



Bushed

by
KEN STANGE

Bushed

BOOKS BY

KEN STANGE

Love Is A Grave (Nebula Press)

Nocturnal Rhythms (Penumbra Press)

These Proses A Problem Or Two (Two Cultures Press)

Cold Pigging Poetics (York Publishing)

More Than Ample (Two Cultures Press)

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God When He's Drunk (Two Cultures Press)

Bushed

Ken Stange



Two Cultures Press
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All the characters in this book are fictitious, including the author, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental, but nonetheless malicious.

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This book is for **Ursula**

Contents

<i>Day 1: A SPACE</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Day 2: MORNING STAR ^a</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Day 3: LIMITS OF CREDIBILITY ^a</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Day 4: COMING OUT ^a</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Day 5: A TOURIST PAMPHLET</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Day 6: FRANK / BEGINNING</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Day 7: PERSONALITY AND MOTIVATION ^a</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Day 8: FOUR DAYS OUT ^a</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Day 9: MANTHA / HALLUCINATION</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Day 10: WHO? ^a</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Day 11: THE LINE, FIRST SEGMENT ^a</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Day 12: BARRIER / BORDER ^a</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Day 13: SPIRIT-LADY OF THE AUTUMN NIGHT ^a</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Day 14: CALCULATIONS</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Day 15: FREDRICK'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR MARCH 8 ^a</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Day 16: BUSH/BUSHED</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Day 17: SOME CRITICAL SYMBOLS ^a</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Day 18: MEETING / FREDRICK</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Day 19: FOX ^a</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Day 20: MIRROR</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Day 21: THE INDIGENOUS MAMMALS ^a</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Day 22: THE AESTHETICS OF THE LAND ^a</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Day 23: BORDERLANDS ^a</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Day 24: ANGLES OF APPROACH</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Day 25: MERRY CHRISTMAS</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Day 26: LOVERS, HUNTERS ^a</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Day 27: CONVERSATION WITH FREDRICK ^a</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Day 28: BREEDING IN THE WOLF AND COYOTE ^a</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Day 29: IT COMES IN THE NIGHT</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Day 30: INDIGENOUS SNAKES</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Day 31: THE LINE, SECOND SEGMENT</i>	<i>51</i>

<i>Day 33: THREE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT MANITOU ^a</i>	56
<i>Day 34: FREDRICK'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR JUNE 1</i>	56
<i>Day 35: THE RAY [FOR FREDRICK] ^a</i>	58
<i>Day 36: CRACK THE WHIP</i>	59
<i>Day 37: DEATH KILLS TIME ^a</i>	59
<i>Day 38: KESOGAMI LAKE, YOUNG-WOMAN BAY ^a</i>	62
<i>Day 39: NOVEMBER IS THE MONTH FOR THE AXE</i>	63
<i>Day 40: 40 BELOW ZERO ^a</i>	65
<i>Day 41: INDIGENOUS TREES ^a</i>	65
<i>Day 42: MARKS ON THE SNOW ^a</i>	67
<i>Day 43: FREDRICK'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR JUNE 15</i>	67
<i>Day 44: THE FOOL IN THE MIRROR ^a</i>	69
<i>Day 45: BLACKFLIES ^a</i>	69
<i>Day 46: FACES ^a</i>	71
<i>Day 47: WE GROW OLD ^a</i>	74
<i>Day 48: THE BRAIN DRAIN ^a</i>	75
<i>Day 49: PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE</i>	76
<i>Day 50: THE LINE, THIRD SEGMENT ^a</i>	77
<i>Day 53: THAT WAS NO LADY ^a</i>	80
<i>Day 54: IS THIS RIDICULOUS?</i>	84
<i>Day 55: WINDIGO SPIRIT^a</i>	85
<i>Day 56: DYING OF YEAR ^a</i>	87
<i>Day 57: AVERAGE DAILY MIN/MAX TEMP FOR TWO CITIES ^a</i>	88
<i>Day 58: ASK NO QUESTIONS AND I'LL TELL YOU NO LIES</i>	88
<i>Day 59: ON A NORTHERN LAKE OF JANUARY ^a</i>	89
<i>Day 60: FREDRICK'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR AUGUST 29</i>	90
<i>Day 61: FRAYING AT THE EDGES ^a</i>	91
<i>Day 62: FREEDOM AND DIGNITY ^a</i>	92
<i>Day 63: BILLY BOY ^a</i>	93
<i>Day 65: PREVIEWS ^a</i>	98
<i>Day 66: MAGNETAWAN ^a</i>	99
<i>Day 67: ADV FOR DELAYED ACTION ANIMAL GAME TRAPS ^a</i>	103
<i>Day 68: WOLVERINE TRACKS ^a</i>	103

<i>Day 69: INDIGENOUS FISH</i>	104
<i>Day 70: BLOOD AND COLD ^a</i>	105
<i>Day 72: FEBRUARY TUNDRA ^a</i>	108
<i>Day 73: WHITE WATER CANOEING TIPS ^a</i>	109
<i>Day 74: NOTES AT THE BORDER ^a</i>	109
<i>Day 75: NEAR EDGE ^a</i>	110
<i>Day 76: DEAD SPOT IN THE CENTER, WINTER'S CENTER ^a</i>	110
<i>Day 77: FAR EDGE ^a</i>	111
<i>Day 78: BEGIN THE DESCENT ^a</i>	111
<i>Day 79: COPERNICUS IN THE BUSH ^a</i>	111
<i>Day 80: GREEN ^a</i>	112
<i>Day 81: DREAMING ^a</i>	113
<i>Day 83: AN ESSAY ON THE WILDERNESS MYSTIQUE</i>	115
<i>Day 84: LET'S KEEP EVERYTHING IN PERSPECTIVE ^a</i>	119
<i>Day 85: NATURAL RIGHTS</i>	120
<i>Day 86: CIVILIZATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH ^a</i>	121
<i>Day 87: GOING NUMB</i>	122
<i>Day 89: NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT ^a</i>	125
<i>Day 90: AGED TAMARACK ^a</i>	125
<i>Day 91: SEVEN DAYS OUT ^a</i>	126
<i>Day 92: START PILING UP THE BODIES ^a</i>	134
<i>Day 93: OLD MAN YOU OUGHT TO KNOW BETTER ^a</i>	135
<i>Day 94: FRAGMENTS ^a</i>	135
<i>Day 95: NOTES ON WOLVES ^a</i>	138
<i>Day 96: THE PLACE OF SYMBOLISM ^a</i>	139
<i>Day 97: SNOWMOBILER ^a</i>	140
<i>Day 98: NEYS PROVINCIAL PARK ^a</i>	141
<i>Day 100: FREDRICK'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR SEPT. 18 ^a</i>	142
<i>Day 101: NORTH SHORE LAKE SUPERIOR [FALL] ^a</i>	143
<i>Day 102: TRAVELING PERSONAL DISTANCES ^a</i>	143
<i>Day 103: ABOUT BARRIERS ^a</i>	144
<i>Day 104: FUTURE TENSE ^a</i>	148
<i>Day 105: BAD NIGHT ^a</i>	148

<i>Day 106: I HAVE REPULSIVE BLOOD ^a</i>	149
<i>Day 107: GOING NUMB</i>	150
<i>Day 108: TAO ^a</i>	153
<i>Day 109: SIOUX LOOKOUT, NO RESERVATION REQUIRED ^a</i>	154
<i>Day 110: HUNTING, EATING ^a</i>	155
<i>Day 111: CROSSED-WINDS RULES</i>	155
<i>Day 112: OLD CONCEPTIONS, NEW CONCEPTIONS ^a</i>	156
<i>Day 113: TODAY'S SCRAP OF MADNESS ^a</i>	157
<i>Day 114: DRUNKEN INJUN ^a</i>	158
<i>Day 115: THE REMAINDERS</i>	159
<i>Day 116: AD FOR A SIMPLE TREE KILLING APPARATUS ^a</i>	160
<i>Day 117: AFTER A CERTAIN TIME ^a</i>	160
<i>Day 118: MISPLACED ^a</i>	161
<i>Day 119: FOUR PARKS, FOUR PERSPECTIVES ^a</i>	164
<i>Day 120: HAMSTRINGING</i>	164
<i>Day 121: MISTABEO ^a</i>	165
<i>Day 122: APRIL FOOL'S DAY ^a</i>	166
<i>Day 123: THE SPRUCE PADDLE ^a</i>	166
<i>Day 125: A VISITOR ^a</i>	168
<i>Day 127: STRAIGHT EDGES ^a</i>	171
<i>Day 128: THE DANGER OF BEAUTY ^a</i>	171
<i>Day 129: FORESHADOW^a</i>	172
<i>Day 130: SOME SKETCHES FROM A CANOE TRIP</i>	173
<i>Day 131: PICTOGRAPHS ^a</i>	178
<i>Day 132: THE DEATH OF TOM THOMSON</i>	179
<i>Day 134: VOYAGEUR DEATH ^a</i>	180
<i>Day 135: FREDRICK'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR SEPTEMBER 30</i>	182
<i>Day 136: I'M GOING TO BEGIN THE TRACKING ^a</i>	182
<i>Day 137: UNDERTOW ^a</i>	183
<i>Day 138: KINNICKINNICK TOBACCO ^a</i>	184
<i>Day 139: HUNGER PANGS ^a</i>	185
<i>Day 140: AN OLD FOLKSONG ^a</i>	185
<i>Day 141: FREDRICK'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR DECEMBER 1 ^a</i>	186

<i>Day 142: THE COMING OF TOTAL UNITY^a</i>	<i>187</i>
<i>Day 143: DEATH IN THE BUSH^a</i>	<i>187</i>
<i>Day 144: WIND CHILL FACTOR^a</i>	<i>190</i>
<i>Day 145: COUNTDOWN^a</i>	<i>191</i>
<i>Day 146: BREAK-Up^a</i>	<i>192</i>
<i>Day 147: TOWARD THE LIMIT^a</i>	<i>193</i>
<i>Day 150: TO EVERY DEATH THERE IS A SEASON^a</i>	<i>208</i>
<i>Day 151: LAST DAY^a</i>	<i>209</i>
<i>Day 152: BUSHED^a</i>	<i>209</i>
<i>ENDNOTES</i>	<i>211</i>
<i>AN IDIOSYNCRATIC BIBLIOGRAPHY</i>	<i>223</i>
<i>AUTHOR'S NOTE</i>	<i>227</i>

The following is a record of one man's winter spent alone in the bush of Northern Ontario. Each chapter is a daily entry into this record: the first chapter being the entry for December 1st, and the last chapter being for May 1st. Some of these entries were written on the day they represent; some were written before that date (either by the author or by his Doppelgänger or by someone else) and only put in place on the entry date. Any eccentricities in this record can be attributed to eccentricities in the author.

Day 1: A SPACE

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This is a book about a space: an attempt to capture one space within another. However, because space remains as ill-defined as time it is inevitable that my drawing of boundaries will fall far short of precision. Still, what this book attempts to encompass is the vast expanse of Northern Ontario . . . including the constricted time of my mind.

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(Alone. I am alone here in late autumn, the first snow already securing the land for winter. ^a All alone with my relics and totems and memories. I am alone, physically alone here in this cabin, beginning to piece together the mosaic that I hope will clarify for me a few people, a few deaths, and a vast space. Alone, spiritually alone here, as are most of us wherever we are; and I have very little time, as little as most of us have whenever we are. I have with me my short list of names, my garbled notes, Frederick's journal, and some books. It is from these traces of brief contact and from the long winter that I will extract the pieces for my mosaic, although right now as I sit here with the first page unrolling on the carriage of this old typewriter, I have no idea where this is going ... or where I am going. Closing my eyes I see concentric circles, starting to turn, beginning to whirl into spirals.)

•

Northern Ontario, like all space, is relative. It all depends on your frame of reference. To a man from Toronto it begins somewhere past the rolling moraines sixty miles north of the metropolitan scramble, perhaps defined by the sudden passage onto the exposed Pre-Cambrian Shield. To the man from an arctic Settlement, all of Ontario is South. To the development planner most of Ontario is labeled the "Middle North": a vast boreal forest, subarctic, and filled with "unexploited" natural resources. To the wilderness-seeker it is wherever civilization remains invisible for a space of time. To the man of fantasy it is not so much a place as a mythology. And to me it is an experiential space including rocks and people and moods and

movements and the feel of my paddle dipping in a river that is never the same.

.

(It would be nice to remain objective, but no space exists objectively: we are but the receptacles of the universe.^b I would enjoy listing birds and beasts and trees and minerals; I would enjoy omitting the friends and deaths, and writing an unpeopled account of this magnificent area. Yet not the simplest shape or colour comes to us in its natural state, for we must always rearrange reality to perceive it. I know this intellectually, and I know that Frank with his pomposity and Diana with her sexuality and Mantha and Robinson and the others are bound to intrude, but still the beginning is the appropriate place to indulge delusions of objectivity.^c The beginning is the place to forewarn, the place to rationalize the tangled undergrowth ahead. The exploration of this strange place begins soon enough.)

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Part of a region can be captured in a novel, another part in a map, another part in a tourist guidebook, another part in a poem, another part in a history, another part in a scientific report, another part in a journal, other parts in other genres. But no balanced space, multi-dimensional, is possible in one genre. The novel or story inevitably deals with the created character, but with Northern Ontario where much of its space is free of humans and their entangled relationships, the novel must fall short. A map is two-dimensional, not multi-dimensional as is all space. A tourist guidebook is literature but a literature cleansed of impurities - excepting of course commercialism - and the North is rich with mistakes, misfits and blemishes. Verse is too rarefied for the Northern expanses, although often right in understanding how to relate to space. While a history, by definition, rests in the past and is static. A scientific report gives facts, not feelings, and anything untempered by honest personalism always presents a misleading perspective. The journal is too much of the inside; its space is too bounded by reality's harshest walls: the self.

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(My self: not important per se, but all things seen are seen through a particular set of eyes. I know as I sit here watching the snow sifting down that the way I wrap this space will be compounded by your vision of my vision. What

control I have disappears with each word typed. The space of this record mingles with the feel of the land merging with the hard-rock fact of the land. Your extensions of this space must most naturally include other books, mind-trips along maps, and actual encounter with the North. The North is a concept, unreal as space, not just a place on this globe. It is cold in here.)

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Thus I will mix up a hodgepodge: a coarse attempt to combine the different methods and approaches of literature and somehow form them into the shape of Northern Ontario. The result will be both objective and subjective, although most likely more of the latter than the former. If I succeed this will not be a substitute nor a model of Northern Ontario. (For that is a theory of aesthetics I cannot accept.) It will merely be a bit of space that includes and is included in another space. It will merely be a bit of space singled out for exploration.

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This book is written for myself and for those people, anywhere, that feel the need for more space. I have found that space in the wilderness of this particular North. I have also found much more: things less satisfying and very disturbing. Indulge my angle of approach.

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Day 2: MORNING STAR ^a

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Like a tooth coming out: pain, then the feeling of a great hole. But a tooth is a very small part of one's body; individually it is of little importance. The metaphor holds up, for what did she really mean to me? Very little. Mean daily time spent with her: 1 hour and 17 minutes.

"You don't enjoy the Hunt, the Kill," she said by way of explanation; her hands, normally so still, now fidgeting one with the other.

“Yes, especially I don’t like the Kill,” I said, “but Christ! quit with the stupid symbolism, will you, this isn’t a theatre.” The woman was an actress to the end; the play a game; playing a game. I had just become too involved in my assigned role. That’s all.

She glanced into my eyes, looked down again at her hands, and looking, stilled them. We were parked along Henderson’s road, a bush track more than a road really, and had ostensibly come to shoot partridge. The day was clear.

“Especially the Kill, you say,” murmured pensively.

“Damn it Diana, let’s play this scene later! We came to try our luck with the partridge, remember?” But of course you can’t change your dental appointment once you’re in the chair. Already it was out. Already over. All that remained was the clean-up, a few pleasantries, and good-bye. Plus. residual pain and the adjusting to the small loss.

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The leaves were already coming down, for it had been, unusual here, a short autumn. And a wet one, for we had to do a slow dance down the road, leaping from dry spot to dry spot. No flies in the crisp air; the sun bright overhead. Yes, this was my season. And no partridge.

“Let’s try the trail to Otter Lake,” she suggested. The path led first up a small hill, then passed down into and through a swampy area, rising finally into a level stretch of deciduous woodland, recently cut and good partridge country.

She led, of course, and in a few minutes we were mucking our trousers on the swampy part of the trail. Occasionally the foul smell of marsh gas assailed us; occasionally I slipped and almost went down in the mire. She naturally led sure-footed and rapidly. I began to feel like a small child clambering behind his long-legged parent.

Then suddenly, as though materializing in the sharp air, there stood a deer in the path ahead. It froze and we froze. I watched as Diana slowly began to raise her rifle.

“Illegal here, now,” I said softly.

The deer twitched at the sound of my voice and turned his head to stare blankly at us. We remained motionless for a few more fragments of time, but then Diana began again to slowly lift her gun.

“Illegal here, now,” I said loudly this time.

In an instant the deer was a blur of movement . . . as was Diana. The shot rang out. The blur of movement momentarily lost its grace, then bounded into the bush. Diana fired again. The deer slipped into the mosaic of trees and bush. Gone.

“You’re a lousy shot; you only wounded it.” I said.

She spun around and aimed her gun at my head. I stared at her in total amazement. The second skin comes off.

Of course, if you hunt you know a deer has no right wandering through wetlands.

.

We had no choice but to track it and finish the kill. Diana’s gun was a .22, hardly appropriate for hunting deer, but although she disdained the game warden’s laws, she could not ignore natural law. At least one has to give her credit for that. So off we set.

Sloshing through wet bush for an hour, maybe two, before we were led up into drier terrain, made me irritable. Neither of us spoke, although I sometimes muttered vague curses under my breath at the darkening sky. A way of killing the pain, you might say.

In the woodland we accidentally flushed a grouse and Diana, the bitch, blew its head off. Blood. I hate blood. I hate death. You carry the dead, I thought, for you love it. Death kills the pain.

We trudged on. Hours passed. My irritation grew deeper. My legs grew tired. Still we went on.

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The deer was dead in the twilight. The shot had scattered into the neck and shoulders and caused a surprising amount of bleeding. The blood, the life, had slowly drained out of the creature. Now deer, now carcass.

“Now what?” I said, looking down at her victim, ‘It’s getting dark.’

“I’ll come back tomorrow and . . .” “It’ll rot.”

She hesitated then began, “Maybe the wolves . . .”

“Damn it you know we’re too close to the city for wolves.” “Then we’ll tie her up and haul her out in the dark. We’ll have to walk part way back in the dark anyway.”

“Tie her with what? All we’ve got is a bit of twine.”

“Then she’ll just have to wait until tomorrow.”

“And you’re a fool,” she replied in like tone.

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taking up permanent residence. The view I had as a visitor differs considerably from my present perspective. One has to winter here to really learn this land. So one could say I am an outsider entering at a tangent. We must always approach each object of knowledge from some predetermined direction, and mine was up from the urban welter. You will notice, however, that when you walk at night many stars invisible to the direct stare become visible if viewed out of the corner of your eye. Perhaps, it is only the outsider that can see clearly what is invisible to the native.

My life's movements so far have been against the mesh of the past, and my rationality is constructed from this past. By moving to this cabin and the outer edge, I hope to see what I could not see from the center . . . but I take chances in stretching personal limits. We fear what is unknown more than anything, and how many men, urban in background, have really known physical isolation? And fear, of course, is the one thing most likely to destroy sanity.

For the third day now snow is sifting down: it is like a door slowly and softly closing. I can't help thinking of Frank saying that the only way we ever really conquer the fear of death is by dying.

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There is an invisible web
that runs from man to land
thru woman and intention.

We ignore it at our own risk.
We spend whole lives dancing
within it.

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It is rarely cut but by death.

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So here I am. It is December 4th. I have made arrangements to be picked up May 1. Officially it is not yet winter, but as I fit in the fourth piece I am regularly shaken by quick shivers. It is winter here, even if it is still autumn in the south.

The south. How far away that seems. Yet I still can vividly remember getting off the train, packsack over one

shoulder. I remember how the man on the freight car nearly dropped my canoe on a woman with child. How the pine smell of the cool summer night cut through the beer fog in my brain.

Standing by the tracks I thought of my previous skirmishes with this land. Inhaling deeply and swelling under an expanding déjà vu sensation, I gathered my gear. I had arrived at last, become resident of the mythic North of my imagination, even though it was June and my pack and canoe marked me as a tourist. (Even now, perhaps, I am still the naive tourist at heart and my viewpoint the tourist's.) My new home was to be a small town calling itself a city, also calling itself the "Gateway to the North". To me this place was but a tourist trap, a small and unaesthetic town, but still a place on the periphery of a space that obsessed me. I hate to admit it, but actually - a gateway. Some of the cities I had lived in were equally ugly, but they at least counter-balanced this by extensive cultural resources. North Bay, named after the postal address for a keg of railroad nails, lacked this particular compensation. What it did offer was ready access to hundreds of thousands of square miles of Bush.

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THERE IS MAGIC IN THE BUSH.

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Day 5:

A TOURIST PAMPHLET

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"This lovely city which curls around the shores of Lake Nipissing has many names, but none so apt as 'The Gateway to the North'.

"In area, the second largest city in Canada, it encompasses 130 square miles and first-time visitors are struck by its cleanliness and beauty.

"Located at the junction of Trans-Canada Highway 17 and Highway 11, and served by the Canadian National,

Canadian Pacific and Ontario Northland Railways, it is easily accessible by train, plane, bus or car.

“This lively city with a population of over 46,000 people, has a proud past and a glowing future.

“In its early days North Bay was welcome haven for explorers, trappers, and adventurers journeying through Upper Canada. These intrepid men pushed back the frontiers and opened up areas of wild, rugged beauty to the brave settlers who left us this heritage. The waters and streams gave those early adventurers fish and highways. The forest provided meat and shelter, and the same is just as true today.^a

“As early as 1615, records show that Samuel de Champlain traveled up the Ottawa River to the Mattawa and into Lake Nipissing, then out the French River to Georgian Bay.

“The Champlain Trail, as it came to be known, became the established route for travellers and North Bay was the connecting link between the ‘old established settlements’ of Upper Canada and the vast, uncharted forests of Northwestern Ontario.”

(from *A Visitor's Guide to North Bay*)

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Day 6: FRANK / BEGINNING

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I met Frank that first night in North Bay. He was driving a cab at that time, and he was the only driver in the train station willing to tie a canoe to the roof of his cab. I could have left the canoe at the station, but I wanted everything together at my new house and intended to take a brief night paddle in the lake.

We rigged the canoe precariously over his cab light, and pulled out of the parking lot. Perhaps it was the beer, but for one reason or another I was unusually talkative, and Frank, as I was soon to learn, always enjoyed talking . . . or rather making pronouncements.

“New-comer eh? You’ll get to hate it here if you’ve lived in Toronto. This place is a wasteland. Dead spot in the center. What do you do?”

“Used to do some journalism, some photography . . . was an adman for a few years.”

“What’re you going to do here?”

“Just live,” I replied, then added, “I’ve inherited some money and won’t have to work for awhile.”

Glancing over at me sharply he suddenly commented, “You’ve come for the Bush, another refugee from civilization. Christ, you guys are common as rain.”

I started to object but he cut me short saying, “It’s okay, don’t get upset: I’m not objecting to your quest, it’s just that you’re in the wrong place. Sorry to say, you should have stayed on that train till it reached the end of rail. This city is neither here nor there. A dirty little limbo. I know; I’ve worked in the Bush.”

“Doing what?”

“Mostly in lumber camps. I’ve done some guiding.”

This set me off, and in sudden enthusiasm I started questioning him about canoe routes, fishing and hunting areas. In general, I set about unconsciously confirming his suspicion that I was just a tourist not satisfied with a short visit. Still, even if he thought me naive and I thought him a bit patronizing, somewhere something clicked and we were attracted to each other. By the time we reached my new house, we’d made arrangement to meet for a few beers the next evening. We untied the canoe and he was off.

