would survive the week. Those closest to him were in danger as well. The most likely move would be for Harry’s people to grab Sarah and squeeze him for the plans. Of course, he would give in immediately. There was only one option open -- finish what Jeff Stanton had set out to do.

Rather than go to the store, he called Nick on his cell phone and said he would be delayed. He also called Sarah and told her to spend the day at her friend, Megan’s, house and to take along the small can of Mace that he had given her. He averted her questions, saying it was important and he would explain later. Sarah knew her father would never suggest such a thing without a very important reason, so agreed to do as asked.

He arrived at his townhouse about 10 minutes later and parked out front. His neighbour was puttering in her flowerbed, so he asked if she had happened to see any strangers near his place. She said, no, not that she had noticed, at least in the last half hour or so. So far so good. He went inside and pulled the schematic photo out of a folder in his gun safe, then carried it to his computer desk. With a felt

pen, he copied the symbols from the scroll and the amulet onto the margin in large letters. Working quickly, he placed the photo in his flat bed scanner and made a high resolution scan of the image. Fortunately, he had recently upgraded his computer and added more memory along with a much larger hard drive; otherwise, scanning and storing such a detailed image would be impossibly slow.

Next he opened up his web browser. He had discovered several websites that specialized in collecting and distributing leaked government documents and other secret information. Many of the most popular sites took thousands of hits daily. He had such files book marked, and it was a simple matter to upload the file - it took only seconds.

He named the file Fuel cell and had included a descriptive note:

*Revolutionary fuel cell technology.
Complete plans and formulas.
Enjoy. Jeffrey S.*

He figured that a dozen or so uploads would be enough. Now, even the most determined effort to expunge the information from cyberspace would fail. Within hours, the file would be downloaded dozens of times. The fuel cell technology was now part of the World Wide Web. It would serve no purpose for anyone to harm him or those close to him now.

He carefully burned the photo and flushed the ashes down the toilet. Although he had previously burned a CD to back up his entire system, it was difficult to do next what was necessary -- he wiped his primary hard drive clean using the Format command, then repeated the format again. That way, no one would be able to recover anything that had ever been on the drive, including the scan of the fuel cell. Simply erasing it was not good enough. There were ways to recover erased material, but not from a reformatted hard drive. Finally, he turned the computer off. When it was turned back on, it would automatically boot to the other disk drive. Two million dollars poorer, he drove to the store. It was bizarre, but he was feeling pretty damned good. It wasn't every day that a guy got to blow a fortune, save his own life, and do something good for humanity.

Nick wondered where he had been, so Ian told him: Fishing at Rice Lake and then surfing the net for a couple of hours. Nick just shook his head and asked how the fishing had been. Two hooked and lost, but on only two casts. Nick was impressed. He then told Ian that some snobby guy had called several times, but would not leave a message. The store began to fill up and they were soon too busy to worry about anything other than the ka-ching of the cash register. The phone rang constantly, with most of the callers asking where the fish were biting. Around 3 o'clock, Nick handed Ian the phone, whispering, "It's that guy."

"You're a hard man to reach, Ian," said Lawrence Connaught's cultured voice. Christ! Now what? "I hear you went fishing this morning. I just hope you did not catch more than you bargained for."

"What do you mean? You know, I'm getting pretty tired of all this bullshit. Those two guys jumping me in my own store was the last straw. You have the film and the code -- what the hell else do you want from me?"

"The two gentlemen you referred to are professional associates of my employer. During your conversation with them, you seemed to possess some disconcerting information about their activities with regard to Professor Elias. I'm wondering how you came by that information."

"Just a lucky guess. What of it?"

"A more suspicious person might assume that you have been getting help from some outside source. Given your meeting with Harry Converse this morning, I have to think that you may have shifted your loyalties."

"Listen, Mr. Connaught. I have no loyalties other than to family and friends. This Harry person left me a note to meet him at Rice Lake. I did and he made a pitch to buy the same information you're after. He offered me a lot of money for the plans for some long-lost fuel cell. Believe me, if I had the material, I would have gone for the two million bucks."

"Two million? That's interesting. But let me return to the reason for my call, Ian. During the session with my associates, they asked you specifically if you had made other copies of the document in question. You were delightfully evasive, but your response gave the impression that you were being untruthful. This was reinforced by the readings from the VSA. You did make another copy."

"They used a Voice Stress Analyser on me! What next thumb screws?" Ian was getting worried. Connaught knew.

"I am sure it will not have to come to that. We, of course will match any offer made by Mr. Converse."

Ian's mind was spinning. He had to play for time. In a day it wouldn't matter. When in doubt -- deny, deny, deny. "Sure, I made several other copies, but they were either blurred or underexposed. Only two were clear enough to be useful. I don't have either one of them. Harry told me that you even managed to obtain the copy that I had given to the Mounties."

"That's true, the cooperation we received from the Canadian authorities was quite gratifying. But getting back to my proposal - I must stress that this offer has a very short expiry date -- twenty-four hours."

"What happens after that -- a sudden accident, some selective kidnapping, blackmail? You'll have to excuse me, Mr. Connaught, there's some sort of commotion here." Ian abruptly hung up and turned his attention to four "suits" who had just entered the store and were in the process of hassling Nick. One approached Ian and flashed his identification. He was from CSIS, Canada's very own secret police. He then presented Ian with a search warrant. Ian glanced at it, and knew what was about to happen.