My possessions had preceded me, excluding the canoe and some personal gear, so that when I arrived at the house I found everything set up according to instruction. My place was right along the shore of Lake Nipissing and out the window I could see moonlight twinkling on the waves.

That first night (the beginning of an encounter with the space that now threatens to engulf me) was simple, pleasant and sentimental: I just sat in an overstuffed chair watching and listening to the waves slapping the moonlit beach. My urge to go out in the canoe dissipated, and I was content to stare out onto the water, remembering childhood. In my reverie the house became a summer cottage far south of here, the “city” a countryside, the night a night eight thousand nights ago, when our small

woodlot was a wilderness and the shoreline of a nearby pond was a steamy jungle teeming with strange life-forms. A breeze drifted through the screendoor . . . “screendoor summers” . . . the smell of grass and pine. It is the smells of childhood more than any other sensation that truly carries one back into the past. In the North, where the air is still clear, you can smell again. And in the North, where the distances are immense, you can feel small again.^a

Day 7:
PERSONALITY AND MOTIVATION^a

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- - Why does a man go North? Why do wolves kill those graceful deer? Why does a man go mad? Am I too fond of the “why” of things? “Forget it, just cross over,” Frank used to say.
 - Why does a man go North? To capture an illusion of childhood . . . or an illusion of being natural.
- - Coming North may be regression
 - down the phylogenetic scale
 - the passing back to unhampered self
 - and beyond to the freedom of irrationality
- - “A stone lies in a river; a piece of wood is jammed against it; dead leaves, drifting logs and branches caked with mud collected around; weeds settle and soon birds have made a nest and are feeding their young among the blossoming water plants. Then the river rises and the earth is washed away. The birds migrate, the flowers wither, the branches are dislodged and drift downward; no trace is left of the floating island but a stone submerged by the water: such is our personality.”
 - (from *The Unquiet Grave* by Cyril Connolly)
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Return to rock face? A scraping away of the superfluous, which we call our personality? That simple? Some kind of return? Attempt to get back? No. More than that, but it's down in the ice, frozen in until spring. Eyes open staring up.^b

Why does a man go North? I remember the winter I almost saw the end. Walking alone, half frozen, all day in the thick air. I made it to an old trapper's cabin around dusk: dry wood for a pot-belly stove and rum. It was two days before I moved on. Left a note for the man; since I lived with his ghost all that time, I felt it was the least I could do. Well, why not?

Pre-Cambrian

Post-Industrial

odd aggregate of the old and the new

“A man goes north to become animal, to turn the whole day toward food and a place to sleep warm. Small cracks begin at the bases of marble angels that were his ideas. His days come down like trees felled to feed an insatiable fire.”

(from *Great Bear Lake Meditations* by J.M. Yates)

Several years have passed since those early days in that border settlement with its old buildings and new streets, its motels and fishing camps, and time and the North beyond this town has wrought strange changes upon my mind. The town is important only as contrast, for it is the Bush beyond the settlements, and the few people that have moved in that Bush with me, that have really affected me most profoundly.

In fact, since I first arrived up here I have spent most of my time in the back-country. This country penetrates a man's character, changing him in ways he'll never rationally understand. Those that are alone out here (as I am now) sometimes behave in ways we would usually define as insane: giving up speech and even the slightest token gesture of cleanliness, developing what most would call delusions about the totemic forces of Nature, sometimes even starving themselves or killing themselves in wild and unreasonable confrontations with Nature at her most violent intersections: rapids, storms, cold. These men are said to be "bushed".

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Day 8:
FOUR DAYS OUT ^a

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Out here
night has a way
a way of settling in
like a lover grown confident
Pines relax their asymmetric tension,
movements lose their identity
and so does a man.

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Day 9:
MANTHA / HALLUCINATION

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“So she told me to wait by the carcass while she hiked out to the car to get some rope.”

Frank finished his mug of beer, signaled the waitress, and asked me if I did indeed wait, “guardian of the dead”.

“Yeah, like the fool, I did. I figured it would take her three or more hours to find her way back to the car and then return, so I didn’t worry until it had gotten quite late. The night was clear - no moon, so very dark - but clear. I just lay on the ground watching the stars. Saw a few fall.” I looked out the window of the Lakeview Inn at the frozen lake.

“And ?”

“Well after awhile even this fool started to suspect she wasn’t coming back. I considered the possibility, pondered it. If I headed back I should surely meet her returning ... if she was returning . . . so I decided finally to walk out.”

“Don’t tell me: you got lost!”

“Be a more interesting story if I did, but no, somehow I found my way back to Henderson’s Road. Then I had to walk out to the highway, eight miles or so, and thumb back to North Bay. Took a long time to get a ride. It was nearly dawn before I crawled into my own bed.”

“She’s quite a woman,” Frank said. The waitress came with a couple more beers, and we poured in silence.

“When did all this happen?” asked Mantha, who up to now had said nothing.

“Oh it hasn’t yet, but it will,” I replied smiling.

We were quite thoroughly soused by closing time, so Frank’s idea somehow seemed reasonable. We went to his place to pick up skis, food and more booze. It was a little past two in the morning when we three started on our cross-country ski-trek to the islands. Lake Nipissing’s Manitou Islands are about seven miles out from the shore. The first mile was a joke: we tripped and slipped and blundered along, three drunks with big feet.

The next mile we managed to get the rhythm, perhaps because the exercise was sobering us up. But in gaining co-ordination, we also gained speed. I grew tired, but didn’t want to say anything, for my companions seemed to be bursting with energy. Nevertheless, eventually I had to stop to catch my breath.

“Okay?” asked Mantha.

“Let’s do this some other time,” I said.

“Sure.” Mantha smiled, but not condescendingly.

“In that case, let’s have a drink before heading back,” interjected Frank.

We took off our skis and sat down in the snow. The lights of North Bay danced afar off across the white waste. There was a good moon, nearly full and the surface of the lake was bright with reflected light.

“If anyone could see us sitting a couple miles off shore, passing around a bottle of rum, they’d think they were hallucinating,” I said.

“They would be,” said Frank.

So who is Mantha? The correct question is who was Mantha. I am remembering this on December 9th of a different year. People have come and gone. I warned you that you'll have to indulge my angle of approach.

The ground is now covered with snow. Winged Lake was already frozen when I arrived here. For all I know no one is alive out there. The years matter and the years do not matter, but the seasons are all important.

Why? The hell with why! How? There is a more useful question. How? How leads us onto the path to why. How permits of real and solid answers. This is not true of the amorphous and ambiguous why.

I type this seated at a small wooden table. You read this and accept it. What is in print you accept. You. You know things. I don't. You. You no longer question things. You gave that up along with the other follies of youth. You. You are sensible, normal.

You don't accept wilderness; you reject it violently. Still, you do not question it. The answers come sliding out from under rock, come pushing up through thin soil like a young stem, come like a wall of rain across the lake, come spurting out with the blood of a wounded beast. These answers frighten you, don't they? It hurts a man's pride more to be ignored than to be hated.

I rant at you, but I don't know you. I am really scolding myself ... or the part of my self that begs me to stop. When alone you begin to break up into fragments, just to have someone to talk to.

I piece this together from fragments of the wilderness, fragments of my confusion, and fragments of loneliness. This cabin has only one room. This room has only one occupant. So I move from the short to the long of it. I touch and go, hint and pass. It is my nature. Nature! Now there's a word! Nature?

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Moving through the stillness like spirits, the swish of skis on a light powder-snow, the breath of the skiers white in the moonlight. On the surface, moving over the surface of water in a hard season, three wintered men returning home. Or three winter mirages. Your choice. ^a

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Day 10:
WHO? ^a

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I watched in fascinated horror for too long before I again looked ahead. I saw immediately that I had let us get too close to the island. Afraid to turn too sharply, and dump him off his skis, I tried to edge the boat out. It was then I heard him yell. Turning I saw him let go of the pull rope just as I heard the scream of my propeller blade scraping a rocky shoal. Flung forward violently, I was thrown against the windshield and stunned. My head swam with confused images: winter lakes, fires, waves. Somehow, though, I managed to get to my feet. My vision cleared, and I could see him struggling wildly through the icy waters, struggling slowly toward the island - the desperate movements of a man clumsily mimicking a swimmer. I kicked off my sneakers and dived in after him. The bitterly cold water was such a shock that my breath locked in my lungs. Swimming around, confused and pained, I could no longer see him: he must've already gone under. In desperation I swam and dived in the rapidly fading light, until the cold caused my foot to cramp with bone-deep pain. Then I set out for the island, barely reaching it. I must have crawled into the underbrush before I passed out.

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Day 11:
THE LINE, FIRST SEGMENT ^a

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One method of penetration is the line - beginning of any geometry. Moving northward: Toronto to Cape Henrietta Maria on Hudson Bay.

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Mile 1: Driving up Young Street in Toronto. A major city, civilization, a large population. Peopled streets. Off to each side, treed avenues and preened lawns. Tree species highly varied - fruit trees, Butternut, Sassafras, Manitoba Maple, Blue Spruce. Occasional squirrel sighted. Pollution count: 27 (safe but unhealthy'. Sky gray. Temperature: 93° F.

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Mile 27: Driving on Highway 400 North. The countryside rolling green farm land. Pastoral as a poem from the English Romantic Period. Soil obviously rich; farmers equally obviously rich. Sky clearing. Fat of the land. Tree species are those deciduous trees common to the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Forest Region, such as Sugar Maple, White Elm, Beech, Red Ash, Basswood, White Oak, and Butternut. A few Hemlocks, Tamaracks, Cedars and White Pine are also encountered in the area. There are few nonindigenous trees like the decorative Blue Spruce that occurs throughout Toronto's finer residential districts. The overpowering smell of manure: almost sweet. Human beings not visible anywhere across these rolling, rolling rich greenlands. The occasional cow. The smell of manure.

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Mile 41: Extreme long, straight hills rolling North. Moraines, glacial debris, produce this oddly tilting land. It was ice that brought the rich soil to this region. Off Highway 400 in either direction, extensive farms sprawl across the cascading planes of the land. Sky blue as ice. Temperature: 85° F.

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Mile 63: Passing the town of Barrie on Lake Simcoe. Lake Simcoe, nearly forty miles long, dotted with boats, water sparkling with the noonday sun. A town clean and peaceful, rural but rich, reminds one of days when things went slower, of those "screendoor summers" misty in the past. Kids playing. A cool breeze.

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Mile 71: The rolling hills are gone although the land still heaves. Now starting onto the Pre-Cambrian Shield, many hundreds of

millions of years old -- this bedrock that constantly surfaces through its ultra-thin soil skin. The last ice-age scraped and compressed this land. The soil suddenly is very poor. The highway winds again and again through the rock-cuts blasted in this ancient Shield. On the tops of hills often no soil cover at all - just primitive lichen clinging to its Shield.

Mile 83: A dead skunk in the middle of the road. The smell penetrates the auto, stays for miles.

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Mile 96: Muskoka-Lakes country. Cottage country. A mixed forest of deciduous and coniferous trees, countless small Sphagnum bogs, thousands of bright clear little lakes and rivers. On most lakes a few small summer cottages spread along the shores; motorboats or canoes skim the water. Middle-aged men in sport shirts and shorts, kids with scraped knees, picnics, and beautiful young girls that water-ski. The sun bright and high.

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Mile 99: The pattern is set. From the highway: trees, trees, trees, lake, trees, trees.

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Mile 104: Deer at wood border fifteen feet from the shoulder of the highway. Still for seconds. Then gone.

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Mile 114: Dead porcupine on the shoulder of the road. Temperature 83° F.

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Mile 134: Huntsville. Off to the east Highway 60 cuts into the southern section of the three thousand square mile wilderness of Algonquin Park, with its two thousand lakes, its wolf-packs and wilderness seekers. Now driving through upland hills of the Algonquin Dome. Sugar-Maple - Yellow-Birch - Hemlock forest. The tops of hills offer great vistas of forested hills, knolls, extending in every direction. Highway winding, turning, up hills, curving down through this extremely attractive woodland.

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Mile 176: Miles keep rolling past. The extent of this lovely, relatively unpopulated forest begins to impress. No wonder that many people don't worry about depletion of the forest resources; the extension of this forest seems infinite. Temperature: 81° F. This region was once mountainous before the leveling glaciers came. The bush is full of wildlife.

Mile 179: Another dead skunk.

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Mile 187: Powassan. Hints of farming country. Few cleared fields visible from the highway. Off to the east, cattle country then the Bush border to Algonquin Park. An occasional cloud passing slowly over the sun.

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Mile 189: Cattle farming: Guernseys, Holsteins, Shorthorns, Mixed.

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Mile 197: Around a bend then suddenly the downhill curve and to the left the bright waters hundreds of feet below - Callander Bay of Lake Nipissing. A thin line of islands visible a mile out and beyond that the choppy waters of the main body of the lake extending to the horizon. Down the steep hill. Flocks of ravens scattering to the wind. Dead raccoon.

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Mile 207: A touch of civilization: North Bay. Continuing North over a high ridge takes you: North. Rest here.

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(All these changes, the emphasis of seasons and weather outlooks, introducing the unstable cycle. The meaning of it an so inextricably entangled in the mathematical and emotional topography of this place, with its planes and intersections, turns and returns. There is a geometry of direction up here, non-Euclidean, composed of acute angles and large areas, circumferences incalculable, theorems of proportion erratic and axiomatic. So it is to regain the linear that I sometimes travel this nearly straight line south to North, Toronto to Hudson Bay.)

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North Bay: Rest here. Tourist here.

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Day 12:
BARRIER / BORDER ^a

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North Bay is situated just south of a height of land that marks a major change in landscape and climate. In the past the town was the last outpost of civilization before the descent into the real Boreal North, and the only practical access to the wilderness beyond was by canoe. Now a lonely ribbon of highway continues its line North, driving out from the centre of the city into the centre of the wilderness. Even now many tourists that come to the city, believing themselves deep in the North, must wonder at what lies beyond that hilly barrier, what kind of Northland exists beyond those ominous hills north of the city. For even today, with the “suburban development” of what the locals call the “ridge”, this swelling of the shield at the edge of town appears primeval, like a reassertion of the Pre-Cambrian Rock’s natural rights to this place.

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The land watches.

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Day 13:
SPIRIT-LADY OF THE AUTUMN NIGHT ^a

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I had to walk along the long way back there
barefoot
in the dark of the wood.
Trail barely visible, a pale ghostly winding ahead left,
right, turning dodging
between tentacles of unsaid life
reaching out out
from behind alders, swamp spruce.

A spider's web, another's will
breaking-tangling
in my face. The mud sucking at my passing
like a lusting woman.
The cool night air sharpens
my small hairs.
Some thing
crosses my path.

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I know you walk beside me
not to guide
but just to see what happens.

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Day 14: CALCULATIONS

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So now that you've come this far, you start to wonder where this all leads. What's that old cliché - "you can't see the forest for the trees"? Ah, but you know you're in a forest!

Each year Diana took a man in Spring and ran him through the seasons' cycle. Frank was first, Mantha second, then I arrived in time to take the third position, and finally Fredrick.

Outside the temperature is 22 below. The night clear. Tonight, for the first time since I've settled in here, I heard wolves howling. Now, however, they are silent. I wish they would take up their song again; they do not frighten me, they comfort me.

Moosonee is about two hundred miles northeast of my present location.^a If one traveled in a straight line from here to there, it is highly unlikely you would encounter another human being.

It is because I think of Fredrick that I try to draw a midsummer line straight into the North, while the snow lies here in three foot curving drifts outside my window. As I peruse his Journals, attempting to draw from his shallow prose some

understanding of this one man's obsessions and explorations, my own sterile and frozen emotions scorn me. But then it is only middle of December, and I am still sane.

I remember something Frank said to me second night in North Bay. As we sat drinking our beer he made the observation that the ghosts of civilization are usually people come back from the dead, while the spirits of the wilds are most often animals or some non-human creature. As usual, he wasn't entirely correct.^b

An outside observer, if there was an outside observer, would say that I am starting to get "spooked". I've rarely had nightmares, yet last night I awoke at three in the morning full of panic. I can remember nothing specific, only vague images.

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Day 15:

FREDRICK'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR MARCH 8^a

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"This is no small change, arriving in North Bay after spending my whole life in the core of one of the continent's densest urban centers. This city has a population of only 45,000 and it situated right in the heart of sparsely populated wilderness. I've rented a house on Lake Nipissing, a large, wild lake once part of the voyageur route west, now a famous pickerel and muskie fishing spot. The wilderness encroaches within the city limits: bears, I'm told, wandered into the city last fall because of a poor blueberry crop in the bush. And one could easily drive twenty minutes from my house, stop the car, walk off into a forest thick as sin and never be seen again. In fact, every fall a few hunters do just that. Yet the people here consider themselves city dwellers, the surrounding bush tame, and the true North, the real wilderness, somewhere hundreds of miles further along the 'north highway'. Well, our perspectives differ.

"The very first thing that struck me when I arrived here was that the sky is so much larger, so much more intense a

presence. I've had a touch of the flu, and I found that looking at the sky up here induced vertigo. It is just too large, too extensive. But again people here don't understand; they insist the sky in the western prairies is larger. Maybe so, still I feel as though I'm perched on the edge of the earth, and somewhere not much farther north is the Abyss. The sun has been high and stark these first days, lighting an unending expanse of blue with the rare relief of an occasional cumulus cloud, small and surreal.

"I have finished unpacking today and have decided to start this journal to keep me company, for I know hardly anyone here and feel very much an outsider. When I tell people here my impressions of their region, they seem to find it amusing. So for awhile, at least, I'll talk to myself. In a way I also hope to make this journal a symbolic gesture of a new start, here at the end of the sky, here at the edge of the North, the Abyss. Meanwhile somewhere within the black hole I left little over a week ago, a certain woman is probably thinking about me as she revolves her hips around another stranger in purgatory."

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Day 16: BUSH/BUSHED

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Bush. Now there is word heavily laden with meaning and association, a word as dense and dark with mystery as the forest interior it describes. Heavy word: the strain of carrying, carrying on. Even men who have never seen the dense woodland interior of the North say they are "bushed" when they grow weary. Looking in the small dictionary I have with me ^a I find bush defined as: 1) a low-spreading, woody plant, generally smaller than a tree; shrub (in the far North the winters never permit ordinary trees to grow beyond shrub size, all growth stunted by the long and severe winters); or 2) a thick growth of bushes; thicket; undergrowth (think for a moment about the rich reverberation of that word - undergrowth); or 3) shrubby

woodland; wild or uncleared country (yes, here we get to the heart, the wilds, the woods of the North or of a man's mind and all the atavistic fear that includes). BUSH. More than that. Bush is also slang for the pubic hair of a woman - here too is mystery and thicket and primitive response. This sexual undertone colours all definitions of the word. BUSH. Bush is sometimes used as a verb meaning to grow thickly, spread out. Or bush can suggest provincial, second-rate, as in the expression "bush league". (Implication being that urban is center, although center of exactly what isn't clear.) And then there is that fine old word, bushwacker, which can mean either a backwoodsman or a guerrilla fighter. BUSH. And then very important is the expression: "he's bushed", read "he is mad". But madness of a specific kind. This madness does not resemble that of the urban schizophrenic or the rich manic-depressive or the academic paranoid. "A stone lies in a river" For some the elements have shaped the personality; perhaps when the elements complete the cycle and erode away the facade, one arrives at the condition described as "bushed". Perhaps not so much a madness as a liberation from rationality: the erasure of the adjective in the expression - "man is a rational animal".

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THERE IS MAGIC IN THE BUSH

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Day 17: SOME CRITICAL SYMBOLS ^a

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Autumn

Birch

Blackflies

Blood

Bush

Champlain

Deer

Diana
Drownings
Frank
Fredrick
Hunted
Hunter
Ice
Lake
Manitou
Mantha
Maple
Me
Moon
Moose
Mosquito
Muskeg
Parks
Pine
Pond
Rain
River
Road
Robinson, Mr.
Robinson, Mrs.
Shield, Pre-Cambrian
Sky
Sleep
Snow
Spring
Spruce
Summer
Sun
Tamarack
Temperature
Thomson
Trail
Wilderness
Wind
Windigo
Winter
Wolf^b

Wolverine

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Day 18:
MEETING / FREDRICK

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I first met Fredrick at a party, although he lived only a half mile down the beach from me. It was May 24th weekend, Victoria

Day long-weekend. Spring was already sliding into summer; the ice had been off Trout Lake for nearly a month, and people were water skiing ... even swimming for short periods of time.

Fredrick was standing alone on the dock, staring out over the calm dusk water, when I came down the slab steps from the cottage. I was curious about this stranger, for Frank had spoken of him, so I walked up, made some casual comment about the good weather, and then introduced myself. He was friendly enough, although he seemed a bit distracted, his face frequently registering mild confusion, almost as though he wasn't really paying much attention to you. Studying him I came to the conclusion (a conclusion few people ever reach) that this man looked like me. He had the same youngish features; we were both tall, slight of build although not unmuscular. It wouldn't surprise me, I concluded, if we were mistaken for brothers.

As we stood talking and sipping our drinks, a loon called out from near the island across the channel. At the sound of this bird's weird cry, Fredrick's face registered such disoriented surprise that I burst out laughing. He stared at me with that confused and distracted expression flickering across his face, as I explained that a rather common northern waterfowl was the source of the eerie cry. Then I began retelling the old tale about loons being reincarnations of the recently dead, and their haunting melancholy call, the wailing

of lost spirits. At least to this he listened with inordinate attention.

This party was being given by Stan Barker, a graying history prof at the local college. Stan had a habit of drawing his guests from as many widely divergent sources as possible in our area: there were rich and poor, bright and dull, artists and academics. His only criterion was some degree of eccentricity. I spent most of one party just following the old boy around, watching him watch his guests; it was with obvious and perverse delight that he observed the indelicate personality clashes such a mixture is bound to produce. This party was no exception, although things hadn't really gotten very rowdy yet. One older gentleman from a local real estate firm had stormed out half an hour ago after a brief conversation with Mantha, my friend whose constantly fluctuating but always radical opinions made him one of Stan's favorite guests. But aside from this incident, the party was relatively dull. Most of the guests were still in the cottage listening to Champlain describe the La Vase Portage between Trout Lake and Lake Nipissing. Champlain was describing graphically how one of his men broke his neck when the canoe slipped and crushed him. This carry across the divide was certainly grueling, but Champlain was making it sound like a seven week marathon. It was for that reason that I had originally deserted the cottage and gone down to the dock.

While Fredrick was listening to my questionable Indian fable about ghosts and loons, I noticed a canoe approaching from the island. I had a strong suspicion who it was, for I hadn't seen Diana yet, and I knew she was expected. The canoe came across the water slowly, but Fredrick was too engrossed in my story to notice until it was nearly at shore. As it drew up to the dock and Fredrick turned, Diana stopped her virtually erotic stroking of the water, allowing the canoe to coast gently - sidling up to the dock. I stepped over, dropped to my knees and held the gunwales as she leaped gracefully out. Dressed in white blouse and shorts, tanned well in advance of the summer sun, her long sleek hair held by a plain leather thong, she had her desired effect on us. I knew that her entrance by canoe in the rapidly disappearing dusk-light was intentional and staged with cold deliberation. I admired it still, as lovely if artificial. Fredrick clearly admired it too, all hint of distraction gone from his open

face, but I suspected that he was quite ignorant of its artificiality. His face was full of admiration and surprise, a surprise far deeper but in some way similar to his startle response to the loon. There is no denying that Diana is beautiful, but I somehow expected Fredrick to show more of the urban cool ... for I didn't yet know how much of an extremist he was. Instead he was staring at her like some gawking kid from the sticks. Diana, no doubt expecting a larger audience on the dock, clearly intended to at least make the most of this appreciation. She ignored me - which was to be expected, as my time had passed. So after making the necessary introductions, I left my new acquaintance to his fate.

She is going to make a fool of him I thought as I climbed the steps to the cottage. The Robinsons, cousins of Stan, were listening in stunned silence to Mantha -- who is Cree dissecting the "white-man". Mantha had been a good friend from my first days in North Bay, and I was delighted to find he had upstaged Champlain. Although I had always found him basically very quiet, intelligent and good-natured, he loved putting on a radical guise at parties. Then he would rant and, rave and nearly go so far as talking of scalps. In reality, he liked the city and what we call civilization, and held less grudges than I - as a good white liberal - thought he should. His warpath rhetoric was simply his way of amusing himself on a pleasant social evening. Some people relieve tension and anger by drinking and picking a fight with an innocent stranger; Mantha seemed to find a similar if more intellectual release mechanism in baiting gullible strangers. The Robinsons, Torontonians, were naive and thus perfect victims. Thomson, the guide and sometime artist, was also listening in bemused silence as Mantha warmed to his middle-aged, middle-of-the-road victims.

I listened to Mantha describe in horrible detail the raping of his sister (he had no sister) by a gang of motorcycle toughs, and then gestured for Thomson to join me outside, leaving Mantha to his fun. It turned out that Thomson had just made a deal to guide the Robinsons on a fishing trip later in the summer. I suggested we hide Mantha in their tent with a hatchet, and this evoked one of Thomson's rare bursts of laughter.

Shortly thereafter Frank joined us, and somehow the conversation turned to Diana. Thomson didn't like Diana and rarely had anything to say about her, but Frank could carry on

for hours. He was just warming to the subject when Mantha left the Robinsons and came over. He, too, always had a few bitter words about her. All of us had at one time or another fallen for the lady, and she was almost a common bond between us. I suspected the others of still harboring hopes and licking wounds, but then perhaps they thought the same of me. Anyway, our speculations now centered on Fredrick, for I immediately told them of her effect on him. We all had our theories as to why she was such a dangerous bitch, and why any intelligent man would steer clear of her - even though we had all, excepting maybe Thomson, failed to.

I had just ventured the opinion that Fredrick would smarten up as soon as he sobered up, when I happened to glance down toward the dock. I couldn't detect their figures anymore, and the canoe was gone. Frank saw me look and wryly commented, "Remember that it's Spring."

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Later I drank too much and got into an argument with Champlain, accusing him of exploitation. a Mantha, thinking I was being funny, joined in, and we harassed the old voyageur until he left. I don't remember driving home.

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Day 19:

FOX ^a

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Fox, red as automotive rust, watches ...
small-eyed in the grass beyond an old, junked Dodge
(broken dream of ten years gone) . . . sees with dark eyes:
a lone man, walking along the gravel path
(weeded-over bush-road for Henderson's
burned-out log-camp) . . . the red fox, thin as winter dusk . . .
watches, watches the man swat at flies, sees
to things the broken man doesn't even dream on
(he's a careless man, a senseless man) . . . fox,
mean as natural change, knows, watches still;

his tight, hungry throat: moving on nothing . . .
he watches fish pass beneath the bridge where the man
spits down (ten years nearer the Dodge, rusting
in the dew) . . . fox watches the man pass. Who?
Me? Hell, how about . . . how about you?

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Day 20: MIRROR

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I can't really say why I finally decided to repeat the performance, for I saw Fredrick after he came out of the wilderness. It was obvious he was the fool, so why emulate him? Everything moved away that spring, became distant even when near. Someone had lowered a glass bell over everything I tried to approach. Winter strikes at the glass; in spring the ice cracks. Open water. Going under.

Leaving, entering, turning, again, starting over, unlikely, just continuing on whatever curve, arc, ray or line that guides you.

Frank used to be a guide. He gave it up. Now he just makes statements, drops pebbles in the creek.

Yes, I saw Fredrick when he came out in the Spring. And then I saw the seasons progress with death after death. Even Diana changed, took no new lover. Eventually disappeared. She was years ago; it couldn't have been her that drove me out here to this converted hunter's cottage. No, I guess it was Fredrick ... or what was left of Fredrick. I guess I found in him an echo of myself ... or a parody of myself. Narcissus? This man - with his typically southern obsession with the North - held a mirror to my own behaviour. We were neighbors and we were close friends, so I was with him often. I watched him intently, until he disappeared, and I saw him first when he returned. Those places I briefly ventured toward and then withdrew from, drew him deep within. From him I learned what lay at the end of roads I had only the temerity to glance down.

My attempt to build this space is a direct result of his explorations of emptiness. And my winter isolation here is, perhaps, a variation on his theme.

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The door has closed: winter has settled in.^a The season means something here. Elsewhere, maybe not. The effect of the seasons on human life has been dulled by our technology, and so the symbolic reverberations of the seasons in art has to be explained to Poetry 1000 students. (Ah, winter equals death and spring equals rebirth: write that down.) Winter in the cities is not a season - it is an inconvenience. Silence does not blanket the city when the final migrations are completed. Snow cannot muffle urban noise. The raw weather itself is mutated by the pollution and by the warmth of machinery. Soon Fuller Domes will further alienate the urban dweller from the earth and its natural cycles. Even now what little effect the weather has on the city resident can be easily escaped by a few hours in a jet: for the well-off, the long winter rest is now punctuated with sunny summer intermissions. So our attention span decreases, as the world turns.

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As I write this the thermometer dips to thirty below. I don't have an escape. I don't know whether I want one.

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Leaving, entering, turning, again, starting over, unlikely, continuing on whatever curve, arc, ray or line guides you. We will follow the tracks to the end, end of desire.

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Fredrick saw a great deal of Diana that spring they met. She, strange to me, seemed quite genuine in her interest in him. (But of course she is an accomplished actress.) Frank and I would often get together at the Lakeview Inn and analyze their relationship. After many beers we would inevitably get into an argument about some "philosophical" point, say the relationship of freedom and responsibility in sexual behavior, and end the evening angry with each other's naivete. That is to say we both concluded the evening as silly drunks.

Sometimes Mantha would join us. He usually drank little and remained witty and sane, alternating his barbs

between Frank and myself. He thought Frank pompous, and I believe he considered me childishly romantic, ^b Yet, on some evenings he would drink a lot and say very little.

How distant they all seem already - almost unreal! In getting away from everyone, moving to this wilderness retreat, I had hoped to get a better perspective. But it is not I that am getting away from them: they have left me. Death and disappearance. Autumn, then winter.

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then spring
spring again
the wolf pup springs, springs again, again....

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Day 21:
THE INDIGENOUS MAMMALS ^a

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Bats
Bear, Black
Bear, Polar
Beaver
Bobcat
Caribou
Chipmunk
Deer
Ermine
Fisher
Fox, Red
Hare
Lynx
Man
Marmot
Marten
Mice
Mink
Moles

Moose
Muskrat
Otter
Porcupine
Raccoon
Seal
Shrew
Skunk
Windigo
Wolf
Wolverine
Woodchuck

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Day 22:
THE AESTHETICS OF THE LAND ^a

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It is getting close to Christmas. I intend to celebrate by an overnight hike to the small lake north of Winged Lake. The snow has decorated all the trees for me.

Tonight the wolves are howling again, and I feel a storm moving in. The air is still but the clouds are racing overhead, and one can feel the presence of an awesome power. It is at these moments that the beauty of this land is most accentuated, for it is *strength* that is such an important component of its beauty.

The power in the air is too intense to induce fear - one's response can only be awe.

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Day 23:
BORDERLANDS ^a

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“Call me Ishmael!” I yelled to the man squinting at me from the rock ledge.

“Who?”

“Some years ago - never mind how long precisely - having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world.”

“Can’t hear you.”

“Listen! Listen and you’ll hear the mermaids singing each to each. “

“Want a cup of coffee?” he yelled, obviously unable to understand, or admit to himself he heard correctly what I was saying.

“No, no, I’ve got miles to go before I sleep.” And on I paddled past the island and the first man I’d seen in six days. He stood on the rocky shoreline watching me pass. The sun, a blinding red ball of flame to my left, burned only inches from the tree line. The bastard was set-up at my intended camp-site, so it was imperative I hurry to reach the next decent camp-site, unless I wanted to cook dinner in the dark. He probably figures that I’m nuts, I thought, as I dug in for the final stretch of water.

•
Finishing the coffee and smoking my third cigarette since eating, I propped up my feet on a rock by the fire and listened to the trees creak, to the forest grow. It was cool, but it wouldn’t frost again till Fall. This was the right time of year to travel alone.

Just south: Minnesota; while just North: a hunk of the real world. Just then: into camp it came. Green-eyed, so it teems with life, so it knows ways to cross the edge, uncut and healthy. Tease

her man. Yank on the line. Quoth the raven. Quote your own. Night migrations. Crossing over. Into camp it came, green-eyed and hungry, pell-mell into camp, while I slipped toward sleep, impervious.

•
The next day I worked my way North along a small chain of lakes connected by portages ranging from a few hundred yards to over a mile and a half. It was an overcast

day, and this matched my mood, for I was feeling tired and aching. I had slept all night in the position I had assumed before dozing off in front of the campfire, and my back was bothering me. Also, canoeing is tiring because of the constant need to radically correct each forward stroke with a twist of the paddle that strains wrist and forearm. To add even more to my weariness, I had to walk each portage twice - once with the canoe and once with my gear. About three in the afternoon, I pulled up to a small island, determined to call it a day.

I flipped the canoe out of the water, after tossing my gear ashore, and checked out the campsite. It was good: flat, spacious but sheltered from ever-present westerlies, and included a comfortable-looking log dragged over to the stone fire-place. The ashes looked fresh, for they were still damp from being doused. My guess was that a party had just left that morning. I walked around, looking the area over, noticing the flattened grass where a single pup-tent must have recently stood; and then headed into the central bush of the island.

I had taken no more than three steps along an obvious path to the shit-hole, when I simultaneously heard a sharp crack and felt pain fly up my leg, searing my reason. Jerking my leg spasmodically I found to my amazement that I had stepped in a trap: it looked like the old Newhouse-50 Frank had once shown me - a trap used to get small bear. All I could think was that someone had either a strange idea of the location of bears or a very strange sense of humour.

My leg wasn't hurt badly, thanks to my boot, but I stayed on for a day at the island campsite ... using my slight injury as an excuse for lethargy. I spent -the time daydreaming, fishing and reading. After the one bad day, the weather had cleared again and turned very hot. The heat made me lazy, and I almost enjoyed myself despite the pain in my leg. Around evening, as I was frying up some trout, I spied a canoe approaching from the south, with two men dipping their paddles almost absentmindedly into the waters.

“Ahoy,” the man in the bow shouted idiotically.

“Hello.”

“You the fellow that passed us a few days ago?” he yelled much louder than necessary.

“Maybe,” I replied, watching with chagrin as they turned toward me, obviously intending to dock.

“For a man in a hurry, you’re traveling slow.”

“Had an accident.”

They pulled up into the reeds and scrambled out. The taciturn man was tall and thin with an anachronistic handlebar moustache; the other was stout and spoke with a midwestern accent. Yanks, canoe-tripping for the first time in their lives? Wrong. Yanks, but both had lived in the North and one, the tall quiet fellow, had actually taught a course in “bush-survival”. Finding this out, I began to feel foolish and rude, for I was the real tourist, doing this solo for some obscure romantic reason. Feeling foolish, I tried to be more friendly; I brewed up some coffee and showed them the trap and my leg.

The fat one laughed, “If I was you I’d reply to the trapping with a little hunting.” Then he went to his pack and pulled out a revolver.

“What the fuck’re you doing with that?” I asked nervously.

“He’s a gun nut,” the other said by way of explanation.

“Oh.”

The fat one, who his partner called Dill, glanced at the setting sun and asked, still brandishing his revolver, if I minded if they share my campsite that night.

What the hell could I say?”

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Day 24: ANGLES OF APPROACH

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Marked by the Wild is “an anthology of literature shaped by the Canadian wilderness.” The section headings suggest the major

avenues (attitudes?) used to approach (broach?) wilderness (wildness):

1. "An Elemental Song: The Non-Human World"
2. "A Beauty of Dissonance: The Ambivalent Wilderness"
3. "Beardusky Woods: The Wilderness as Adversary"
4. "Crooked Nerves Made Straight: The Benign Wilderness"
5. "Never Quite the Same: Wilderness and Self-Discovery"
6. "Fellow to the Falling Leaves: Man in Accord with Nature"
7. "A Canada to Call Forth Love: Wilderness as Cultural Influence"
8. "Farewell to Saganaga: Wilderness Lost"

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Italics mine; sequence the editors. ^a

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Leaving now on my over-night hike. It is the day before Christmas.

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Day 25: MERRY CHRISTMAS

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Back now. It is almost midnight, but I stick to my commitment . . . my ritual. It is ritual that keeps me alive. When I let that structure slip, then it is only a matter of time before my world begins wobbling on its axis. I know this, and it is my weapon against the night.

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I left yesterday, early afternoon, and headed directly down to Winged Lake. Walking was easier across the lake, for most of the snow had been swept away by the wind. It isn't a big lake, so I was across it and climbing the hill by three o'clock. Nevertheless, darkness comes very early here, now, and I didn't

take a real rest until I had reached the top of the hill – a long climb – and could detect an open area below. There it was, my goal, a lake too small and too isolated to rate a name on the maps. It is these unnamed lakes that have always fascinated me.

I stood quietly in the bush, staring about me at the magnificent composition in white and green. The snow around me was completely unmarked – although I had passed innumerable bird and rabbit tracks climbing the hill – and the place looked as though no living thing had moved through it since the germination of time. Only the trail left by my snowshoes marred the effect. I did not belong there: I *knew* I was a scar on the face of that landscape. Yet I *felt* at one with it.

“Hello!” One of those voices sounding in my head, familiar and real. But I couldn’t place it. My muscles quivered instinctively, and my pulse increased. An unreasoning chill ran through me. I picked up my pack and started down the hill rather too fast.

The snow was surprisingly deep on the wooded hillside, and I was clumsy on my snowshoes, hurrying down the slope. I should have slowed down, but the winter twilight was already upon me, even though it was not quite four o’clock. So the inevitable happened: I tripped. Falling in deep snow is usually more humorous than dangerous, but I had the misfortune to smash my hand against a concealed boulder.

My right wrist was hurt – how severely I did not know. Regaining my feet, I again began the descent . . . more cautiously. The pain was deep, and I feared my Christmas present was a broken wrist. Below the lake grew larger and larger, until at last I reached the bottom of the hill and the edge of the lake. In the twilight I quickly searched the shoreline for a sheltered camping spot, and finding within a few yards a quite decent place, set about preparing for the night. My injured wrist made the task more difficult, and it was quite dark before I could relax by my fire. Fortunately the temperature wasn’t much below zero and there was no wind, so despite my wrist I was moderately comfortable.

As I sat sipping my soup I noticed a fire-light flickering across the lake. Naturally I doubted my eyes, but although the fire seemed to be a small one, it was distinct. I

watched it for nearly half an hour before it suddenly went out. The mystery could wait till morning, I thought, and I then sacked out for the night.

My bag warmed up quite nicely with my body heat, and the tent kept any night winds out, but I spent a miserable night anyway. It was probably not yet seven when I closed my eyes and urged on sleep, only to find that the pain in my wrist kept me awake. The weariness from the hike only served to make my wakefulness more uncomfortable. The long hours of darkness stretched before me. I would doze off, then waken with a start. It seemed that every time I managed to drift off, a loud noise would snap me awake; but once awake all I could hear was my own ragged breathing. Interminably the night dragged on. Sleep. Snap awake. Darkness and boredom. Sleep. Night images: wolf packs moving across the white landscape, blood crimson on the snow, a man slipping under the waves of a gray lake, clouds passing over the sun, then ... Snap awake again. Deep into the interminable darkness, interminable time, time to regret this trip ... and other things too. Distraction of pain. On. On. Finally sleep so deep with weariness that no sound could waken me. Even the images of my dreams hazy at last. sleep

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“Hello!” There it was again - the voice in my head. Light filtering through the blue nylon. Morning. With a violent act of will I drove myself out of the warmth of the sleeping bag and into the morning air, cold as death.

Christmas Morning. The sun hazy and far off. Much colder than yesterday. I stood in front of the tent and stared at the snow before me. The whole area about my camp was trampled by snowshoes. Tracks ran to and from my camp straight across the lake. Someone had visited me last night. I was unnerved.

After breakfast I headed off across the lake. The tracks led to roughly the point where I had seen the light, and sure enough I discovered the remains of a small fire. However, there was no indication that the person had pitched a tent. Again tracks leading to and away from the place were mingled and led off into the woods. This was strange. Curiosity got the better of me and I set off again along this snowshoe trail. Walking was fairly easy since the terrain was level and the snow was packed from the stranger's passing. Still it was very cold and my wrist

hurt, so I promised myself I would continue for one hour at the most before turning back.

I plodded along at a good pace, my snowshoes swishing in the dry, powdery snow. The woods were relatively thin there and the trail direct. By the trees I was able to deduce that this was wetland in the warm season. Unusual, I saw no bird or animal tracks. Just as the ground began to climb, and the hour had almost elapsed, I saw ahead that the trail abruptly ended.

I was not at all prepared for this, although I knew the tracks led both ways. I don't know what I was thinking about. I do know that I felt, at that moment, an irrational fear rise in me. I had suddenly come to the end.

The explanation was obvious: the stranger had walked from the fireplace to here and then suddenly turned around and walked right back. But where then had he originally come from? I couldn't remember any other tracks leading from the fireplace, excepting, of course, those leading across the lake to my tent. But then I wasn't sure ... perhaps I had missed a trail off from my campsite back up the hill.

I turned back. At the fireplace I checked again for some other trail, but found none, so continued back to my tent. Coming out of the Bush onto the lake, I was met with a strong wind that put an even sharper edge on the already bitter cold. It was noon when I arrived back at my campsite.

I immediately began searching about the site for another trail. At first I saw no new trail leading away: there was only the path across the lake, which I had just returned along, and my path leading down the hill from the south . . . but there! Instead of just my one set of tracks leading down to the campsite, I found superimposed on them a set of snowshoe prints facing back uphill. I had easily overlooked these in the morning upon discovering the more obvious passage across the lake. Still I was baffled. Whoever else was tramping about these woods must have come down the hill in my footsteps, searched around my tent, crossed the lake to the fireplace, walked off into the woods on the far shore for a fair distance, then abruptly turned around and retraced his steps all the way back past me, and finally back up the hill. . . *all in the dark*, while I slept. The motivation for such behavior was baffling enough without even trying to figure out who would be out here, miles from nowhere. And then there was the question of the fire. I was sure I'd seen a fire across the

lake, and the tracks led to it, but that was in the twilight before I'd gone to bed, before the tracks across the lake had been made; that is to say, *before anyone had been to the fireplace.*

I had, however, no time to worry about the irrationality of all this. The wind was increasing even more now and whipping the snow into a wild swirling dance across the open plain of the lake, and I feared a storm was brewing. I didn't want to weather out a storm that could last days in a small tent without heater ... or much food. I figured I'd hurry back to my cabin; if it got really bad, I would be forced to pitch camp along the way, but damned if I wouldn't try to get . . . home!

So in a flurry I collapsed the tent, packed up and began retracing my steps, and his, up the hill. I calculated three hours as the time required to hike non-stop to my door. Glancing nervously at the sky as I climbed the rise, I saw gray clouds scudding rapidly at cross-direction to the ground wind. This side of the hill was short but steep, and reaching the top I found myself winded, but dared not rest. My legs ached as I continued on, and the pain in my wrist hadn't lessened. The long winding descent to Winged Lake was almost as tiring as climbing, and it was snowing now. The wind, even in the shelter of the woods, was whipping my face. I knew the actual temperature must have increased, but the wind driving the coarse little grains of snow into my eyes more than compensated for that. I stumbled a few times and soon was at the critical point where I felt I had to make a decision whether to continue, or to make shelter while it was still feasible. One more hour, at the most, I guessed, and I'd be at my door. But I still had to cross Winged Lake, and that had now become a real risk, for the wind in the open would surely cause a white-out. I pushed on, weighing these matters in my mind, and watching the tracks before me fill with snow. I wondered about the stranger. So far I hadn't noticed any trail branching off from mine, so even though it was becoming difficult to see the double step pattern in the snow ahead, I could only assume I was still following in his footsteps. On I went.

At last I came out of the trees at the bottom, and the lake loomed before me. The white-out wasn't as severe as I'd feared it would be, but still I certainly couldn't begin to see across the lake. The tracks were still discernible on the surface of the lake, although hazy in outline. Now I really had to make my decision. The storm had not abated, nor had it increased in ferocity. I was

cold, my wrist ached, and I was less than an hour from the relative comfort of the cabin. So ... I would go on. I was briefly tempted to walk along the shoreline, rather than venture out onto that desolate white expanse. But that meant a very considerable addition in time spent out in the blizzard, as well as the unpleasant prospect of breaking a new trail through the high shoreline drifts. My leg muscles throbbed from the constant strain of lifting high my snow-shoes, and the cold was penetrating deeper and deeper through my defenses. Whether it was wise, I don't know, but almost without hesitating I plowed out onto the lake. I walked with head bowed, the snow blasting into my face as I squinted at the trail. With each step it grew less distinct from the surrounding field of white. I didn't need, nor dare, to look up. I knew that around me was nothing but that painful whiteness, emptiness. On I went, panic threatening in my gut as I realized the wind was covering my path much more rapidly than I'd expected. The only thing that seemed to hold back the panic was the reassurance of the tent in my pack. This was fatuous, though, for I knew how difficult it would be to try to set up a tent on this bare, wind-swept plain, and I had nothing with which to generate any heat.

Then, suddenly, I wasn't sure I was actually following anything: before me was white, beneath me white, all around me nothing but ever shifting shades of white. And as this awareness sent the cold right into my heart, something gave out, and I shut my eyes. Still my legs moved automatically, and I continued ... forward. It must have been forward, for opening my eyes a moment later I saw trees. The wind lessened its howl as I entered the woods again. I was across, and before me the trail was again visible, if faint. It is only a short distance from the lake to the cabin. Obviously, I made it.

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That was seven, maybe eight, hours ago. Only now, warm again and reviewing this, does it dawn on me that I never saw the stranger's trail diverge from mine. I could've missed it, but, except while I was coming across winged Lake, that seems very unlikely. Outside the wind is howling, and the trail surely obliterated.^a

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Day 26:
LOVERS, HUNTERS ^a

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Broken branch in first snow.

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It was in flaming autumn we began to hunt,
remembering spring,
remembering to not injure the young

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you close your eyes
(as in summer)

when you fire.

When you fire

it is not to kill:

maim will do.

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And I . . . I keep my eyes open,
but I am such a lousy shot.

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Now the color's gone.

Bears scratch trees.

We claw each other.

Then leave each other ...

.

a little

blood

on the snow

.

Now the color's gone

Just cold.

Blue cold.

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A .22 goes off in the distance;
a quiet snap in the cold
like a branch breaking.

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Day 27:
CONVERSATION WITH FREDRICK ^a

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Fredrick: "She has a most unusual quality, a quality not often found in women . . . yet she's very feminine. I don't really know what exactly you'd call it ... strength of some sort, I guess. Oh sure she is like most women in many ways; for instance, she uses her beauty like a tool, a lever. But you know, when I went down the Petawawa with her, she seemed almost distracted, like she was in contact with something out there and as though I wasn't with her at all."

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"I've known her for longer than you and I've sensed what you're talking about. Call it whatever you will, it is an attractive trait. But I'd like to warn you of something, if you won't think me presumptuous.

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Sure, what?"

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"Well, you called it strength. Just know that she'll use this strength, plus all the more natural female powers, without any sympathy. There's an undercurrent of indifference to human suffering and emotion in that woman. Perhaps this indifference is the source of her strength."

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"I'm not at all sure what you mean..."

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"I think that as you get to know the wilderness here you will find that one characteristic of it, and part of its beauty, is - its total and complete indifference to man. While this may be a crucial part of its beauty, its attractiveness, it is also a severe danger. Not just physically, but psychologically, or rather -- spiritually. It does not hate you, that perhaps would be an easier thing to cope with; no, it simply does not value you, you are nothing to it."

“Reproductive tracts from animals submitted for autopsy were collected and preserved as they became available. The purpose of this study is to determine the rate of reproduction of wolves and coyotes throughout various sections of the province. Approximately 120 female reproductive tracts of wolves and 75 reproductive tracts of coyotes were weighed and measured.”