Very shortly, the men had boxed up all of the files in the back, and virtually every other piece of paper in the store. They even unplugged and removed the old computer that he used to manage business related databases and his bookkeeping spreadsheets. They loaded the whole mess into a van.

"So, what the hell's going on?" asked Ian. He was too flabbergasted to do much else.

"We believe that you are in contravention of several sections of the national security act, Mr. Stewart. You are not under arrest at this point, but it would be in your best interest to cooperate fully. We are now proceeding to your place of

residence to carry out the remainder of the warrant. I suggest that you accompany us.”

“That’s okay, I’ll meet you there.” He told Nick to keep the store open, and that he would be back as soon as possible. Once in his truck, he phoned his lawyer.

“Listen Jerry, drop whatever it is you’re doing and meet me at my house. The cops are on the warpath and I need your help.” Jerry Levine, his old friend, attorney, and sometime fishing partner, said he was on the way. Slightly relieved, Ian drove to the townhouse.

The men from CSIS were there awaiting him. “My lawyer is on the way, I’ll let you in as soon as he gets here.”

Thankfully, Jerry arrived just as the cops were beginning to get a bit surly. Jerry asked to see their identification and the warrant. He carefully looked them over. “This is about as vague as a warrant can get, but I advise you to let them do their thing.”

Ian opened the door and turned off the alarm system. He grabbed Booger and tossed him out on the back deck before he got himself into trouble. One of the CSIS people made a beeline for his computer, immediately unplugged it and carried it to the van. They took every computer disk they could find, even the blanks. Next, they emptied his filing cabinet and started examining the books in his bookcase, carefully fanning the pages of each one. As Ian had a lot of books the search was going to take a while.

One of the men gave his gun safe the once over, but other than asking if Ian had the proper permits, left the contents alone. After an hour or so, the leader handed Jerry an itemized list of the items seized at both the store and his townhouse.

Jerry stated that unless his client was charged within 24 hours, he expected the material to be returned and an apology issued. After they left, Ian gave his attorney a somewhat edited version of the events of the previous few days. Jerry suggested that at some time during the week, Ian had stepped into some “very deep shit.”

“Yeah.” Ian nodded and said, “I feel like I’ve gone through a time warp and ended up back in Chekist Russia. Those CSIS guys give me the creeps.”

“I haven’t had much to do with the agency,” Jerry said, “but some people I know in the judiciary have been quite critical of the powers they have been granted. Apparently, an individual’s right to privacy and due process doesn’t mean much at CSIS headquarters. They pretty much do what they want.”

“Great! So they *are* secret police. What next, torture chambers and concentration camps?”

“Who knows? Anyway, there’s nothing more I can do for you now. Let me know if anything changes -- or they arrest you. I would have never guessed that tackle store owners lived such colourful, exciting lives.”

Jerry left and Ian was about to head back to the store when the phone rang. It was Lawrence Connaught. He wanted to pick up the conversation where it had been cut off. After Ian told him what had happened, Connaught’s tone changed. He sounded far less sure of himself. Obviously, he knew nothing about the CSIS raid. “Are you absolutely certain that their identification and authority were genuine?”

Ian told him that his attorney had checked everything very carefully. They were genuine. "Why are you worried? If they found anything -- and they won't -- they would just turn it right over to your bosses anyway, wouldn't they?"

There was a long hesitation before Connaught responded. "I must consult with my principals. This new development is a bit of a surprise. Obviously, I must withdraw my offer. It is unlikely that we can do business now. Good luck."

Ian had never heard Connaught so unsure of himself. Well, he was off the hook with the "military industrial complex." Now he had only Harry to deal with. As he went back out to his truck, he was met by a small group of neighbours wondering what was going on. "Just a little problem with Revenue Canada," he laughed.

That seemed to satisfy them and he made good his escape. Snoopy bastards, he thought as he drove back to the store. He parked out front. He could see that there were still several customers talking to Nick. As he entered he was surprised to see that one of the customers was Harry Converse.

"Your assistant has been giving me some excellent advice regarding local fly fishing. I have been meaning to take it up one of these days. Did you give any thought to my offer from this morning?"

Ian left Nick to deal with another customer while he took Harry to the back of the store. "I guess Nick didn't tell you, but some guys from CSIS showed up a couple of hours ago with a search warrant for both my store and home. They took all of my files and my computers. Obviously, if I had what you were interested in, I have it no longer."

"That's unfortunate, I guess we won't be doing business then."

"Not unless you want me to outfit you with some fly fishing tackle. By the way, do you have access to a computer?"

"Of course, why do you ask?"

"Open your browser and select a search engine. Enter the phrase: 'Fuel cell.' I think you might find the result interesting."

Harry looked at Ian with his eyebrows raised. Suddenly his eyes widened and he stared at him. "You didn't? My God! You have no idea what you've done!" He left the store shaking his head.

Well, so much for Harry and the Japanese. Nick rang up the items for the last customer, then went outside to bring in the Open sign and locked the front door. Ian dealt with the receipts and prepared the night deposit.

"Jesus, quite a day!" Nick stated.

"You have no idea, Nick. Let's head over to Pemberton Station for a beer."

"Good idea. So what fly did you use up at Rice?"

"It's a new chironomid. I call it the 'Black Swan.'"