(from *Dept. of Lands and Forests' Research Review: 1969 Annual Project Report Branch*)

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It is known that coyote and wolf territories rarely overlap.^b
The coyote, unlike the wolf, can and often does live in close proximity to human habitation. Unlike the wolf, he finds the farm a source of food rather than an invasion and infringement.

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Diana was a bitch.

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Day 29: IT COMES IN THE NIGHT

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The present temperature outside is 22 degrees below zero. My typewriter is stiff although the temperature inside is 52 degrees above. It seems I can only keep this place warm by burning great quantities of wood. The fireplace is along the wall; I sure could use an old-fashioned stove right smack in the middle of this room. Clearly this cabin was never intended for winter occupation. (Or this land?) I think temperatures are very meaningful. It is nice to have a number to indicate how numb or miserable you are, ^a It is nice to be objective...

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Dill wasn't a bad cook. He arose well before I did, since I had a little difficulty getting to sleep that night, and fixed up some flapjacks. We ate in silence - mornings at the

best of times rarely elicit vocalizations from me - and I noticed that contrary to expectation, it was Dill's companion that ate most. I had a suspicion he burned more energy in moving them along, but he seemed as slow and lethargic as his gun-crazed friend.

"We'll move on about noon ... though we might just spend the morning pretending to fish," Dill said, looking at me intently.

"Yeah, well I'm going to get moving sooner," I replied.

"Thanks for the hospitality."

"Thanks for the breakfast."

"What're you going to do with the trap?"

"Throw it in the lake."

"I'd like it."

- Sure, fellow, you would.

"Sure, take it," I said.

"Thanks."

I moved out quickly. I paddled till about two in the afternoon without stopping for lunch, for I was anxious to get away from those two. I knew of a portage off the main canoe route that led up to a small isolated lake, and it was here that my solo trip was

to end. Mantha and Thomson were supposed to rendezvous with me there. My extra day at the island meant it was likely they would already be waiting for me, but as I started along the muddy portage, I didn't see any footprints. Perhaps they too were delayed. It took nearly three-quarters of an hour to reach the clearing and the blue sparkle of the lake. Dropping the canoe, I rummaged through my pack for the meat and cheese. Eating and staring blankly out over the calm waters, I remember telling myself that it was very unlikely Dill and his buddy would bother coming up this way. Wishful thinking.

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Images haunt me. Nightmares haunt my night. This space is haunted, and I am haunted by it. In the fine old tradition of stealing from the Indians, I will call this spirit of the North - Manitou.

Manitou is real. Unlike the overly-civilized and slothful gods of the white man, Manitou has frequent and powerful effects on the activities of this land. b

There are also infinite numbers of lesser demons, outstanding of which is the Windigo Spirit: a demon that possesses a man and turns him into a cannibal. Cree and Objibway tales of the Windigo remind one immediately of the Old World vampires and werewolves ...

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I pitched my tent on the southeastern shore, brewed some coffee, and waited for my two friends to appear. I was enjoying the hot and sunny weather, but clouds were crossing the ground winds and I could smell a change in the air. High winds from the south, perhaps a quick thunderstorm by nightfall. Whatever. After letting my mind and eyes wander for an hour or so, I decided to paddle over to the mouth of a creek that drained this lake:

I was just pushing off from shore when I heard the shot. There was no mistaking it for something else - it was a gun going off ... and not too far away. It had come from the direction of the portage, but I had no intention of paddling over. Instead, I secreted myself around a promontory and watched for the appearance of Dill and his companion, for who else could it be. I didn't have to wait long before the two figures came stumbling into view. Followed by two other men: Frank and Mantha! Frank was holding the revolver, pointed skyward, and Mantha was yelling at Dill and the thin man. My friends were acting as if they'd captured two bandits. I paddled out from behind my cover and headed toward them.

"Idiot ... take your scalp ... it back to your dear ... fucking moron ... ought to take an ear from both of you . . ." Mantha's angry voice alternately rising and falling. I paddled faster. Frank spotted me and waved, and then the others turned too.

Suddenly Dill lunged at Frank, butting him in the gut with his head, and sending them both tumbling into the underbrush. Then as Mantha turned toward the struggle, the thin man struck with startling speed at the gee's neck. Mantha crumbled to the ground and lay motionless. Jesus Christ, I thought, this is absurd. As I paddled harder still, I saw Frank emerge from the underbrush and dive into the water. One shot

rang out, but I couldn't tell where the bullet went. Dill and the thin.-man seemed to disappear back into the woods, but I wasn't attending to them - I was watching nervously for Frank to surface,. Which he did . . . about ten yards from my canoe.

"What on earth is happening?" I yelled.

He didn't answer. He just treaded water and looked back toward shore. Mantha was sitting up and rubbing his neck. The others had apparently headed back down the portage ... or were hiding in the hush. Then Frank began swimming back, so I followed.

As I walked over to Mantha, he grinned Lip sheepishly at me and said, "White-man bad enough, but White-Man with Yellow-Skin tricks burns this Red-Skin s ass!"

Frank smiled, "Stupidity is its own reward

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Images: otters in a smoke of dawn; you don't need a map, just a lot of patience; I don't know the names of the birds; the avarice of snow; waves thick with cold; the steaming carcass of a moose on the lee, of moll Lake; Diana's breasts, round, firm nipples erect.

My nightmares are extremely vivid, and when I awake I can smell my own fear fouling the bed- sweat of terror ... although the cabin temperature usually- slips to near freezing at night. How I long for Spring already, and winter has barely begun.

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The embers from the fire were starting to fade. "Let's stay up a bit longer," I said.

"Sure," replied Mantha, but Frank grumbled something about being too tired and got up and went into their tent.

I threw some more wood and branches on the embers and kneeled before it, blowing gently to spread the ignition.

"That bastard really clobbered me," Mantha said rubbing his neck.

"From what you guys told me, he probably felt you had it coming."

"I don't like people playing with guns near my head."
"He probably didn't like getting jumped and beaten up." "We

didn't 'beat them up', fer Christ-sake, we just . . . ambushed them and disarmed them."

"You've watched too many westerns." I stood up and looked out over the moon-striped lake.

"Damn it! Are you defending those creeps?"

"Hell no. Remember I told you how Dill waved that gun in my face when he asked to share my camp-site? He's weird and he gives me the creeps. The point is that the whole thing was obviously an accident, and you guys went berserk."

"Now listen . . ."

"You listen. You told me the shot hit a branch over your head, but you couldn't even tell where it came from. That gun of his is powerful, and he was probably shooting at birds or something afar off. You couldn't see him, so he couldn't see you. Sure, it was stupid to be shooting into dense brush, but that doesn't make it attempted murder."

"He could've killed me."

"And if he had, it would have been because of stupidity, but not deliberate. Yet jumping them was very deliberate. Besides, Thin-Man didn't have anything to do with it, as far as I can tell from your story."

"Aw, fuck off! I'm going to bed."

I stayed up with my new fire, thinking about Diana ... and about Fredrick. Telling myself again and again that she was just toying with him didn't really ease the jealousy. He was a fool, but playing the fool sometimes has advantages. Perhaps ...

I felt something hard and tubular pressing into my ribs, and Dill's voice came whispering into my ear, "Shut up and you won't get hurt."

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It comes in the night: the fear.

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Day 30: INDIGENOUS SNAKES

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“Snakes are beneficial to people but people are not beneficial to snakes.”

(from *Ontario Snakes* by Barbara Froom)^a

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DeKay's Snake

Eastern Fox Snake

Eastern Garter Snake Eastern

Hog-Nosed Snake Eastern

Milk Snake

Eastern Ring-Necked Snake

Eastern Smooth-Green Snake

Massasauga Rattlesnake

Northern Water Snake

Red-Bellied Snake

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Snakes are not really creatures of the North: most of these snakes are found only in the near North. (The Eastern Garter Snake has the range which extends furthest north - to James Bay.) Excepting the Massasauga Rattler, none of these snakes are dangerous. Being cold-blooded, snakes prefer a warmer environment.

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Day 31:

THE LINE, SECOND SEGMENT

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Begin again to move. Start slow, steady - North. The curvilinear relationship of season to sensitivity. I draw this summer line North, but the winter here will, must, thicken it, bend it, transform the neat correlation into a complex equation of emotion and instinct. (Frank claims that Fredrick acted out this drama of complication and eventually fell out through the wide weave of the web.) One's relationships grow into gnarled problems and finally one must draw on the sustaining

indifference of the land. One must take a transfusion from the land.^a

The straight line on the map starts thick and red (a four-lane highway), and at 480 miles north of Toronto turns west. This is the end of the road North. So continue the eye along the line, as it becomes a cross-hatched black strand (the railway) wiggling still North. At 666 miles North of starting point, even this version of the line ends. Follow now the jagged border of blue and yellow (the coastline of James Bay). When finally, at nearly one thousand miles North of Toronto, this line too turns to the west, you may at last stop.

This is the imperfect line North from civilization to sensation, and we should remember that there are no straight lines in nature. A man in the wilderness can easily forget the nature of direct action, unwavering movement from point to point; his movements are always as curving or jagged as the movements surrounding him. Staring at my map I reassure myself, tell myself: You are still strong, for if this straight edge does not yet pain you, but instead still has the power to sustain you, then you are still safe, sane. You are not yet bushed.

Mile 230: Ten miles or so out of North Bay, the lakes begin to appear with greater and greater frequency as the highway moves through the Temagami. Lake country. Tall pines. The kind of landscape most commonly associated with the mythic North: clear lakes, pines and spruce, slabs of Pre-Cambrian Shield edging the curving up and down hill-land. The morning air cool: 65° F.

Mile 250: Leaving the mixed forest region and entering the true boreal woodland. White Spruce, Black Spruce, Balsam-Fir, Tamarack, Jack Pine, White Birch, Trembling Aspen and Balsam Poplar. Lakes. Hills. Turns. Never a human seen on foot.

Mile 290: Temagami, very small town on the northeast arm of Lake Temagami, no more than a tourist stop, brief break in the Bush after sixty miles of almost uninterrupted forest.

The large labyrinth of Lake Temagami straggles out to the west into wild, roadless country. A fisherman on the dock showing his fair sized pickerel.

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Mile 310: Moose seen crossing the highway half a mile ahead. Massive crashing into the undergrowth. Lakes. Hills. Curves. Pines.

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Mile 320: It dawns on consciousness that there are almost no side roads. This strip of asphalt alone cuts through the wilderness. Human life clinging to it, lint to tape. Walk a quarter mile from this highway and it might as well be the sixth century. We are traveling in armored cars.

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Mile 330: Cobalt, old mining town. Once a rich frontier town; now there are ghosts. Buildings precariously perched on cliffs below flows the wide and wild Montreal River. Pretty girls in short skirts (tourists?) walking along the tilted streets. High rocky outcropping of the Shield. Sky blue as a hallucination of ice. Men lounging about look gruff and poor. Temperature: 70° F.

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Mile 342: Haileybury. Suddenly here past Cobalt and the high hills and pines and rugged Shield and lake country -- is a flat land. Flatland. The Clay Belt. Farms spreading out in all directions. One has the feeling of being back in southern Ontario. The moose-crossing signs seem absurd. This is good farmland, but the trees are not very tall and the land does not look so buttermilk rich and fat as the farmland just north of Toronto. For although the soil is good here, the climate is harsh. This odd slash of good soil laid across the stark bedrock of the North is called the Clay Belt.

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Mile 347: Driving North, the Bush seems to have disappeared, but in reality it hides just beyond the horizon. One is in some strange space-time warp, slipping back to poor frontier days and subsistence farming. Horses grazing.

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Mile 351: Driving North. Many of the fields apparently not being used; vast expanses of buttercups and devil's paint-

brushes - contrast of golden yellow and brilliant orange.
Temperature: 75° F.

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Mile 360: Driving North. Near Englehart, the bush reasserting itself here and there, although the grandeur of hilly lake and Shield country south of Cobalt is gone forever. Fewer farms. Back into the Bush. Flat spruce country: grasses and wet ditches fifty yards on either side of the highway. Crossing the arctic watershed: now all streams and rivers flow North to Hudson Bay. Small, unidentified, very dead animal by the side of the road.

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Mile 450: Northward. The highway cutting through a great extension of stunted spruce. Flat. Both sides of the highway could be some ridiculous tree farm, but who would grow scraggly rows and rows of such short and desolate trees, these pathetic wind and cold stunted spruce? There is a warped perspective of distance here: the trees are shaped like mature individuals, proportioned correctly, but too short, thus they seem farther away than they actually are. Distant. Distance. Miles on miles of stunted growth. One can imagine with horror the wind, the wind torturing this plain in winter.

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Mile 480: Cochrane. Emerge again into the pastoral ... before the final submersion in the tractless North. At entry to town there stands a large and not especially well-executed sculpture of a Polar Bear. It is mid-afternoon. High and steady winds buffet the town. This place is perched on the edge of the great roadless North. The main highway swings west here. Drive around this town, then out of it on the lonely secondary road that pushes just a few miles farther North, and then ends . . . face to face with the monstrous expanses that stretch to tidewater and beyond. The community here is quite pretty, and does not look like a frontier, a border. The sun is hot, but the inexorable winds confound it. All the streets running North must dead-end at Bush, but within this community, for a moment, one is reminded of quiet little settlements in the southern States. Poplars decorate the front lawns. A lovely pond and manicured park are situated right in the center of town. Still the wind is very disturbing, constant with the smell

of emptiness upon it. The wind informs the North. The temperature: 73° F. North. Rest here.

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Day 32

NEW YEAR^a

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Each year brings a new sacrifice. Each year consumes a small bit of ignorance. Each year erodes more rock, more hope.

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Out back, into the Bush, gone. The sun performs strange light-shows during winter twilights. And today this inhuman and abstract performance was invaded . . . or so I think. Watching out my window, I thought I saw a man standing in the spruce, perhaps fifty yards from my cabin. I got dressed and went out. Arriving at the place where I had seen his lean figure, I found no tracks.

The golden light infusing the forest contradicts the temperature - 33 below. It could be autumn, Diana and myself stalking partridge amidst the fallen leaves. You can't see them until they move.

It could have been a simple illusion of twilight, seeming vivid in the mind of man too long alone. The cold gets to you if you stand still, so I came back in.

I should work more than a few hours a day, getting all this down, but I fall into reveries. They are not always pleasant, but they are always ... fascinating. Besides, I don't want this to be too long, and I want and need my daily record.

He looked vaguely familiar. But I suppose that is only natural, since he came from my mind.

Sometimes, when the moments of depression, dark melancholy, pass away I feel that perhaps I would prefer to stay here . . . forever. Isolated, unhurried, unmotivated. Simple.

Really couldn't spend too much of each day writing, for I have other work. One has to each day create the basics: warmth, food, shelter. I could have sworn I saw a human figure.

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Each year erodes rock, more hope. Each year consumes a small bit of ignorance. Each year brings a new sacrifice.

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Day 33:
THREE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT MANITOU ^a

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The first thing to remember about her is her innocence:
Lovely extremist
Like all innocents.

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The second thing to remember about him is his indifference:
Beautifully reasonless
Like all extremists.

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The third thing to remember about her is her omniscience:
Careless witness
Like all innocents.

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Day 34:
FREDRICK'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR JUNE 1

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“We’ve had beautiful weather, a week of sun. Presently planning a canoe trip for next weekend, with Diana. She has been attempting to teach me to canoe . . . with some success, at least I no longer drift off downwind, circling desperately. We’ll be heading off into Algonquin Park.

“The spring here is rejuvenating me. My thoughts are finally freed of the past, and I am developing a pleasant obsession with the concept of wilderness; the associated self-sufficiency mystique and the isolationism are the necessary counterbalance to all my years of social entanglement. Diana is like the clear lakes and streams of this region, so my days are bright. She has promised to show me how to hunt in the fall.

“I may be in love with her.”^a

“I’ve been seeing a lot of Mantha, the Cree I met at Robinson’s party. He, too, is teaching me a great deal, but I find his attitude toward the land rather puzzling. Where Diana seems to understand my romanticizing and my emphasizing the aesthetic features of this country, Mantha is cool . . . even indifferent. He is a very practical man, but a very intelligent man as well. He is undoubtedly a better canoeist than Diana, but he prefers a small motor - something that offends my newly developed ‘sensibilities’. This difference in attitude no doubt stems from a contempt born of familiarity.

“Still there are other strange aspects to this man. Once after an afternoon walking and talking in the bush, he said suddenly and totally out of context, ‘I’m not sure you should court her.’

“When I, startled, asked if he meant Diana, he laughed and said, ‘Not exactly. I mean what some of you would call Mother Nature, what I call the wolf bitch.’

“When I tried to get him to elaborate on this odd expression, he turned the conversation to fishing lures. I was angry for awhile, vaguely suspecting that he was teasing me, but soon I forgot about it.

“I still wonder if he wasn’t putting me on. I’ve seen him lead gullible people into believing he was a witch-doctor for his tribe. Was he toying with my own romantic infatuation with this land? I suppose it is to his credit that he hasn’t really teased me very much about my inexperienced enthusiasm, but nevertheless I grow angry again as I remember that remark.

“Perhaps, too, he was discreetly insulting Diana. I’ve gathered that he isn’t very fond of her. (Perhaps because she isn’t very fond of him.)”

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Day 35:
THE RAY [FOR FREDRICK] ^a

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the line the ray that begins
moves out
ward
nor from sun
but living warmth
(the way you take each day and add it to your collection)
from animal warmth to the cold
the blue
ice from the basin
a sheet
a glass
a looking glass
the distortion of frozen
fragility
my person my personality
(your bypassing the issue with your linear projections)
your line
blue
your ray of no-hope
moving out
ward
not from sun
but me.

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Day 36:
CRACK THE WHIP

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The winter presses down more each day. I have to supplement my stores with fresh game and fish. One has to hunt: it is part of the game. Last night I brought home a rabbit from my evening walk. A bunny rabbit . . .

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The easiest way to clean a rabbit in the field is by using a sharp knife to cut an opening in the bunny's chest. Then holding the rabbit by the hind feet, you "crack the whip" with the bunny. This shucks out the guts. If you desire more complete drainage of the blood, you can snap the head off. ^a

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Good eating. My guts full. Stomach it. The wind is up. A ground drift is blowing. White out. The blank page.

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Day 37:
DEATH KILLS TIME ^a

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Then what? Then it is time to reconsider the value of bravery. Then it is time to hold out for higher stakes. Then he said, "Really, we don't want to hurt you."

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"I really don't want to hurt you," she said, as the no-longer lover has said throughout the ages. So she closed the book. "I understand," I said as the stoic fool has always replied. And put the book back on the shelf.

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"We just want to teach that wild indian and his buddy a few tricks," he said as he gagged me and pulled my arms roughly behind my back and bound them.

“OK, now come with us,” he said shoving me roughly.

Up from the fire, down toward the shore, and into my canoe. Despite his proclaimed intentions, he wrenched my back as he jammed me under the thwarts. Then as I struggled to a less uncomfortable position, lying on the none-too-soft bottom of the canoe, they shoved me off. Adrift.

Diana disappeared from North Bay about a week after Fredrick came out of the Bush. I wonder if she is making movies. The ice cracks. The lens cracks.

They’re all gone: Champlain, Thomson, Mantha, Fredrick, Frank, the Robinsons . . . and Diana. I wonder about my old friends in Toronto; I wrote to them so infrequently. In fact, I can’t remember if we were really *friends*. Yea, I am only beginning to realize how complete my isolation really is . . .

Putting down the pieces. I hear a snowmobile outside in the Bush! Who is that fool out there? He is haunting me, yet I would like to talk to him. I don’t care if he’s a fool. I don’t care if he’s real. Isolation, canoeing, zen ...

COLD. THERE IS MAGIC IN THE BUSH.

When I had realized my position, I knew I could probably free myself. I started sawing at the rope with the edge of the aluminum yoke that was attached to the center thwart . . . it was only a question of time. I had no idea how serious those maniacs were about revenge.

As I was steadily working on the rope, I heard voices but was only able to decipher a word or two. I ignored the cramps in my shoulders and pumped my arms up and down faster and faster against the cutting edge of the yoke.

I freed myself just as a shot rang out over the water. The whole incident had become very serious. I peered over the gunwales: I had drifted around the bend and was only a few yards from shore. I slipped as quietly as I could into the water, finding to my surprise the water only chest deep.

After pulling the canoe to shore, I began to make my way along the shoreline. The bush was thin on the rocky shore, but in the quiet night I seemed to create a loud disturbance as I picked my way through the brambles back toward the camp.

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Trees. I have a White Pine outside my cabin; he's a stranger to this particular region. The masses: Spruce. The haunted: Tamarack. You get to know them. On one of my early canoe trips in Algonquin I took along a handbook of native trees of Ontario. I spent the whole trip watching the landscape become distinct: my perception gradually changing from impressionist to super-realist. Perhaps it is sad that a person needs labels, names, to open his eyes to the lines and shading of the natural world, but whatever the means, the result is growth. And growth matters. 'Where names aren't natural, growth is. Tree rings. Wedding rings. Distinction, line drawings, contact. I know the trees now, one more level. One more stage. Play on.

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They had Mantha and Frank tied to trees. I almost laughed, despite myself, when I saw the thin man carefully balance an apple on Frank's head.

"Steady now, or I'll have to shoot at your ears instead," Dill said as he raised his arm slowly, the revolver glinting in the moonlight.

The apple dissolved into nothing. I wasn't laughing at that; my gut was twisting and my mouth full of the foul taste of stomach acid.

"Now let's graze the injun's scalp again...but first give me another swig."

The thin-man carefully balanced another apple on Mamba's head, and then walked over to Dill and handed him a bottle. I heard him say softly, "That's the last apple, we only had three, and besides you don't want to try this after too many drinks."

"Don't worry, I could still core those apples after twice the amount we've got with us." Dill took a long swallow.

I was of two minds, for I feared that there was greater danger of somebody getting hurt if I rushed them than if I waited for them to finish frightening my companions. Yet, I was afraid I was just being cowardly, for it wasn't me tied to a tree, waiting for a drunk to shoot apples off my head.

Mantha made my decision for me by yelling, “Hey whitey, you fat-boy, hey, you drink too much and your pistil’ll go limp on ya. Doesn’t that worry you at all? Eh, fuck-head?”

“You son-of-a-bitch, you wanted to cut my ears off, I remember, well, now I’m going to blow yours into little pieces.” Dill handed the bottle back to his companion, but the thin-man grabbed his arm.

“Easy, you’ll kill him.”

I emerged from cover, stick in hand, and strode quickly toward them. The thin-man saw me first, and Dill spun around. I didn’t move faster nor did I slow myself, instead I just continued steady right toward them.

Then Mantha let out a blood-curdling howl, and instinctively Dill started to turn back toward his captives. I was about ten yards away, and I leaped forward at that instant. and smashed my club into the half-raised gun. Dill screamed as the gun fell from his broken fingers. Then I struck again - at his face this time. He fell to the moss clutching his face with his left hand and curled into a fetal position.

I didn’t see the thin-man hit me. All I felt was my breath stop and pain radiating from my solar plexus. I must have dropped to my knees, for as I opened my eyes I saw, not a foot from my face ... the gun. I grabbed it and pointed it upward. The thin-man kicked and I pulled the trigger.

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Then what? Then it was time to reconsider the value of bravery. Then it was time to say, “I didn’t really want to hurt you.” And time to realize you were a liar.

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Day 38:

KESOGAMI LAKE, YOUNG-WOMAN BAY ^a

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I can feel my pulse knot

in my wrist, seal shut
the passage to my heart
as I hurt for you.

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(We only took a blanket and an hour
to kill the beast, mutilate
each other.)

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The river drains the day. Now again I long
to enter
your wilderness
in that brief dark
before the hunter's moon,
blood and cold, rises
on our basic nature.

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It is unlikely I'll find
you in time, in this deep
ragged interior,

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still I hold my breath –
listen, listen
for a sign.

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Day 39:
NOVEMBER IS THE MONTH FOR THE AXE

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I saw the man again today. Again I checked for tracks.
Again: no tracks. It may seem strange, but I am not especially
disturbed by this apparition. And I don't really care if he is a
product of twilight and my mind or whether he is "real" -
whatever that means. In fact, I don't much care about that
particular distinction anymore. ^a

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I have with me a copy of Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*. I've just reread a passage where he writes that November is the month for the axe. Because it is cold enough to work in comfort, but not too cold. And because the lack of leaves permits one a view of the treetops, so you can decide which trees to fell "for the good of the land". I wonder at this ecologist's presumption. The land knows what is good for it. What do we know?

Killing, dying, the presumption of us to think we know best. Look at what we have done to this planet, this place, this space; and we dare to think we know best. DO NOT FEAR THE WOLF, LET THE HUNTER LIVE. I remember the fall, the hunting season, the time when things die by themselves ... or with help. It seems so distant. I am buried in eternal winter. Remember the dying of the year. November alone in the woods with my .22. Five partridge. Meat sweet delight; you can almost taste the berries that fed those birds.

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It was November that Fredrick told me of his intention to winter in the Bush. The leaves were off the trees and temperatures ranging around freezing. Mortality was the theme. November creating its annual atmosphere of doom; the dark days and cold winds moving over the barren landscape. The movement of life southward . . . or the cessation of movement and the long sleep. Death and the waiting. That morning there was skim ice on the creek.

We were walking along the lake, not saying much, when suddenly he blurted it out, "I'm moving."

"Not back to Toronto, I hope? Shouldn't let that woman get to you."

"No, not Toronto."

We walked.

"Not Toronto ... I've purchased a cabin in the Bush North of Kap "

I told him he was crazy, then asked for details. As he talked I became even more convinced of his foolhardiness. The cabin was an old trapper's cabin and hadn't been occupied for several years. It was run down and completely isolated. I tried to warn him of the hazards an inexperienced man would encounter, but I could see that his mind was made up; and I didn't actually expect any real disaster to befall him,

for I was confident he would return long before the arrival of Spring. I was, of course, wrong. I didn't badger him too much, seeing his intense determination. After a short while we stopped talking and concluded our walk in silence.

I saw him only once more before he left. He was looking wan and unhealthy. We spoke only briefly.

Now I'm here too. In my notebook I've written: November is for killing, and December is for grieving." It is January. What is January for? For going on.

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Day 40:
40 BELOW ZERO ^a

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The bush is ugly, dark and deep.
The air is thick
as emphysema.
Fuck off, will ya!
I have miles to walk
before I die
and Spring is coming.
Spring is coming.

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Day 41:
INDIGENOUS TREES ^a

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Coniferous:

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Cedar, White

Fir, Balsam
Hemlock
Pine, Jack
Pine, Red
Pine, White
Spruce, Black
Spruce, White Tamarack

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Deciduous:

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Alder, Speckled
Ash, American Mountain
Ash, Black
Ash, Red
Ash, Showy Mountain
Ash, White
Aspen, Large-Tooth
Aspen,
Trembling Basswood
Birch, White
Birch, Yellow
Cherry, Choke
Cherry, Pin
Dogwood, Alternate -Leaved
Elm, White
Hawthorn
Hornbeam
Maple, Mountain
Maple, Red
Maple, Silver
Maple, Sugar
Nannyberry
Oak, Burr
Oak, Red
Poplar, Balsam
Serviceberries
Sumac, Staghorn
Willow

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The number of species decreases as you move North. The great muskeg is mostly spruce, poplar and willow ... and tamarack. In Algonquin Park, at the southern reaches of the Northern Space, the variety is tremendous.

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Day 42:
MARKS ON THE SNOW ^a

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Snow. Whiteness. The sound of the snowmobile at night. Unmarked snow. I never find tracks. Sealed in. Beneath the ice two eyes staring up, unmoving. Who's who? I assume the deer rotted where we left it. The wolves howling comfort me. The shock of the gun along my arm and the terror in his face. Whiteness. I wait for blood on the snow. Whiteness. Diana. Snow. This is my forty-second day. Sentence. Cold. Snow.

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Day 43:
FREDRICK'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR JUNE 15

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"I've been neglecting this journal. I am so busy these days - time flies past. I spend my confidences on Diana."

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"Our canoe trip was great. We traveled down the Petawawa River from Lake Traverse to Montgomery Lake. ^a The river, like the weather, was alternately wild and peaceful: a counter-pointing of elementals. On the very first day out we saw moose several times. They are gigantic. I have a difficult time imagining a pack of wolves, which are really just big dogs, attacking and killing such hulking and

monstrous creatures. Diana tells me that wolves usually only kill the very old or very young or the very sick. Certainly, for no mature and healthy moose could fall to a pack of dogs.

“I ran my first serious rapids on this trip. Rather than taking out and portaging at Five Mile Rapids, I convinced Diana that I could cope with them. She admitted that they weren’t really very dangerous rapids, but they’re long, if not fully five miles of continuous white water. After she agreed that we’d shoot them, I felt my stomach knot.

“The current drew us gently up to the lip, almost drifting to the edge. Then suddenly we were in it. As you first slip into the firm grasp of the surging current, a sense of inexorable fate overwhelms you, paradoxically dispelling any fear. What must be will be. You have to go with it. Do the best you can, as fast as you can. There is no time. It stops. Everything flies past you, but you are motionless in the center. Reacting fast - no, faster - than you can. Spume and spray and the glimpse of rocks emerging from watery confusion, then flashing past to right or left. Draw stroke, pry, left, right, back paddle, the mist in your face, the shoreline an evergreen blur, draw left; and creeping into your nerves the sense of control as the paddle becomes a part of you, a branch of an amazingly finely tuned nervous system, directing your passage between boulders. Then: the gut twisting scrape of canoe on rock ... no, no puncture - on the landscape goes past you. Turning, twisting, almost out of control, almost in complete control, always on the very edge of control - riding down, down, down.

“Then it was over. Then our nearly hysterical laughter as we finally raced out into the calm water of Whitson Lake. The canoe slowed. We had to paddle again . . . in water that felt molasses thick.”

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“More than ever, I am infatuated with the bush. This short canoe trip was a tease, a temptation. ^b There is something out there in the trees that I never, in my previous life, even suspected existed. I don’t know exactly what it is, but it is calling me to a wholly different kind of life. Life should be like that river - alternately wild and peaceful.”

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Day 44:
THE FOOL IN THE MIRROR ^a

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What the hell does he know? I should say what did he know then, for I guess he knows a great deal more now. My father used to say that we only see the fool in the mirror if we don't know it's a mirror we're looking at. Told that to Frank, and he said he'd probably like my father. I wonder about him. Somewhere I have a letter from him. He wrote that he wanted to come up and spend next summer with me. Summer! How infinitely far away.

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The temperature is 32° below zero. I heard the snowmobile a few hours ago, but I didn't bother looking for tracks I know I'll never find.

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Fredrick writes of the rapids, but does not mention the blackflies. The blackflies that time of year must have been terrible, but he doesn't even mention them.

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I've noticed something odd. The sound of the wolves and the sound of the snowmobile never occur on the same night. So What?

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Day 45:
BLACKFLIES ^a

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Blackflies are the tiny little flies that breed in such great numbers in Northern Ontario during the Spring. When present

only in small swarms or when they are not biting, these little insects are hardly noticed by the newcomer to the Shield country. And if told that these unimpressive little flies are the plague of the North, are the reason some experts feel the sparsely populated North will remain sparsely populated, the novice bush-traveler will often laugh. So tell him about the cattle dying of shock after an attack of blackflies. Tell him about the documented cases of blackflies driving men insane, or biting them to death as they clog their breathing passages, attacking in dense black swarms. Or, most convincingly, take the skeptic into the Bush on a humid day in June.

I have seen these little creatures swarming in such numbers that they appear as dense smoke clouds. Sixteen billion flies was one biologist's estimate for the number of eggs on a fifteen foot rock outcrop near a waterfall. The average number of larvae per square meter of riverbed was estimated at five million. An actual count of 325 mature blackflies landing on a foot square scrap of cloth *per minute* was not considered unusual. And when you have been attacked, when these minute insects are biting you and lapping your blood, you can easily understand the pure terror such numbers inspire. Many outsiders to this country find themselves in the hospital emergency wards waiting for antihistamine shots after one day outings, despite insect repellent and reasonable clothes. Some people have strong allergic responses to the bites, developing fever, nausea and extreme swelling of the lymph nodes. Psychological response to an attack by these insects is often equally severe. The absolute hopelessness of swatting at the hordes of little blood-thirsty creatures, the sudden realization of how very much blood they can draw when attacking en masse, the horrid feeling of suffocation as they get lodged in nose and throat and crawl into your ears and hair - these things can quickly drive a person into panic. Half seriously the emotional response has been called "blackfly dementia". On the ridges of the barren grounds, caribou have been seen running wildly back and forth until they collapse from fatigue, literally driven insane by the flies. So too in the Bush of Northern Ontario, men have been driven into wild and futile flight through impenetrable undergrowth by blackfly assaults. A friend of mine, no novice either, wiped out his canoe on a hazardous stretch of rapids, and rather than attempting to recover his gear and recoup his

losses, soon found himself stumbling and running miles through the thick forest in the direction of a railway embankment - the only open space for miles. After reaching the railway he discovered the flies were almost as thick in the open, so he jogged and ran ten miles to a logging camp. When I saw him the next day his face was covered with tiny scabs, and his neck was so swollen that he couldn't close his top shirt button. He was sheepish about deserting his gear in such a mad scramble, but I understood, for it was early June and extremely humid. I should add that a man builds up some immunity to the flies after spending time in the back-country; my friend had this degree of immunity, so one can imagine what could happen to somebody fresh blood from the city.

Blackflies breed in running water, because of a high need for oxygen, in the early Spring. The swamps are fine for mosquitoes, those relatively minor irritations, but rapids are best for blackflies. Only the female of the species bites, and then only when the humidity is between 70 and 90 percent. However, this is often enough. She does not insert a proboscis like the mosquito - rather she uses her mouthparts to saw through the skin. Then she laps the blood, often for as long as ten minutes if left undisturbed. She bloats up to many times her original size as she takes in the blood-food. Two varieties of blackfly attack humans in particular, but the blackfly bites everything from higher mammals to other insects. One type specializes to the point of attacking only loons.

And what is the natural motive behind this vampirism? What is the reason the female blackfly is so hungry for blood? How does this blood-lust serve ecological function? What is nature's reason? The female needs it to mature her eggs.

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Day 46: FACES ^a

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Did some ice fishing today and pulled in one beautiful trout. I find walking through the Bush is delightfully easy in winter, even with the encumbrance of showshoes. In the summer there is the constant battling over deadfalls, through muck and bog, into the dense, quick and thick growth of Northern underbrush. In summer there is the sweat and the insect hordes. Today in the clear cold I passed through woods that I wouldn't have dared venture into last June or July. Death makes the passage so much easier.

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easy. easy. a tendency to prefer the easy, the comfortable. this will get one in the end. death is easy. death will get you in the end.

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The way he drowned was ridiculous. A man of his kind shouldn't drown in a ridiculous fashion. The others' death, I could understand; although maybe, just maybe, it was right after all. It was his style to always laugh at the absurdity of everything, so his absurd death perhaps does make poetic sense. Still it amazes me that he couldn't swim. Strange how everyone went away.

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Diana was beautiful. a beauty of strength. never easy.

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The dusk brought me another light-show, one of the most lovely ones I've yet witnessed: a gradual shifting through the spectrum as the sun sifted through horizon clouds. Then the stars came out in surreal intensity. The milky-way: a bold splash past brilliantly clear constellations. And now to climax the performance, the Northern Lights are dancing green and blue, a wavering curtain I can almost hear rustling in the ionosphere.

I'm having a cup of coffee after a short walk. I could've walked all night, my snowshoes softly thumping through snow, but the cold finally drove me in. The clear nights are always cold. Feeling very peaceful, but filled with a

longing to share for awhile this place. To watch this night perform for a few hours more, then go share a bed with a woman's warmth!

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comfort of contact. sleep you little death. artificial substitute.

I think I've called Diana artificial, but now I believe this to have been a grave error. She was deceptive, but she was natural. I have seen nature deceive as no human ever could. I've seen quiet placid waters convert to knifing waves within minutes. O, she was natural ... a natural.

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nature. turn and return. wilderness comes back easy if given half a chance.

There is the difference between Fredrick and Thomson: Thomson was a natural, gifted with the deception of an artist, while Fredrick was a civilized man, a rational man. People wonder if Thomson died of natural causes; I wonder if Fredrick survived by natural causes.

I'm planning to hike to the knoll tomorrow. I've set a few rabbit traps, and it is about time I checked on them. I can't expect to make it through this winter on my stores; besides, it wouldn't somehow be right. Frank used to say that we have a responsibility to take, to use, that like a predator we have to destroy. If we have a role left in the nature of things this is it. I don't know. This may be our role but we are clearly overplaying it, and soon may be left alone on an empty stage.

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I'm tired despite the coffee. I am moving into the center of this pattern, into the center of this winter. A man needs sleep to keep up his strength.

Day 47:
WE GROW OLD ^a

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No, I didn't kill him. I just wounded his shoulder. He sat down from the shock, though. Dill was still moaning and rolling back and forth, but I figured that neither of them was seriously injured.

First I freed Frank. As I untied Mantha, I asked why he had baited Dill, "You could have got yourself killed."

"I could see you crouched in the underbrush," he said, "and I figured you needed a distraction to make your move."

"Oh, I see." I looked at the two men awaiting rough justice. Frank spoke up, "I think we should try that apple trick. I've used a gun once or twice, and I think I know how to fire it."

"Or perhaps we should scalp them," Mantha suggested laughing.

I didn't see the humour in the situation. I took the revolver and flung it into the lake where it splashed quietly.

"Guess that means you vote for Mantha's more primitive suggestion," Frank joked.

"No, that means I vote for getting out of her-e and leaving these two to nurse their wounds. Considering that we could've all been killed, I don't really see why you guys are treating this like some big, goddam joke."

"It is," said Frank.

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"And then what happened?" Fredrick asked after I gave no indication of continuing the story.

"I don't know yet," I replied, sipping my beer and staring out the window.

"You mean to say that was all a lot of bullshit?"

"Not exactly." I lit a cigarette and, took another sip of beer.

The lights of four snowmobiles were flickering as they rode over snow crests on their way toward shore.

"Well?" Fredrick insisted.

“Well most of it was bullshit. We did go on that canoe trip.”

“Jesus Christ!”

“... and I did step in a bear-trap ... and I did meet a couple of guys ... and then it gets a little different.”

“O yeah, how?”

“Well, we paddled together for awhile. Met up with Frank and Mantha the next day. We ran some rapids together. After a couple of days, they headed off eastward, and we continued on the main route ... How’s Diana treating you these days?”

“You bastard!” Fredrick grinned foolishly. Gradually he faded ... all but his grin.

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Day 48:
THE BRAIN DRAIN^a

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I don’t like it the way the banks
dip here ...

it’s troublelike I’m sure
stick your ass into shore
draw draw draw
in the stern

(compensate current differential)

Let’s stop! Let’s stop!
You said no, tho I said yes.
I knew best, or more, but you’re from the States, so
back
into the current
into the current
In

drift, breathe deep a
round the
bend, then

ROAR

of stony rapids.
 Drift up
 to the edge ----- o
 ver
 into it
 draw left, right again, left
 back back paddle
 left, more more
 more more moremore . . .
 The Scrape.
 and
 you lean and draw like a titan too
 late.

Broadside.

LEAN!

o
 ver

toolate
 wet, dip spin thru green smack of rock on shin, up up again
 air
 Breathe! Get feet downstream!

CRACK!

My skull split open like an egg:

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 The Brain Drain.

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Day 49: PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

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So does your patience wear thin? Perhaps you don't yet understand that it is all part and parcel of it. The Bush includes not only the lichen covered rock, but the litter, the bear crap, the deadfalls ... all the pieces matter -- not just the green fragments of imagination, but the pieces of junk. Plato had to admit hair and feces into his ideal world: is it too much

to ask you to do the same? I'm trying to get at the real, and the real encompasses even the unreal.

Patience is a virtue. Imagine my patience as I endure winter and isolation! Some of the pieces are sharp, and I cut my hands. I wash the wounds with snow. Patience.

Be patient with my angle of approach. Sir Arthur Eddington says the physical world is made up of relations and relata: you can visualize this as lines connecting points in many dimensions. Some of the lines have no beginning or no end --- call them rays. Someone has to draw the lines or there will be no intersections to interest you. Or is it the end of a life-line that is your chief interest? Well be patient -- I will take you to the loose ends ... in due time.

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Day 50:
THE LINE, THIRD SEGMENT ^a

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Conversation overheard at the Cochrane Train Station:

- Going up to Moosonee?
- Yeah. Have you taken the trip?
- O yes, just got back.
- What's up there?
- Nothing.
- Nothing?
- A lot of indians that won't even talk to you.
- o. What about the ride up?
- Trees.
- Trees?
- Nothing but millions of trees. I recommend you get a double seat so you can sleep part way.
- o.

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Continue the penetration, follow the railway line:

- Mile 480: Board train to Moosonee. Temperature 65° F. Early morning clouds clearing.
- Mile 485: Passing what still looks a bit like farm country, although deserted. Poplar-spruce forest. Still in Northern edge of Great Clay Belt.
- Mile 490: Glimpse of the giant Abitibi River. This river parallels the rail all the way down to Moosonee. (Do parallel lines meet in infinity?) Wide muddy water seems quiet at this point, gently easing its murky way down to the Bay.
- Mile 510: Smaller bush river, muddy too, winding through spruce and poplar hills. Any suggestion of civilization gone. Bush thick although the poplar and aspen predomination still gives a distinctly southern quality to the landscape. No pines, for it is too far North.
- Mile 550: Now past the Clay Belt. Poplars gone too. Land has become monotonously flat. Spruce walls pass unrelentingly on both sides of the train.
- Mile 573: Otter Rapids Hydro Development. Train stops. The Abitibi is dammed here for power. Below the dam a long section of shallow rocky rapids. This is the point where the land drops into the Hudson Bay Lowlands. This is the beginning of the Great Muskeg.
- Mile 596: Riding down the Great Muskeg. All that is visible are spruce, spruce, candelabra spruce, three to six feet tall, perhaps 200 years old. Occasionally, and then gradually with greater frequency, the wall of spruce on both sides of the track thins out and exposes vast plains of muskeg - open bogs and fens with the spruce scattered to the higher hummocks. Cottongrasses, sedges and sphagnum moss. Profound mosaic of quagmire.
- Mile 615: The ubiquitous tamarack - lonely and lovely, spooky tree, its leaves (needles) hang like gossamer, a green semitransparent tone - mixes with the stunted spruce that

extend, extend on and out ... into nowhere. Haunted place. An
ambience of complete desolation. It has become cloudy.

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Mile 666: Moosonee. Rail ends here. Town is mud and gravel,
stray dogs, poor Indians. Squalid. The Great Muskeg
surrounds it with a dismal aura of decay. Temperature 63°F.
Drizzle. Shanties, shacks. The population is mainly Cree. The
big Moose River, wide and muddy, is split by gravel bars and
shoals, for it is low-tide. Big Rupert-House canoes propelled by
junky, battered outboards cross-cross the water, carrying tourists
to Moose Factory. Moose Factory: extension of Moosonee
located on an island in the Moose River; it has a hospital,
modern wonder of medicine, that services the North beyond this
settlement. Visit Moose Factory! Dirty little injun kids calling,
“goin’ across, Misser, goin’ across?” Are you willing to cross
over? Last communication point with the South, you enter the
post-office where a big sign warns: STRAY DOGS WILL BE
SHOT ON SIGHT.^b

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Beyond: James Bay tidal flats. Stop. Rest here.

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Day 51

FRANK IS REASONABLE^a

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Frank is reasonable, the carcass
of a deer is so much meat to him.

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We stand over the still warm flesh and Frank begins to expound
again: “An animal doesn’t die like a human. Death comes to us
with heavy footsteps, the first distant echoes are heard in early
childhood, but it comes to an animal swiftly and silently. The
human spends his life dying; the animal often only seconds.
With our mind it is not only impossible to learn to live like an
animal, it is also impossible to learn to die like one . . .”

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Day 52
SPRUCE TEA

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Spruce tea. The way back is always more difficult. I can remember one summer in the Hearst district. Back of nowhere in blackfly season. I can remember another summer, canoeing down the French River, laughing at rapids. I can remember the way Diana moved, most naturally. Memories, dead bodies. You make spruce tea from spruce needles and boiling water; it tends to be weak, so I always add a lot of sugar.

I saw the man again. Again from a distance. There was no point in it, but I checked for tracks. Again, no tracks. I am no longer especially disturbed by this apparition. And I couldn't care less if he is a product of twilight and my mind or whether he is "real." In fact, I don't really believe much in that distinction anymore.

It is cold tonight, thirty below already, and only midnight. I remember a canoe trip with Fredrick where he made the "spruce tea" from hemlock needles. As we were sitting sipping the concoction, I told him he had used hemlock instead of spruce and it wasn't half as good. He spit his out in terror. You see he thought hemlock trees were the source of the poison "hemlock" that did Socrates in. Even after I explained that the poison came from a water plant, he refused to finish his tea. ^a

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Day 53:
THAT WAS NO LADY ^a

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They had been getting pretty disgusted, what with eleven of their twelve days gone and they had not even seen a moose

track. Two hundred miles north of the nearest road, and damn near five hundred from the charter plane base, this was wild and isolated country and this was moose country. And unless there was some

unknown factor involved it was only reasonable that they would manage to kill one of the great beasts.

The older man had more patience, more money too, and wasn't taking their bad luck quite so seriously. But the younger man, normally a very rational man, was burning with frustration. Thus that last morning he broke a tacit rule by grabbing his rifle case and heading off from their tent into the early morning mist. The older man knew there was little point in shouting after his companion, so he just squatted in front of the Coleman stove and continued sipping his tea.

It was a cold morning and there was frost on the aluminum canoe. This made the young man think of the hazards of a civilized man going out alone into this wilderness, this time of year. Still he got into the canoe, telling himself that he had no intention of going far from camp. He'd just paddle over to the portage to the beaver pond. He had figured it out: the rich aquatic vegetation of this pond, according to the books, meant it was a likely feeding spot for moose. Perhaps alone his luck would turn; the old man was always coughing or talking, but alone he would be silent.

The portage was about a mile down along the southeast shore. He ignored the small outboard motor and paddled the whole distance: he had no intention of making noise even at this distance from his ambush spot. After the paddle he walked the quarter mile trail over his own frozen footprints. I'm tracking myself, he thought fleetingly, as he silently strode the portage. I'm tracking myself, retracing my own failure, like the wolf lapping his own blood from a razor in the snow. But quickly he drove these irrational thoughts from his mind.

The end of the portage looked out on the pond, a dismal pool quite thoroughly misted over. Looking at the vegetation in the shallows by his feet, he quickly identified it as arrowheads; somewhere he had read that you could eat the tubers. He sat down, back to a stump, took out his 30.06 from the carrying case and loaded it. Resting it across his lap, he leaned back, shivering despite his wool outfit, and waited for

the mist to rise. Dull, waiting is. Deadly dull. But this is the only rational way to hunt moose, he thought, let them come to you, for we all have to eat. He heard very little, for the mist was muffling sound. So when gradually the outline of a gigantic bull moose became visible, he doubted his eyes. Still he froze and waited, waited. Waited till the mist had risen.

The moose was perhaps forty yards along the curving shore to the right, standing knee deep in the pond, nibbling on some underwater plant. The man lifted his rifle very slowly. He couldn't possibly miss at this distance. He knew he was definitely going to make the kill. The only problem was that he didn't dare hit it while it was still in the pond, for he'd never be able to get the beast out of the water. And he didn't just want to kill, he told himself, he wanted the meat. Reasoning it out, he realized he would have to startle it, then blast it just as it reached the shore but before it could disappear into the Bush. If he kept his wits about him, this should be no great problem. The great animal was so close, it was impossible to get erect: the startled moose would be onto shore and gone into the thicket long before he could get a good shot. So he had to shoot sitting down.

Rifle butt firm against shoulder, the big bull right in the gun site, the man inhaled deeply. Then shouted, "I've got you, you bastard!" The animal lifted its antlered head and then began moving for shore, much slower than the man had anticipated. Keeping it in perfect site, he swung the rifle smoothly with the movement of that great hulk rising out of the muck and mire and onto shore. A steady squeeze on the trigger. The shock to shoulder. The moose snapping its head with the impact of the bullet. The crash as it lumbered into the Bush, out of sight.

He knew he had it. He had reasoned carefully, killed cleanly. He knew he had it. In fact he was sure that moose couldn't have gone more than a few yards after the hit. He would go to it now, although this was almost a superfluous act, and admire the body of his victim. Then back to the canoe and camp to get his companion. It would be a long day's work with block and tackle, knife and muscle, to section this big animal and haul the meat back to camp. But first he wanted to see the bull, neatly dead.

Walking along the shoreline was difficult, but his enthusiasm rushed him along the forty yards to the broken branches where the animal crashed ashore. He stood, admiring his prey, for several minutes, no rational thought passing through his head.

“Nicely done.” A woman’s voice, perhaps tinged with sarcasm.

He spun around. No this wasn’t real. She was beautiful, dark hair and flashing eyes. And a magnificent body. She was standing a few feet from him, standing amidst the undergrowth, stark naked. Smiling. The temperature was still barely above freezing; her nipples were erect but otherwise she seemed

impervious to the cold. What does a man think? What does a man say? There could be no women, no men even, for a hundred miles from this lake, unless another hunting party. She was smiling, almost laughing, as he searched for a rational explanation.

“Nicely done.” Was she mocking him?

She took a step forward and took his hands and lifted them to her breasts. She was warm, deeply warm. He could not think, not think what to say. She must have watched him kill. She took his hands from her breasts and led him to a wool blanket thrown on the groundcover. Silently she undressed him. He shivered involuntarily, but she pulled him to her. Something triggered within him. He came down on top of her and fucked her savagely and quickly with mean, deep, hard thrusts. She barely moved, did not respond to his crude movement, but he did not notice. As the last spasm died out, she quickly slid away from him, stood over him, still smiling.

“Nicely done.” She laughed, a deeply sarcastic laugh, and ran off past the steaming moose carcass into the spruce.

The young man dressed rapidly, made his way back to the portage trail and retraced his steps. Riding back in the canoe he watched the wake from the outboard with blank expression.

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Any luck?” The older man was sprawled out smoking his pipe.

“No,” replied the other man for he was a profoundly civilized man, a profoundly rational man.

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Day 54:
IS THIS RIDICULOUS?

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Is this ridiculous? Can I ever hope to make you understand this place? Come into it? I said before it is not the why but the how that is the more illuminating question. On what tangent should you enter the circle of wonder?

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I seem to work better on the nights the wolves howl. It must be the effect of knowing there is animal life around me that encourages me in my own activity. Wolves, remember wolves.

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I have been considering including an extensive bibliography in this book. I have taken most of my relevant books with me, and they line one wall as insulation from the cold. The problem is that any thorough bibliography would be too large a proportion of this work, for this space is not especially literate. Still, it is my space, and I'm literate. Perhaps a selected and very restricted book listing would be the fairest compromise.

Diana claimed she never read. Considering her precise speech, this seems very unlikely, although I never did catch her alluding to any written work. The woman was always extremely careful with her image. She had completely stylized her life by the time I met her, and I often wondered if anything could take her by surprise.

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I haven't seen or heard my mysterious stranger for two days now. It may seem strange, but I sincerely hope he'll come back.

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My mind wanders. Very cold tonight: 40 below. Living in the North thickens your blood. I'm not uncomfortable although the cabin can't be much warmer than freezing temperature. I do get cold, but I rarely get chilled ... except by

nightmares. The cold is often good: a clear sunny day with twenty-below temperatures and no wind is merely refreshing ... once you get accustomed to it. One can appreciate the air. In summer when sweat ruins the sun, water is enjoyed, but on the clear cold days of mid-winter it is the air and sky and sun that is appreciated. To every element there is a season. The sun is closer to the earth in the Northern winter than in the summer, and you can feel its presence in the sky.

Northern Ontario winters are not short, but they are real: they impinge on your life, force awareness of the non-human. In more temperate climates it is easier to modify nature, mold it to fit human proportions, and hence it is all too easy to forget man's place. But the sharp indifference of cold cuts through any pretensions a northerner might hope to harbor. If you are careless of the earth's revolution around the sun, if you lose contact for even a short time with the outward reality, you will get hurt.

You can get frostbite in the town on the way to the office. You can die of exposure if your car stalls in a blizzard one mile from a neighbor. The cold keeps you humble.^a

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It is appropriate that Fredrick took his apprenticeship in Spring and summer, because then it was easy for him to hold his illusions, and these illusions motivated him, sustained him. Of course, what happened the winter of his disillusionment is also appropriate, despite it being horrible.

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But what do you make of all this? I have a suggestion: make a snow-castle.

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Day 55: WINDIGO SPIRIT^a

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The Windigo is a spirit of the North, the Cree told us. The
Windigo is a cannibal spirit, the Cree told us. The Windigo will
possess a man

form ice inside his soul
cause fur to cover his skin
create a craving for human flesh

The Cree told us,
Two bitter nights ago.
Two nights ago, we left their dismal camp, to check
Our traplines. It was twenty-below zero
Two nights ago, but now it has gotten
Really cold. Windigo, Windigo, Passing through our thoughts
Like wind at thirty-five below.

Windigo.

The Windigo moves thru the five moons of winter
shrouded in a blizzard
blown by high winds over frozen lakes
or creeps inexorably on
thru those still days
when life is locked immutable in minus
fifty skies, those cloudless, breathless
days when neither air nor man dare move.

The Windigo crosses a portage
then a sun-blind lake
then the soul of any fool
alone

out here,
like us

Now.

Two nights out, out from another man, we are still
Strangers in front of our fire,

our meek fire melting
melting just enough
night air
to breathe.

A shadow moves.

Windigo.

Two nights ago, the Cree told of a trapper lost,
Near here,
Now surely, host of
The Windigo Spirit.

Cold.

Windigo. Windigo.

Two nights out, the dead trapper enters the ring of our fire
his own lips and fingers chewed off in hunger
a gaping chasm of a mouth ringed with frozen

Blood.

Two nights out, I turn to my companion,
behind his eyes ice forms
his hands are matted with hair

This night, I rise and scream.

My scream crosses the frozen lake and dies somewhere in the
spruce

dies somewhere in the

spruce.

Windigo. Windigo.

Windigo.

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Day 56:

DYING OF YEAR ^a

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In the loneliest dying of year. Decisions made in summer's laze
grown solid as granite. The urge to kill rising in the most
civilized souls. Spring we weed out our own weak, but in
autumn we weed out their weak. We move through the Bush,
hunters again. In cities, autumn brings new violence: schools
open with their hidden lessons behind the teaching. The migrants
move away fearful of winter assassination. Loveliest dying of
year.

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Day 57:
AVERAGE DAILY MIN/MAX TEMP FOR TWO CITIES ^a

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Month	Average low and high	
	Toronto	Thunder Bay
May	46 / 65	37 / 58
June	56 / 75	47 / 68
July	61 / 81	52 / 74
August	60 / 78	51 / 72
September	53 / 71	44 / 63
October	42 / 58	34 / 51
November	33 / 45	20 / 34
December	23 / 34	6 / 22
January	18 / 31	-2 / 17
February	17 / 31	0 / 20
March	25 / 39	12 / 31
April	36 / 52	26 / 45

The greatest differences are clearly in the winter months.

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Day 58:
ASK NO QUESTIONS AND I'LL TELL YOU NO LIES

"I know, a parable . . . you're no longer satisfied with just telling stories. Well, let me figure it out. I know who the younger man is, and I know the lady is ... " ^a

"But that was no lady," I interjected.

"Shut up, please. Yes, those characters are clear. Now the older man ... hmm ... you maybe?"

"I'm not old, and I don't know why you insist it's a parable."

“Sure, you’re old ... at least in your own eyes. Aren’t you always giving me fatherly advice about Diana?”

“Damn it, Fredrick, you’re getting so touchy! Listen, if you want to meet an old man why don’t you come with us on the canoe trip: we’ll end at Brent, and there is a man there as old as the trees.”

“I want to talk about your parable.”

“It’s not a parable,” I insisted. “And I don’t want to talk about it! Let’s forget it, okay?”

“Sure,” Fredrick replied in a voice edged with anger.

I took a long drink of my beer, and stared out the window at the frozen waste of Lake Nipissing. There was a good moon, nearly full and the surface of the lake was bright with reflected light. I thought I could see three men sitting out there, passing a bottle. ^b Hallucination, of course. ^c

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Day 59:
ON A NORTHERN LAKE OF JANUARY ^a

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. .
The point of a poem is surely style
Not what it permits you to see,
Thus poems of love appeal to me
For that form of gentle grace
Contributed by a woman’s face –
But the rigid
Countenance
Of this frozen lake
Is no-place
To think
Of love;
Being too sharp
The crackling air too
Brilliant-clear, lacking
Dusky edges blurred
Contours, and semi-

Blindness
Requisite to contemplation
Of love;
For here love can only seem
Animal, a lust reserved
For certain times of year,
For here
The lonely tracks of wolves,
Here the carcass at which they end,
Here the matter of food
Of warmth, of the exacting
Glare of reality
Demands priority; this
Long wind-beat mile of ice
And snow: naked
To an impotent sun has
Its own point and style.
Its own poetry.

.
You would hate it, Fredrick,
But I find it a nice plane

.
To visit.

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Day 60:
FREDRICK'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR AUGUST 29

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“Today we went for a walk along Henderson’s old bush road, which winds back into a sugar bush and then through a young pine forest. As we walked Diana remained very quiet. I wanted to ask her what was on her mind, but I knew I wouldn’t be successful at prying, so I too walked in silence.

“We came to a spot where the Shield breaks through its thin soil cover and sat down on the lichen carpet that

covers the rock. The noon sun was hot, but it was a dry heat -- not at all unpleasant. The season apparently was too late for flies, and the only insects that buzzed about us were the small yellow-jackets that love hot open spaces and seem, fortunately, to be indifferent to humans.

"We had only been sitting, basking in the sun, for a few minutes, when Diana stood up and pulled her white sleeveless sweater off over her head. My breath caught at the erotic contrast of deeply tanned and untanned flesh. She unzipped her shorts and stepped out of them. We made love all afternoon on the lichen-cushioned rock.

"Walking back to the car I realized we hadn't spoken to each other, excepting one word interjections. Now I really wanted to talk, but I felt it would be breaking some tacit agreement, some unwritten natural law that she always let guide her behaviour. So back to town we drove, cloaked in our silence and satiation.

"Right now I don't want anything more than what I have. I want things to go on just as they are. But I know better, for I'm not sixteen."

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Day 61: FRAYING AT THE EDGES ^a

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Dead of night: a scream. I leaped from the warmth of my cot and stood naked on the cold floor, trying to sort the images of my dream from the stark reality of that scream. Doubt came into my mind, but still I dressed, determined to take a look outside.

It was a very dark night. I stood just outside my door, my breath white in the light from the cabin window. I didn't move until my eyes became accustomed to the darkness. Then I took a few steps forward . . . and stopped.

Off by the edge of the spruce I could detect the tracks of wolves. I hadn't yet found wolf tracks near the cabin and I

admit I was a bit disconcerted. Still, I slowly followed them, moving very cautiously, only able to see at all because of the snow's ability to reflect what little light there was. They led down toward Winged Lake.

The lake became visible below me, and I stopped. It looked like a man was standing about a hundred feet from shore. Around him circled a pack of wolves. As I watched he dropped to his knees and covered his head with his arms. The pack moved in.

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Day 62:
FREEDOM AND DIGNITY ^a

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Frank: "You realize your obsessions are of no significance to anyone but yourself. You may think you've found a person who shares your obsessions, but you'll be mistaken. Everyone has their own obsessions and each person's are totally unique. Superficial similarities may fool you into believing you have found someone with the same concerns, but ultimately you are alone with your particular madness. I think it is best to try and free oneself from any and all deep concerns. Since no one cares for you or your cares, why should you care for anything or anyone?"

.
Death cares.
Death breathes and lives on your air.
Death waits patient at the bend in the river.
Death nurses a grizzly.
Death kills time below the falls.
Death lights your fire.
Death gives and death takes away.
Death is natural.

.
"Wholeness is the product of the rhythm of the earth.
Man in an apartment or motor car - like man in a spaceship -

is an occupant of the universe but not a part of it. Only when there is a wilderness, can man harmonize his inner being with the wave lengths of the earth. When the earth, its products, its creatures become his concern, man is caught up in a cause greater than his own life and more meaningful. Only when man loses himself in an endeavour of that magnitude does he walk and live with true humility and reverence.”

(William O. Douglas) ^b

.
Only in total unity is there total equality.
Only in total unity is there total freedom.
Only in total unity is there total dignity.
- Only in death is there total unity.

.
Here is a communion of indifference.
Your death:
irrelevant as the average Tuesday in March.
The living goes on
Like rain in spring.

.
When you care, and it doesn't ... then you'll understand love.
And the stark beauty of wilderness will rearrange any little ideas you may have had of your own importance.

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Day 63:
BILLY BOY ^a

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“Christ! How old is that man?”
“Billy? Christ knows, I don't”

.
I have a day or two to wastrel away in this waylaid place
called Brent station: a minute-stop
on the rail, gauge to tie the mile on mile, thru Algonquin
wilderness.

Brent : very (at best)

very little

more or less than a place
to put in for canoe trips
or to take trout (and pickerel) out.
What?

would any man live here for, eh?

Eh? Billy?

.

Billy, Billy,

(storekeeper for this speck of a place)

I'd write
a proper ode to you if only
I knew how. But how
immortalize
a man perhaps not mortal

perhaps but a ghost

perhaps but a tree

(disguised as a man)?

.

Old Billy has his store here,
a damp and dingy store
he's had for more years
than blackflies in June.

.

Old Billy is a mystery
ancient as Delphi. "Christ!

How old is that man?"

.

His flesh and hair
urine yellow, sick
skin weathered
to consistency of mildewed newspapers.
His hand-rolled
cigarette, wet, short of tobacco, rarely lit,

dangles

from his hint of lower lip.

.

Billy stands amidst his humid products, his day-old (at very
least)
pies and bread; the canned meats, the fly-swatters, the past.

front.

transportation

horseshit

.
I ask around, question natives of this town:
(most were summer cottagers, not a one I found
lives here the year around, but Billy, even those
railway men work in two week shifts all year now)
“Billy? O, I don’t know, been here as long as I can
remember.”
“Wife? Not that I remember ever hearing of.”
“Age? Christ knows, I don’t.”

.
Perhaps as a younger man he did know Christ.
(Billy on the sea of Galilee?)

.
He has become obsession, this man with his piss-coloured
skin.
Was he ever, ever a younger man?
Did he ever wander through these billion trees, leaves in his
hair?
Ever compose poems using words like sweet and
fair?
Ever dream of wealth or fame?
His hair, his hair, what colour once upon was his hair?

.
“Christ! How old is that man?
“Billy? Christ knows, I don’t.”

.
Can I just walk into his store?
Stand amidst cakes and paddles and mosquitoes -
Stare this old and dirty creature in his bottomless eyes and
ask,
“How old are you, Billy?”
Would it sound to him like,
“Are you going to die today?”

.
But perhaps
he is long since immune to thought of death.
A man his age must
have-been-expecting it
twenty-five years ago.
Perhaps
he figures God forgot

about him

way out here

and he won't be picked

Up

till the seven horsemen ride

that thirty mile bush road

thru muck, spruce and northern

weather.

.

Still I can't be rude, walk right in and ask about a man's death.

His past must be so large,

his future so minute

and improbable,

I wonder how

he manages to move about at all.

.

No, Billy, I'll never ask a personal question of you,

for I'm but a stranger here; it would be rude. And I

haven't time right now to try to know you slow

for you see I'm just passing thru

passing thru

.

unlike you?

.

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.

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Day 64

PHENOMENA

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You're wondering, I know. When I got up the next morning to check for tracks, for some confirmation of the reality of the dark night's vision -- I was confounded by a storm. Only today has the howling finally abated, and the outside again become visible.

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DO NOT FEAR THE WOLF

LET THE HUNTER LIVE

.
I didn't find anything, no trace of the wolves ... or their prey.
Of course a great amount of snow has been dumped on the
landscape these last few days, and also, I'm not at all sure
exactly where on the lake the man fell. Remember it was very
dark.^a

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Day 65:
PREVIEWS^a

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I know not whether you will think it legitimate to
insert a few pieces of crystal into this mosaic, to reflect on the
yet unpieced section. But I have no critic out here. There is no
one to turn to and ask if I am on the right track. So I blunder
along;

1. Silence. "Silence. We both drank and stared at each other.
He looked very much alive. His face seemed vaguely familiar,
but his eyes were strange - filled with a resignation so deep
you could drown in it."

2. Summer. "It is in summer that we follow the trail easier and
without thought; more drifting than tracking. We continue
without effort though often lost in the thick and lush
undergrowth. Like lust that has become familiar but not stale.
Frank often laughs at nothing. You, Diana, you no doubt are
laughing too. There are blueberries in August."

3. Mystery. "The mystery perhaps is the thing that first
catches in one's throat. The why's. The mystery of sounds
without sources . . . effects without causes. It keeps the peace
from becoming intolerable, and adds the tension that makes it
art, not death. The mystery that a human being can never
solve, only destroy."

4. Lost. "lost and clothed in fur, search and search but fail to
find your hiding rock."

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Day 66:
MAGNETAWAN ^a

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It was a silly incident, and I am, no doubt, attaching too much significance to it. But surely you know how these things are: you discover something about yourself that you never would've expected, and the surprise seems to endow it with great personal significance. Yet often to other people it seems a small thing.

Anyway, Fredrick and I were canoeing the Magnetewan River - a simple Saturday afternoon outing. The river, at least where we were canoeing, is shallow and unimpressive, so we had become quite relaxed and careless. We approached an easy rapid with little caution, only to suddenly find ourselves in a bad channel. Dodging the rocks desperately as we rushed down the shallow rapid we miscalculated and went broadside. Leaning upstream to balance we lodged on a rock, and in seconds the canoe was scooping the river in. And we were in the river.

We weren't injured and surprisingly the canoe wasn't too severely damaged, but. we did lose our paddles. After about forty-five minutes of wrestling with ropes and long branches used as levers, we managed to free the canoe and get it to shore. The river, at this point, was near a bush-road into Algonquin Park, so I suggested we thumb back to our car, then drive back to pick up the canoe. For even if we wanted to continue paddling the mangled canoe, we could hardly do so without paddles.

We set off trudging along the gravel road. After walking for about half an hour without seeing a single vehicle, we decided to rest. Fredrick suggested we climb a nearby knoll and bask for awhile on a high rock shelf, enjoying the late afternoon sun. If a car did pass while we were on the hill, there would be no way we could flag him down, but I figured at worst we'd have to walk another hour or so to get back to the Ford, so I agreed. Climbing a steep hillside, thick with undergrowth, in soaking wet clothes is an exhausting ordeal. I had barely stretched out on the lichen-cushioned rock when I drifted off.

My eyes opened suddenly, and I felt the blood racing through my heart. It was very dark, an overcast night with no moon, and I was disoriented. What the hell, I said half to myself, half aloud, as I sat up. I knew I'd been dreaming, but the scraps of it were dissolving rapidly - something about a hunting trip. I looked around: below me I could make out the hazy gray winding line that had to be the gravel road, but behind me and around me the Bush was impenetrably dark. I checked my watch but no help there, for it had stopped. There was no trace of Fredrick so I called out; my voice startling me, but drawing no reply from the woods. My damn clothes were still damp and I was cold. Gathering together my resolution, I stood up and stamped about calling to Fredrick every few minutes - each time disturbed by the incongruity of my voice in the silent night. I smoked one of my few dry cigarettes before deciding I had waited long enough. Whatever had happened, heading for the car seemed the best policy.

Working my way down the hillside in the pitchy darkness was pure hell. I kept scratching my face on invisible branches. Wiping my face I felt the warmth of blood on my hand - only superficial cuts surely, but still unpleasant. Continued through Bush and bramble, scratched again and again, I continued the scramble down. Had made it perhaps three-quarters of the way when I slipped. I fell hard, backwards and to my right, smashed my elbow against a rock, and started to roll. Tumbling through darkness and the sharp, shredding net of brambles. But the undergrowth was so dense it held me back from crashing blindly all the way to the bottom. Just as my movements slowed I heard a loud whisper. Tangled in undergrowth, I lay still, bruised, bleeding and angry as a bear in winter. Although it seemed totally out of character, the only logical explanation appeared to be that Fredrick was playing some very stupid practical joke. I hadn't been able to discern what exactly was whispered, but I was positive I had heard a whisper. I froze. Every few seconds I detected a rustling about twenty yards to my right and up the hill. I waited. Then I struggled to my feet. My eyes strained to pick out some form, but it was hopeless.

"Alright, goddamn it, I'm hurt. Now quit playing games," I shouted into nowhere. Silence.

Then it was that the thought flickered across my mind that perhaps it wasn't Fredrick. I tried to repress it. I'm not frightened of the Bush at night, for I've spent too many peaceful nights there. However there is something terrifying about encountering another human being at night in the wilds. Some primitive response, some archetypical memory, starts the adrenaline flowing. What is a man doing in the Bush at night, You ask, forgetting that you're there, and you're not a madman.

I felt about for a rock the size of my fist, found one, and then called out again. Silence. Damn its I flung the rock in the direction of the earlier rustling sounds. Silence.

I found another rock, and waited for some sound to make a target for me. But stillness only waited with me. Ignoring a wide variety of aches and pains, I again started edging my way down the hill. And as soon as I began moving I heard the rustling behind me. I stopped. Silence. Now, to my deep surprise, I realized I was really frightened. Once again I began to move downward, more rapidly and less cautiously than before. From the sound of branches snapping and leaves rustling I could tell that whatever, whoever, was out here with me was following me down in a path roughly parallel to my descent. I hurried on, and only by good fortune did I avoid slipping again.

I reached the road, and then instead of feeling relief, I felt extremely exposed. I stood still at the edge of the gravel and listened, but now the only sounds I heard were natural: trees creaking, the wind in the branches, and such. The unnatural quiet of the wooded hillside had passed. Making a firm decision to shake off my nervousness, I strode right out into the center of the road and began to walk. In the open I could see better, and my eyes had adapted to the darkness. The gravel reflected what little light there was. I set off at a good clip. The rock was still firmly in my grasp.

As I walked I thought I heard movement paralleling me, but I couldn't be sure, for the gravel crunching beneath my feet masked other sound. I stopped a few times, but naturally it stopped too. Well, I figured, a person certainly couldn't travel through the thick forest beside me as fast as I could stride along a gravel road. And I knew there was no one behind me on the road, for I checked regularly. I began to relax a bit and attributed the sounds to my own nervousness.

I had been on the road for about ten minutes when I tripped in a pothole and sprawled forward. The rock left my fist and rolled into the ditch.

Laughter. Soft, muffled laughter. I know I heard it. Anger and fear washed over me in alternate waves. Laughter again, this time on the other side of the road. I tried to will myself to my feet, but I didn't seem capable of movement. The laughing grew louder. It surrounded me. I closed my eyes, frozen with terror, the insane laughing grew greater and greater in intensity. It was everywhere, above me, all around me. It sounded vaguely familiar, like the distortion of a friend's voice, but it was insane, demented.

Then through it I thought I heard a motor. It was gone, but then I heard it again, and it grew louder quickly. The laughter had faded into the Bush. The sound of a motor was getting closer still. I scrambled to my feet. Headlights came around the bend ahead. I waved my arms wildly, and the Ford pulled up and stopped. Fredrick jumped out.

"Christ you look like a madman!" he exclaimed.

"Get back in the car," I shouted as I ran to the passenger door, "and drive!"

Obedient and silent he drove and listened as I told him what had happened. When I finished I thought I detected a smothered smile. My temper rose.

"Damn it, why'd you walk off without me?" I asked angrily. He replied gently, "I couldn't wake you. I shook you, but you just cursed me from the depths of your dreams, so I took the keys and went for the car by myself. I didn't think you'd mind not having to walk another three, four miles."

"I don't remember you trying to wake me, and how was I to know where you'd gone?"

"Well geez, where else would I go? Besides, I left you a note." "In the dark I'm supposed to notice a note?"

"I didn't think it would be dark before I got back . . ."

"Damn it, it must be midnight!"

"Not quite. It was later than I realized when I left you, and it got dark before I got to the car. Then I walked right past the turnoff; must've walked another mile beyond it before I knew I had missed it. So that's why I was late. Sorry."

"Yeah."

Fredrick glanced over at me as he stopped the car by the ditch where we had cached the canoe. "Jeez, you're a mess. Didn't think you'd get so rattled."

I was still angry, "You think I was hearing things, don't you?"

Fredrick is a very reasonable man, so he just smiled and said, "Aw, c'mon let's tie up the canoe to the car."

He walked over to the canoe, and I heard him laughing softly to himself. A shiver ran up my spine.

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Day 67:

ADV FOR DELAYED ACTION ANIMAL GAME TRAPS ^a

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These sensational traps are designed especially to prevent loss through wring-off. When the animal is caught, an auxiliary guard moves high up on its body, holding it in such a position that the animal cannot twist or gnaw free. By using an optional delayed action pin, the guard is not released until the animal pulls on the chain.

Size: 1 VG

Jaw Spread: 4 inches

For Catching: Muskrat, shunk, mink.

Price: \$1.65 each or \$19.25 per dozen.

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Day 68:

WOLVERINE TRACKS ^a

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The weather has been relatively warmer for the last few days, so I went traipsing about in the surrounding Bush, looking for signs

of game. This morning I found tracks just outside the cabin, and having heard wolves howling last night, I at first assumed I had been visited by a lone wolf, but a more careful observation revealed the tracks to be wolverine. I immediately thought of Mantha, who used to joke about the wolverine's persistence and intelligence. Most trappers have had so much trouble from wolverines raiding their trap lines and occasionally attacking their dogs or even the trappers themselves, that many of these men have developed a totally irrational loathing of the creatures. Mantha knew quite a number of trappers, and he found this obsessive hatred of the wolverine funny. He claimed, with his typical irony, that the wolverines disliked men because they were so stupid and easy to taunt. Sometimes, he said, a wolverine would pick out a specific trapper to harrass. All winter the beast would haunt him, and then in spring follow him to the city, look up his name in the telephone book, and spend the summer making obscene phone calls to his sister.

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I'm haunted enough -- I hope this wolverine was only nosing about and is now far away.

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Day 69: INDIGENOUS FISH

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Atlantic salmon
Black crappie
Bowfin
Brook trout
Brown trout
Bullhead
Burbot
Carp
Catfish
Chinook salmon
Cisco

Gar
Lake trout
Largemouth bass
Muskellunge
Northern Pike
Rainbow trout
Rock bass
Smallmouth bass
Smelt
Sturgeon
Sucker
Walleye
Whitefish
Yellow perch

.

There are others, obviously, but these species are the major game fish. For many people these fish come closest to defining the Northern Ontario of their experience. We should not begrudge the angler his obsession: his art is an art of the people; as occupation or preoccupation it is a noble art. Fishing is humble and subtle and a fine example of man's remaining capacity for ecological relationship - at least when it is practiced as an art, with all the restraint and selectivity any art demands. And of all the expressions in common use, it is difficult to find another as rich in pleasant connotation and implication as - *Gone Fishin*.

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Day 70: BLOOD AND COLD ^a

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The pieces, the edges, the placement. It is only to be expected that at times the depression seeps in, and the borders turn black. An animal in a cage grows depressed too. We attempt to escape one cage, attempt to escape into the elements. Then what? You find you don't fit. The pieces just don't fit.

•
Made my way out to the lake. Fishing was poor and difficult. Also, there are airpockets in the ice, and the sound of the ice shifting beneath me unnerved me. The ice is certainly safe since the weather hasn't been *that* warm, but I'm losing my self-control. Moving toward dead spot in the center. I only stayed out on the ice for about two hours: took one trout, middling size.

•
Frank was fond of saying that the frightening irregularity of life's movements inspired the obsession with intellectual order. Although I've seen wolverine tracks before, I've not encountered one and don't at all desire to, for unlike the wolf, I suspect their reputation as vicious and temperamental beasts is completely warranted. Diana has long dark hair and moves like a she-cat.

•
The man in the twilight: I wish I could place him.

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Day 71

THE LINE, FOURTH SEGMENT ^a

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Mile 666: Moosonee. Dismal morning. Drizzle. Temperature: 57° F. The Rupert House Canoe loaded with gear. Drone and knock of outboard ... out into gray morning mists. Cold spray as boat moves down the Moose River toward James Bay. Past Shipsands Island and out into the saltwater, ice water, into the Bay. Gray gloom, water. Northward.

•
Mile 734: Whale sighted. Drizzling again today. Fog and depression. Day on day. Far out from shore. The canoe battered incessantly by waves that the Guide insists are nothing to worry about. Temperature 51° F.

•
Mile 801: On left the bleak shoreline, shoals. Gray inland plains. On the right is Akimiski Island. Bleak monster of land in this desolate sea. World's End. Days pass dismally. Often

travel is impossible as huge waves smash into this coastline and the fog cuts visibility to zero. Camping always on sloping muskeg and mud-flats. The dampness cuts through to your marrow.

•
Mile 890: Spruce sparse. Approaching tree line, tundra. Demarcation.

•
Mile on mile, fog ... saltspray, cold.

•
What to report except still alive and miserable?

•
'This is August. Temperature 39° F. Ice floes.

•
Cape Henrietta Maria: tundra, polar bear sighted, constant cutting winds. Is this where it ends? Nowhere. Cold heart of the North Sea's penetration. The cliff at the edge. The mouth of the wind. Is this where it ends?

•
Nearly one thousand miles south of here: girls in bikinis, concerts, and millions of people moving about within the web of their lives.

•
Temperature: 39° F. This is where the line ends.

•
•
This is where sanity is tested. This is where my nightmares steal their images. Begins at first with vague remembrance, but builds each night into precise images: the carcass of a deer; wolves; the cold air turning solid, crushing me; Diana naked, laughing; ice suddenly crackling beneath my feet as I cross over a frozen lake; loss of balance, falling, and shock of unbearable cold.

•
(I can't help suspecting the transition was easier for Fredrick.)

•
Diana. Think of nightmares. Think of her. Laugh that goes to the bone. Sunspots. Akimiski. Certainly it is a mistake to write this out here, alone. Temperature 27° below zero.

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Diana. The first strong emotion, idea, to ever possess Fredrick. And he didn't resist - unlike me. He chose that particular path

and walked it to the end. Chose? Wrong word. Driven,
predestined. Ice age. Glacial debris.

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Stop. This is where it ends, the line ends. Now it is time to move
into the interior. Into the Bush, beyond rationality.

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Day 72:
FEBRUARY TUNDRA ^a

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A Man needs a rest
Bed, a nest, a place to put
His head.

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The sun won't quit, glare
Blinding, unremitting
And everywhere.

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Snowshoes too small for
A man this tall; I'm afraid
To lose this fight.

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Pray for night.

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The cold like a hunter
Won't quit either;
Inverse from the sun
But worse.

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I'm nearly done in.

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But God help me!
A man could die out here
And never rot.

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Day 73:
WHITE WATER CANOEING TIPS ^a

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“When you are in rough and turbulent water and spot a nice quiet spot, avoid it like the plague. As you shoot past, sneak a look back and you will probably see that a hidden rock with water pouring over it protects the quiet spot.”

(from *Basic River Canoeing* by Robert McNair)

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“When there are alternate passages among rocks, watch - and feel -- where the main current is going. If it tends to carry you into one channel rather than another, go with it unless it carries a penalty. Don’t do battle with the current except in an emergency, or you may create one.”

(from *White Water Handbook* by John Urban)

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Metaphor. There are suggestions to help you stay alive. Survival is a practical matter. A philosophy of survival is best derived from the specific. Old man you ought to know better, following a river -- downstream. Metaphor.

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Day 74:
NOTES AT THE BORDER ^a

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So now we prepare to step over the line, the threshold. No, no, not true. I . . . you ... we have been dancing on the edge from page one. From the moment I isolated myself from real contact, once I made this black on white, I severed myself from human reality. The intention was to move beyond into a

deeper reality: a reality preceding the human and superseding the human. The best I can do, of course, is to make it to the border. I will never cross.

If you are with me so far, you are with me at the border. No point in my promising to take you over, for I can not make the crossing. No point in any further luring you along the path, for the path ends. We are near the center, dead center of winter. All that remains is to delineate this sharp edge between us and the natural terrain beyond. All that remains is the slide downhill. All that remains is the piling up of bodies. All that remains is the final fragmentation of my mind.

South is still there, with its version of the urbane death dance, and it presses against me on one side . . . just as on the other I feel the cold pressing of the landscape North. But I ask you to follow me as I map this border, by walking along it. What've you got to lose? I'm the one alone. I'm the one that must come apart at the center.

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Day 75:
NEAR EDGE ^a

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A blizzard. I'm sick with fever. Poised at the brink.

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Day 76:
DEAD SPOT IN THE CENTER, WINTER'S CENTER ^a

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WHITE-OUT

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Day 77:
FAR EDGE ^a

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Blizzard. Fever. Brink.

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Day 78:
BEGIN THE DESCENT ^a

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I am creating this space, this book, because the space around me is everyday diminishing. The walls of this cabin are closing in. The fever abates, but the feverish vision remains. I haven't spoken to another human in two and one half months. The winter never ends.

The quiet will kill you. The quiet will eat at your reason, leave you screaming into its infinity, engulf you and smother you. The quiet is another word for death.

I open the door. The storm is over. Everything is white. Everything is quiet.

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Day 79:
COPERNICUS IN THE BUSH ^a

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So unlike fireflies;
 unlike hummingbirds, bogs of sphagnum moss, or lightning
 at noon; unlike cirrus clouds or snow in May; unlike
 burnt-out forests and fresh fireweed, seedlings, bear shit;
 unlike blackflies, blood and lichen; unlike fens at night,
 and acid bog and muck and mire, and a wind-whipped birch
 branch;
 unlike rain in spring, murky streams, a dead bird midst
 leaves,
 Pre-Cambrian Granite, North Shore -- Lake Superior;
 unlike mud and suckers and the Great Clay Belt, miles of
 muskeg,
 ghostly tamaracks, sunrises on the Abitibi River;
 how unlike Reindeer Moss, Whiskey Jacks, all forms of
 flies,
 or wolf pups, mare's tails in a red sky, quick death, reedy
 bays,
 or fireflies . . .

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 is this tight bright idea
 of my own importance

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Day 80: **GREEN ^a**

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Crossing over the divide, the height of land, and
 beginning the slide downhill -- North. Green like the river,
 flowing North. Past the half-way marker, mid-winter center.
 White like the river, flowing North.

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Driving up the North highway toward Cochrane, you
 pass a small roadside marker that informs you that you've just
 crossed the Height of Land and that henceforth all rivers flow
 North to Hudson Bay. I remember a Boy Scout Handbook that
 complacently informed all young explorers that one way to find

civilization, if lost in the Bush, was to find a river and follow it downstream. This seems a dangerous piece of misinformation.

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Old man, you ought to know better, following a river downstream. You ought to know better.

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Day 81: DREAMING ^a

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I was walking through the spring forest, walking slowly through a space wet with impending growth and complication. The sun was filtering through the upper branches of the pines, mottling the ground like a Renoir. I noticed a great number of mushrooms and toadstools scattered about the ground-cover, and some of them it seemed were emitting a very pungent odour. Although I was not hurrying I knew I was on my way to a meeting with an important person, although exactly who this person was I couldn't say. Nor where I was to meet him . . . or her. Suddenly I thought I detected movement out of the corner of my eye. Turning I saw, afar off, two naked bodies entwined on the forest floor. As I was trying to focus on this coupling amidst undergrowth, a sudden crash of thunder rended the air.

Then somehow I was thrust into another season. Snow blanketed everything; a very white snow, early-winter snow. There was no sign of the couple, but in front of me was a scrambled set of tracks. I could make out both human and wolf tracks, but I couldn't determine any definite sequence of events. The blood on the snow seemed to indicate a fight. I felt disoriented, so I shook my head and looked up toward the sky, but that was a mistake, for the tall trees and patches of sky with clouds skudding past only gave me vertigo.

It was at that moment that you walked by. (Who?) You. So I felt vaguely embarrassed, although I couldn't say why. What were you doing there? Was it you I was supposed

to meet? Who knows. I followed your tracks, once my dizziness had passed, and they led me down a steep descent toward a frozen lake. Then again I saw you, out there on the surface of the ice, kneeling with your head in your hands. It was dusk, and as I stood staring out over the white waste, twilight rapidly became dark. I began running down the hill.

This was foolish and inevitably I tripped and began to roll down, bumping and bruising myself severely. Then mysteriously I regained my balance; I was running again, moving with a strange sense of ease, with a confidence that I couldn't trip again. It was still very dark, but I could see or rather sense, every obstacle in my path. I was running on four legs, smoothly and gracefully; the landscape flashing past me was in complete harmony with my movement. My stomach ached with an almost pleasant hunger. Faster and faster I ran. I could see you ahead of me, kneeling on the ice, but more than that -- I could smell you, your rich warmth. I knew then that I was a female of the species, for the hunger was sexual. Lust of the hungry; lust of the hunter.

Then there was pain. Pain sharp and clear as the cold air. Pain, deep in my chest. Pain, deep in my chest, and I howled with the pain.

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Day 82

SLIDING DOWN ^a

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So the descent must come. The days get longer. The end comes nearer. The bodies begin to pile up. But I'm not insane. No, I have everything under control. I continue to insert the pieces. Jigsaw puzzle.

I've lost a little weight and have to be careful with the staples, but I'll make it. Each day I add my small piece. Today is the twentieth of February; in some parts of the world, spring is beginning. Not here, of course, for I've got over two months to go. Still, it is downhill.

Downhill is easier, if you don't trip. Just a matter of going with the natural attraction of the earth. I light a fire gone to ash and listen for the howling of wolves.

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Day 83:
AN ESSAY ON THE WILDERNESS MYSTIQUE

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"As I sit, back against the solidity of PreCambrian Granite, nursing my second cup of coffee in the gentle dusk, I notice suddenly a light across the broad lake. In that moment I reorient, snap back to civilization. There is a hunter's cabin with a light in the window.

"As we quietly slip across the waters of a small lake in our canoe, thinking of the mosquitos and blackflies that had tormented us as we created our own portage to this high, isolated and unnamed lake, I notice a flash of sunlight reflected off the opposite shore. In that instant I reorient, come back to civilization. There is one old gasoline can.

"You are lost in a familiar city, walking south in unfamiliar surroundings, perhaps thinking you're heading north, when suddenly you recognize a street or a building, and zip, everything spins around and you reorient. Perhaps in such a situation it is fortunate that you regain your sense of direction and place, but even here something is lost: a pleasant mystery, a serene feeling of isolation.

"I've found that one aspect of wilderness travel is this same sensation greatly amplified; and the one small intruder from the civilized world, from the world of the familiar, is sufficient to cause neither a fortunate nor pleasant reorientation. That one tin can or one cabin can so totally destroy this sensation seems absurd to those that have never experienced it; nevertheless, it is true. Real wilderness and the sensations it engenders are very fragile things. If a man passes and leaves no traces, the next man is still the first -- alone in both time and space. But if a man leaves his mark - rather than

allowing the wilderness to mark him -- then the next man travels not within nature, but within the all-too-human context. This is a reorientation. It is also a regression to the pre-Copernican universe.

“Aldo Leopold has written that he prefers never to visit the same wilderness area twice, for once it has been captured in his memory he justifiably fears a second visit will destroy it. He is right: the chances are against him. Most likely there will be more than a tin can or a cabin; the wild river in one’s memory might have to confront the dams, roads, and flooded shorelines of the new reality. Reorientation: you’re back to ‘civilization’.

“Another man who cared profoundly for the natural world, Sigurd Olson, has also dealt sensitively with this theme in an essay on the search for the archetypical wilderness lake.^b Engaged in this mystical search for the wilderness lake, he canoed thousands of wild and beautiful waters in Northwestern Ontario. One day he reached the end of a portage and through his sweat and the pines finally saw the lake. It was a lake that matched his ideal, his personal archetype, perfectly. After several days of being part of this blue space, he went away without leaving a mark. For years he treasured the memory of this lake, until one day he read somewhere that a lodge had been built

there. Like a fool he returned to his lake, only to discover the wilderness destroyed. I don’t mean the trees had been chopped down ‘or the lake had become polluted or the shoreline dotted with docks and cottages; no, there was simply a single wooden lodge on one shore, and from that, lodge the sound of music and laughter drifted across the water. Every night. We usually think of music and laughter as positive things, but it is all a matter of context. Here the sounds conflicted with the cry of loons and the lapping of waves: a bad scratch across a beautiful recording.

“There is no point in attempting to list all the elements that can destroy the wilderness experience, such as the other party encountered fifth day out, or the vicious sound of a buzz-saw cutting through the early morning mist, or the unexpected garbage pile behind your campsite, or the twin-engine Cessna squatting obscenely on the lake you’ve spent two weeks of portaging and paddling to reach. It is sufficient to port out that it

really takes very, very little to destroy this fragile thing often called the 'wilderness experience'.

"I've had people tell me that the experience itself is artificial, and they intended no irony. Why preserve such a delicate and clearly elitist thing, they argue. Of what value is it? In fact, what is it? Is it just some perverse pleasure for the misanthropist?

"I think not. It is a need; strong in some, stunted in others. I remember when I was a youngster growing up in Chicago, a friend and I used to have our parents drive us to the 'forest preserve' outside the city. We would pick out the largest area devoid of road or trail and wander happily through the tame deciduous forest, feeling very much like the first souls that ever crossed this continent. As we grew older the land seemed to shrink; one could feel civilization pressing in on all sides. But our need did not shrink. It became necessary to conduct our wanderings at night, which somehow again pushed back the everyday, outside world. Now this small acreage would surely seem like a garden if I dared visit it other than in my memory. But I still have the same needs, whatever their nature, and it has simply become more difficult to satisfy them. So I wander the bush of Northern Ontario.

"I have often attempted to isolate and label these needs, explain this primitive reaction to civilization, a reaction that is becoming more and more evident in the numbers of wilderness seekers, escapees from the cities. But with little success. Although it is possible to delineate some of the features of the wilderness experience, the whole remains greater than the parts. Only through the real contact with wilderness itself can any person come to fully comprehend its value.

"Certainly part of the experience is the isolation, for once separated from excessive human contact, one is free to make deeper contact with oneself. There are too many people in the cities, for people are intended to really touch each other, and this is impossible with the vast numbers of people one must encounter each day. So we build a wall, we develop the habit of shutting others out. This is reasonable, but it is also harmful. In the bush, very quickly one's barriers crack. Out in the backcountry you are too dependent on one another and there are no outsiders: there is no need to talk of "us" and "them". You have no acquaintances, for the other members of your party are

all friends. And with friends it is possible to be open. And with friends it is possible to be alone.

“Another aspect of the experience is the asceticism. You are freed from the inessential. You can only take what you need . . . and perhaps one thing you merely want. The weight of unessential desires is lifted from your shoulders. From this flows natural justice and healthy stoicism. You earn your rest by real physical work. You earn your meals and your sleep. You earn every mile you travel directly with your muscles and your sweat. You learn to tolerate both nature and man, and not expect them to be ‘reason-able’. If you have to spend a week or a month sharing every effort with another man, you soon learn to tolerate his idiosyncrasies. You cannot get rid of the sun., either, when it is too hot, by darting into some technological womb. You cannot get rid of the insect hordes by political or economic pressure. You are forced to learn to share the space.

“Besides tolerance, the wilderness quickly teaches the lost art of self-reliance. One reaches a new maturity where one cuts the umbilical cord to civilization and institution. You learn to value yourself and your immediate place in space and time . . . and to accept responsibility for it. The world where you step is your world. You are dependent on your self and on nature’s rhythms. It is very good to have such direct relationships.

“But here I am making what are inevitably attempts to describe the indescribable. These aspects of the ‘wilderness experience’ I have mentioned are all secondary to the inexplicable relationship that develops between man and nature. In the bush some mystical return to origins occurs. Here a man comes in contact with a totally inhuman (and inhumane) beauty, a beauty not composed of human emotions, a beauty indifferent to man - and thus more important than man. In this profound indifference resides a grandeur far beyond anything human, even the greatest of our art. To have this perfection of indifference despoiled by man’s garbage or his ego centric civilization is truly obscene. The wilderness on this planet may eventually collapse through man’s efforts, but it is our loss - not nature’s. Nature couldn’t care less. It will go on, out beyond our reach: the stars will perform for the void long after humanity isn’t even a memory. We still have a small chance to preserve the opportunity to touch wilderness - and within it hear the beating of the universe - but it is a difficult

task. If the wilderness experience slips beyond our reach, or if the need dies in our hearts, because of our destructiveness, then the madness of our mammoth cities will spread as we fall sick without the antidote. This would be sad, but natural: wilder ass experience is a delicate thing, destroyed only too easily. The ash of the tin can or the light from the cabin window, and you reorient: come back to unreality”

(from *The Green Refuge* by F. Singer) ^c

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Day 84:

LET’S KEEP EVERYTHING IN PERSPECTIVE ^a

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What do you think? A lot of romantic bullshit? Maybe. Nevertheless I can understand how he could write that. I’m by no means free of the tendency to romanticize wilderness, although I’ve learned to regard it as less benign than I used to believe. Still those points about “indifference”, very accurate.

Anyway, the Shield country is strewn with craters. Outside Brent, a small railway stop in Algonquin Park, there is a quite large crater. It is hard to detect, for the land is lush with mixed-forest growth, but once you discover its outline you can walk it without difficulty. Hiking around it in autumn one is struck with the contrast of the transient and the recorded.

What am I talking about? The wolves ... have I mentioned the wolves? I long for their howling, but instead all I hear these evenings is that damn snowmobile. Yes, snowmobile. Someone is out in the Bush riding around on a snowmobile. He circles my cabin until the buzzing drives me to the door, then he disappears. miss the howling of the wolves.

What is out here to attract a man? Trees and rock. And water . . . water-glass. Narcissus. Sometimes at sunset, Lake Nipising would be as smooth as glass: the border between sky and water merging in colour and cloud: reflection/refraction. I

liked to take the canoe out at times like this, and paddle through this looking-glass.^b Yet always, just before I reached the other side, the sun would set - and the whole landscape would lose identity.

Lose. Lost. Lose oneself. Get oneself lost. Lost, lost.

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Day 85:
NATURAL RIGHTS

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It is time to make certain demands, time
to demand certain rights: the right
to madness, to isolation. (time to
affirm my right to walk the green
edge of terror, and to pray for the ice
fragment in my spine) Know it is
“natural”, this yearning after the pain
of alone. (this yearning itself
a madness that knots the pulse of my slow
body’s turning) Yes, I’ve a right
to see the meaning of alone carved from
a pine beside my grave. So please
give unto me the bright isolation
of one shot ringing thru the cold
air, the isolation of only one
way out, the isolation of
one sharp, undetected rock midway down
the rapids, the isolation
of the moon. Give me this day this madness
I so desperately need. (so
I can cut reality like the bow
of my canoe severs the head-
waters of a dawn-smoothed pond; so I can
cut to a clear view with a knife
of isolation: a flashlight’s channel
over the dark water toward

an island) See all I ask is freedom
 for a smothered part of my life's,
 breathing: the rights of flesh over reason
 and sanity. That's why I ask
 an isolation compounded of loon's
 cries, of indifference, and trees
 falling in an empty forest; demand
 the isolation of a wolf,
 a trapper, a trap. Give me smoke rising
 straight upward toward a blue sky. (see
 thru the mist to an otter's V moving,
 a slow arrow along one kind
 of surface) I have a right to the peace
 of not knowing words. I need this
 right to not comprehend ideas. Give
 me this day this holy madness.
 Give me the lone eye of the present, and
 let the past remain blurred, future
 both unconceived and inconceivable.
 These I all demand, rights, not
 of man, but of plant and of animal.

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Day 86:
CIVILIZATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH ^a

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 Before us: an unknown ... and wilderness
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 History of civilization = History of war (plus an unknown)
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 Wilderness is the raw material out of which man has
 hammered the artifact called civilization." (from *Sand County*
Almanac by Aldo Leopold)
 .
 Take an infinitely beautiful and extensive bronze sculpture,
 melt it clown, use the bronze (now contaminated with baser

metals) to create tiny pieces and fragments -- some beautiful, some ugly, many mediocre . . .

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Sell it to the tourists . . . and the scientists .

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An average Indian family still living in the wilderness consists of a father, a mother, four children, and one anthropologist.

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The nature of man: contradiction in terms?

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You tell me: Is the unknown factor worth it?

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Day 87: GOING NUMB

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The cold in this cabin is starting to irritate me. So far I have put up with it, accepting it as part of the experience, but lately, perhaps because I'm not eating enough, it is penetrating through to my consciousness. It is difficult to concentrate when your thoughts are constantly of heat. I built a roaring fire in the fireplace this morning and have been feeding it outrageous quantities of wood in what seems to be a hopeless attempt to raise the room temperature. Still as the beast consumes itself, I remain cold. ^a

There is little sign of any change in the weather. For a week now the temperature has been well below zero, even at the height of the short day. This morning it was thirty-one below when I got up; as they say, "colder than a witch's tit."

Or cold as death. Death. I'm getting morbid. I have moments of overwhelming panic, feel the urge to run out of the cabin and try to run back to a city. Madness. Even with careful preparation it would be extremely hazardous to try to walk out. I almost died once alone out in the winter landscape, while moving across the North, still North of here, crossing over. ^b Crossing over, that is the natural state in this country,

always moving toward the other side. Why this place? Why not another?

Staring out the window I find it hard to imagine passing away from my body out there. The cold would trap me in. Dead, I would remain preserved motionless, a part of the winter still-life. One of the undead.

I must keep my thoughts away from death. I'll live to an old age, like my father, and when I die it'll be in a different season. Better to go in summer. Better to slip under the surface like ... like some of the others. My mind comes back to it, back to the way they started to slip away. First those that didn't seem to matter, but eventually . . .

Another quote from Frank: "We're 'civilized', and that is why the mystery catches in our throat. Wolves don't mourn, nor do deer get depressed."

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Day 88

MANTHA'S TALE ^a

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We were at the Lakeview having a few beers. I had just finished stringing Fredrick along one of my stories, and he was sputtering with indignation. I tried to explain my theories on different kinds of "truth", all equally valid, but Mantha interrupted.

"Let me tell you an old tale my mother taught me. It is a story that is true in many different ways."

"Sure," said Fredrick.

"Well, about seventy or eighty years ago there lived a man named Yellowfeather. He was well-known in his district, this area

around North Bay actually, for his powers over the natural elements."

"A witchdoctor?" laughed Frank.

"No, no, just a man, a trapper. He was a white-man, my mother said."

"Named Yellowfeather?" Frank interrupted again.

“Yes. I don’t know why he had that name. I don’t know anything about his parents. Anyway, he was well-known among my people for his powers over the elements. He didn’t use his powers indiscriminately, but when it was necessary he could do marvelous things.

“One day my grandfather was travelling with him along the frozen shoreline of a small lake North of here. They had noticed at lunch that the sky was turning ominous, so they were hurrying. Yellowfeather told my grandfather that the quickest way back to camp was to follow a small riverway, but my grandfather objected because he knew the current to be swift, and hence the ice likely unsafe. However Yellowfeather convinced him it was the best route to take, and my grandfather knew of the man’s reputation.”

“I don’t think I’m going to find this story any more credible than the last one,” Fredrick interjected.

“Anyway,” Mantha continued, “they headed for the mouth of the river. The sky had become black and a few snowflakes were already drifting down. When they arrived at the actual mouth of the river, Yellowfeather called a halt. He knelt in the snow before the river and made movements like a white-man’s prayers. You know, the palms of hands together, head bowed. My grandfather offered a few of his own prayers while he waited. Then they started down the river.

“They had only traveled about a half mile before my grandfather spotted black ice at the next bend. He told Yellowfeather that they better move onto the actual shore until they passed the dangerous section, but the trapper insisted they must hurry. ‘Are you that afraid of a blizzard?’ my grandfather asked. ‘No,’ replied Yellowfeather, ‘I’ve stopped the blizzard, but we must act *as if* we are afraid of the blizzard.’ ‘Why?’ asked my grandfather. ‘Because we must show respect,’ answered Yellowfeather, and then he plunged ahead. My grandfather, against his better judgment, followed. Halfway around the bend

the ice cracked beneath Yellowfeather. He went through in an instant and did not bob up again. Apparently the current had swept him under the solid ice.

“My grandfather stood for awhile, hoping to see his companion surface, but when it was obvious that Yellowfeather was gone forever, my grandfather inched his

way to shore. He returned to camp the long way, through the thick bush.”

Mantha was silent for a moment.

“That’s it? That’s all there is to the story?” asked Fredrick. “No, there is one more thing: the blizzard failed to materialize.”

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Day 89: NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT ^a

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The rock struck the train window by the man’s head. The outer pane cracked forming a grotesque star, but the inner pane was undamaged. The man, although startled, was uninjured. He cursed loudly, then glared out at the muskeg. The train was “The Polar Bear Express”, an excursion train that brings tourists up to Moosonee on the James Bay tidal flats. Moosonee is an Indian settlement at the end of rail into Northern Ontario. This season “The Polar Bear Express” was averaging one cracked window every two visits. The man wore a red short sleeve knit shirt with a “Polar Bear Express” patch pinned on the collar. He had very white skin and was overweight. He stunk from “Off”, a commercial fly-dope. The rock was about the size of a small fist. The rock was thrown by a young Cree boy. The young Cree boy did not have white skin and was certainly not overweight. Replacing the train window will cost about fifteen dollars.

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Day 90: AGED TAMARACK ^a

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dead wood, drift wood, distant thunder,
you sit on your heels feeding tinder
to the fire, stick and twig meticulously
placed, replaced, dead wood, drift wood,
sun setting in a darkened splash of purple,
tall marsh grass in the creek safe, still,
from waves, but twig and stick unsafe, tired
yield a little lap of flame, there are
six trout strung on a line by the tent,
dead wood, drift wood, dry blood caked
on your hands, blood yours and others,
blackflies and fish, the thunder nearer,
spring is spawning and budding and violent
rains, but your hands are of autumn, old
and golden, sun going, you can hear it,
the storm approaching, rains already
visible as mist across the lake, your
small flames consume the tinder, the dead
wood, your old coffee pot lying like
a forgotten icon on dry grass, at last
the fire begins to blaze, just as
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the first drops strike your hands.
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Day 91:
SEVEN DAYS OUT ^a

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The Robinsons were enthusiastic to the point of being
childlike. As the car wound through the forest, the old man kept
asking me questions about weather and lake depth. Unable to
answer most of his questions, I kept saying, “you just take it as it
comes ... you take it as it comes,” – or something to that effect.
Jostle, shift “as it comes”, down the gravel cut through spruce
and alder swamp. An odd car load: Mantha, the buckskins he

was wearing purchased from a Toronto boutique whose proprietor kept enquiring if Mantha was a “real” Indian; Thomson in loose fitting, cheap cotton shirt and pants, with his ubiquitous box of paints; Robinson in “bush-wear” by Greenstreet; his wife dressed as though she was on her way to a Sunday picnic; and myself in jeans and t-shirt behind the wheel of our old Ford.

We arrived at “put-in” around noon; the sun much hotter than normal for that time of year. Mantha and I took the canoes off the road and plopped them in the lake, while Thomson unloaded gear from the trunk. In twenty minutes we were off and paddling slowly across David’s Lake: Thomson with the Robinsons in the seventeen-foot aluminum Grumann; Mantha and I in the fifteen-foot fiberglass vessel. I kidded Mantha about the buckskins and he enjoyed it, for he is a witty man with a flare for self-parody. The Robinsons, confronted with taciturn Thomson in the other canoe, were nervously silent crossing the water. Two gulls screeched as we passed close to their nesting rock. The hot, mid-day air wavered over the lake.

David’s Lake is small and we crossed it too quickly. Soon it was sweat and pant and plod on over the portage. Robinson insisted on “carrying his share”, so Mantha and I watched nervously as he stumbled along under one of the food packs, while his wife looked like she was suffering more than enough just carrying her own weight. Happily the next lake was larger, and we lazed across it.

One more portage into Butte Lake and we headed for an island to set up our first camp. It wasn’t six o’clock and Thomson had us all fed and indolent. “Time to fish,” I muttered, raising my will from somewhere deep in my gut. This time I took Mrs. Robinson with me; Thomson and Mr. Robinson took the other canoe; Mantha wandered off into the central bush of the island on some unknown errand.

As we sat drifting off shore, Mrs. Robinson kept telling me how much this trip meant to her husband, and how she was worried about the “indian”. I reassured her that he was quite an agreeable chap and an old friend of mine, but I think she remembered only too clearly the way Mantha had baited her husband several months ago at her nephew’s party. “He likes to tease people, but he means no harm,” I kept saying, wishing she would shut up and fish. Which, eventually, she did. I

watched her discreetly as we fished. She wasn't an unattractive woman, considering her age, but her face had taken on a new and unappealing line in the few hours we had been in the wilds. There was a pettiness there that probably had its origins in fear. She had wanted this trip almost as much as her husband, but she was, unlike him, profoundly afraid of the wild, the uncivilized. Perhaps her apparent distrust of Mantha stemmed from her equating his origins with wilderness. I don't know; all I know is that nobody caught any fish that first night.

As the days and lakes and portages wore on, as we moved deeper and deeper into the boreal bushland, I began to change my casual evaluation of Robinson. I had stereotyped him as the typical too soft, too affluent, urban executive. But I watched him respond with real emotion to the stark beauty that surrounded us. He wasn't lazy, either. He sweated a lot, but he held his own. He was a good fisherman, if a little clumsy in a canoe, and gradually I grew to really like the man. Even Mantha seemed to ease off a bit, and the fifth night out they fished together for over four hours; coming in they were both laughing over some shared joke.

Meanwhile Mrs. Robinson had withdrawn into herself. She spoke infrequently and clung to her husband as if he were the last remnant of a lost civilization. I think she profoundly resented the friendship developing between Mantha and her husband. But to be fair I must say she didn't get bitchy. She was out of her element and afraid of the elementals, yet she held herself in control. She tried not to complain, but the occasional question concerning distances covered, or the small complaint about an uneven sleeping surface, or the blister on her thumb, gave her away.

The fishing got progressively better. We got progressively tanner. Thomson did a great deal of sketching.^b The trip was really becoming a delight for nearly everyone involved.

On the morning of the seventh day in, Robinson for the first time rose before everyone else. In a dreary dawn drizzle he started the fire and put water on for coffee. I crawled out of the tent expecting to see Thomson or Mantha, the two that

alternated starting the day, and instead encountered Robinson fiddling with his fishing gear.

“Morning,” I muttered sleepily, “How’d you sleep.”

“Fine. Thought I’d go out alone and try my luck before breakfast. The days are going by so fast.”

“I’ll come with you if you like,” I suggested with a minimum of enthusiasm, and a bit of concern – knowing he’d never been solo in a canoe before.

“Thanks, but I’d really like to see how I do alone; besides the bush is supposed to be a place where a man can be alone with himself, but you guys are always at my side . . . like bodyguards.”

I started to protest, but he cut me short: “Yeah, I know you feel responsible, as good guides should, for the tenderfoot ... or whatever you call a novice to this sort of thing ... but I really think you’re just a bit too protective. This ain’t exactly the Amazon jungle, you know.” He grinned.

I laughed and said something about not normally being the motherly type. Then I picked up the axe and started to split a little more wood for the fire. Robinson got into the fiberglass canoe with his gear and settled in just back of center; leaning her to port, he J-stroked slowly from shore. As I watched him move out across the rain-spotted water, I was surprised at his control; he must have studied us when we paddled alone. Fifty yards or so from shore, he waved and swung east toward a point of land concealing the deep bay we had successfully fished the previous evening.

I had coffee brewing when Thomson and Mantha joined me. Thomson immediately noticed that the fiberglass canoe was gone, and when I told him that Robinson had headed out alone, he stiffened.

“Can’t swim, you know.” he said.

“Neither can I,” Mantha laughed, and this took Thomson by surprise.

“You’re joking?”

“No. I can’t swim. Listen if you know how to canoe, you don’t need to know how to swim.”

“Well, he doesn’t know how to canoe either.”

Mrs. Robinson emerged from their tent and in a tense voice asked who it was that didn’t know how to canoe. When she found out that her husband had gone out alone, she

became angry. Glaring at the grey sky she spoke coldly, "There's a storm brewing. Will one of you go and retrieve my husband please."

Mantha smiled, "When it's drizzling like this in early morning, a real rainstorm is very unlikely."

She just stared at him. I was becoming extremely uncomfortable. If we went after him, "retrieved" him, he would be justifiably indignant. But if we didn't, she would throw a fit; I could see the lines of tension gathering in her face. Damned if you do and damned if you don't. Christ, how I hoped he would just return then with a big trout and a sense of his own competence. But there was no sign of him.

"Let's go, Tom," I said. Perhaps we could cover our intention when we reached Robinson. Tom was usually quiet and I could manage tact as well as the next man. I took the stern of the seventeen-footer and Thomson leaped gracefully into the bow. We paddled rapidly away from shore and headed toward the point. The drizzle had let up but now the sky was turning darker. Also, I noticed with slight discomfort, the water was starting to roughen as a solid northerly picked up. We were working harder than we had expected necessary. Nearing the point of land, we both had to strain to pull the canoe further out than we had originally navigated, for the wind had increased so much that it made the shallows dance with cross-currents.

As we swung in an arc around the jut of land, I was startled to see how rough the bay was: the wind was hitting it straight in, and some of the combers were actually capping. It was easy to spot the red canoe bobbing in the waves. About three hundred yards from us was Robinson standing in the middle of his canoe, playing a fish. I watched in total amazement as he bobbed and balanced with the canoe like a seaman, but he seemed unaware that the canoe was slipping broadside to the incoming waves. I saw his fish surface – it was a fine size – and I saw Robinson lean back . . . too far . . . saw the canoe dip and suck water, spin and then . . . like a slow motion shot: Robinson slowly, slowly, toppling into the waves.

We started to paddle like hell. Unable to see his head, I felt the sweat start to run down my sides. Surely, he'd surfaced and grabbed the gunwales. The canoe wouldn't sink.

We paddled wildly, arms flying, combers spraying us, as we cut through the waves. The red fiberglass hull increased steadily in size, Then we were there.

No sign of the man.

“He must be underneath it,” I shouted to Thomson, who in an instant kicked off his sneakers, and swung his legs over the side, glancing back at me as I lurched forward toward center to stabilize our own craft. He slid into the water like a razor into flesh. I lost sight of him as I struggled for a few moments to gain control of our canoe, which had slipped broadside and was being shoved by the powerful winds right past the swamped vessel. As I pulled into control, I scanned the darting waves for some sign of Robinson. No fishing pole, no cap, nothing.

The red hull rose and flipped and hanging from its gunwales was Thomson. He shook his head. No sign of Robinson.

Thomson swam about, diving under regularly, while I paddled about for an indeterminate amount of time. The wind and waves shoved the fiberglass canoe closer and closer to shore, and we unconsciously followed. Eventually Thomson got back in our canoe – nearly swamping us – and we hooked a rope to the other boat and towed it to shore. The water had become truly treacherous, and I gashed my thumb on thwart and gunwale as we struggled to bring the canoes in onto the rocky shoreline. We pulled the canoes well up from the water and crawled into the shelter of the underbrush, just as the first crack of thunder split the air.

“Must have gone down like a stone,” Thomson said into my stunned silence. I lit a cigarette and stared at the wall of rain moving across the lake toward us. Yeah, like a stone.

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You just take it as it comes. The storm lasted over two hours, so we sat patiently in the underbrush, watching the lightning dance its forked ballet . . . and wondering how ‘a man could disappear so fast. The return is quick. Foolishly I kept expecting to see his body come smashing into the rocky shoreline right below us. But the waves were empty. I thought of Mrs. Robinson. When the storm had passed, I took the aluminum canoe, and Thomson took the fiberglass. We paddled slowly out into the bay.

As we rounded the point I saw two figures standing at the shore by our island campsite. My stomach turned, and I threw up into the still churning water. Thomson looked over at me in surprise. We continued. As we drew nearer, Mrs. Robinson sat down suddenly. I noticed Thomson ease up on his stroke; so, I was to have the responsibility of breaking the news. I pulled up to shore and Mantha turned and walked back toward the tents. Mrs. Robinson had her head bowed. I walked up to her and stood mute before her. Then she looked up at me, and all I could do was shake my head. Then she cracked.

I can't cope with hysteria. I don't know what to do. When she began to scream, all I could do was walk away. Surprisingly, Thomson came forward. He shook her firmly until she stopped screaming and reverted to loud sobbing. Leading her gently toward her tent, he called for me to bring the rum. We had little left, but we got her to take it all. Then we both left her alone, lying on her sleeping bag and moaning piteously.

We walked to the edge of the lake and stood looking out. "She knew immediately that he was dead," Thomson said. "She thinks . . . she was sure that the wilderness . . . us, whatever . . . that he was going to be taken from her . . ."

"What'll we do now?"

"Who knows."

What do you do? We figured it would take at least five days to paddle out. We could try to signal a passing fire-plane, but neither of us could remember seeing a single bush-plane since we left David's Lake. Still, I reasoned, the storm had sent a fair amount of lightning into a forest dry from over a week of sunny weather. There would certainly be check flights after such a storm. I know that I personally was horrified at the thought of trying to canoe out with Mrs. Robinson in such a state. We talked a bit more and finally decided to use the beach at the far end of the lake to smoke signal the next ranger-plane.

"Where's Mantha?" Thomson suddenly asked.

I got up and checked our tent. He was gone again, somewhere into the island's interior. Strange, I thought, but we each have our own special ways of coping. Thomson and I decided to have some coffee and wait for Mantha's return. As we sat before a rekindled fire, the sun broke through and the temperature started to climb.

When Mantha hadn't showed up in about an hour, Thomson insisted he go over and start working on the signal. I agreed. He had barely moved off across the water, when Mantha appeared. He quietly sat down beside me. Mrs. Robinson's crying was still audible.

Mantha looked at me. "She's in bad shape."

"Her husband just died."

"More, too." He lifted a burning twig from the fire. "We've got to do something for her."

"What can *we* do?" I asked with irritation, for he hadn't been much help so far.

"Get her to accept." He took the glowing tip of the stick and slowly submerged it in the water pail. It sizzled for a second and was out. He tossed the stick into the bush, and taking a cup, scooped himself a drink.

I stood up.

Mantha looked up at me. "Listen, you go help Thomson with the signal fire. I'll stay here with the woman."

"OK." For some reason I was angry. I went off to get the other canoe.

As I paddled off into the now quiescent lake, I remembered the morphine in our first-aid kit. If we kept her sedated with that, we would have a much easier time awaiting rescue. I swept the canoe around and headed back toward the island.

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Walking up toward the tents I saw no sign of Mantha. Good God, I thought, he wouldn't have wandered back off into the bush! Then I realized I could no longer hear Mrs. Robinson's sobbing. I ran up to her tent, lifted the flap, and stared in. It was empty. I stood erect and listened. Off in the brush, I could hear movement. I started to, slowly and silently, move toward the island's centre . . . and the sounds that meant something I couldn't seem to remember.

Suddenly, I decided to forget about the morphine, Mantha, the whole matter. I returned to the canoe and headed back across the lake to join Thomson. The sun was hotter than even the first day, so I took off my shirt. The water was like glass.

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We failed to hear or sight a plane that afternoon, so as dusk approached Thomson and I returned to the island. We arrived to find Mantha and Mrs. Robinson preparing dinner together. Thomson looked at me with astonishment, but I just shrugged. We sat down and ate in silence.

I watched her eat. She eat steadily and fully. When she had finished she rose and said she was going to sleep, for she was very tired.

We all said Good-night in unison, excepting Mantha.

She turned when she reached her tent, and said calmly, "Mantha has something to tell you." Then she went in. Mantha poured himself a cup of coffee before looking at us. He smiled gently. "She wants us to continue out, the way we came in. We will begin paddling early tomorrow morning. With good weather, we'll be out of the bush in four or five days."

I could see that Thomson was going to object, but his natural reticence won out and he just stared at us in bewilderment.

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We had bad weather, and it took us seven days to get out.

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Day 92: START PILING UP THE BODIES ^a

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So it goes. Robinson dead, his wife moves into a different region of my head. Diana escaped into the unknown. Fredrick is going out of his head. Take it as it comes. Mantha? Me? Frank? Frank wanted to come with me, go with me. You? Don't worry: it is winter here, nothing can rot . . . yet. Death comes in two sizes.

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Day 93:
OLD MAN YOU OUGHT TO KNOW BETTER ^a

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You ought
To know better
Following a river
Downstream
Twigs in your hair
Bog moss in your armpits
Old man following white water
Downstream
Jack-Pine needles
So slow to decay are
Deeply embedded in your skin
Your sunburned back and arms expect more shade
Downstream
The blood is caked
In your nostrils and hair
Your thick heart is beating too fast
Your mind has turned to tamarack and marsh
You ought to know better following a river
Downstream ^b

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Day 94:
FRAGMENTS ^a

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Shrapnel. The pieces lodged, remain, become part of you. Fit in, you might say. My moods rise and fall, but each time they fall the depression is deeper. This is downhill . . . downhill to spring. Yet tonight I am not depressed. The wolves are howling and it is very peaceful. I find myself thinking about the

unquestionable beauty of this wilderness, no matter its harsh side. It is true that Fredrick didn't understand the dark side of this space – perhaps because he lacked my manic-depressive personality with its natural cycles – but I still should avoid belittling his infatuation with the lit side, for the beauty here affects me the same way. Although even now, in my rising cycle, I long to finish this and go south, I can defend the human need for wilderness. The reasons for this need are complex, some too deep in our collective unconscious for easy articulation, but some of our motivations seem clear enough.

And I can certainly describe the symptoms of deprivation; excessive concern with comfort, exaggerated sense of the importance of homo sapiens, overly intricate social relationships that cannot be untangled, nearly complete alienation from the sources of life sustenance, much activity having only the most tenuous relationship to survival. I could go on, but why bother? The cities are dead; they smell because they are decaying.

That is, of course, too facile. These same cities house the centers of culture, and we are more than animal. Consider the irony of my own immediate situation: as I write immersed in wilderness my central obsession is the south. I swing back and forth, not just between the manic and the depressive, but also between hunger for civilization and hunger for wilderness. This is the madness inherent in borderline beings. The human brain is an evolutionary paradox: humans don't, can't fit in with the natural world, yet they were brought forth from it and feel a deep need for it. Sometimes this need takes perverse forms, such as caging wild animals. Sometimes this need is so intense that a man returns, becomes an animal. But in the end he can not really become animal, anymore than he can become rock, and he must fail . . . and likely go mad.

Perspective. If once we free ourselves of our socially imposed restrictions of vision by lengthy immersion in this space, we may gain perspective . . . even if we lose such valued things as our reason and our morals. A year in the bush: cure for humanism? Ah, but the hazards!

Outside the night moves slyly, independent of this babble and alive with intention. So many things compose this movement. It is not just the wolves howling, or the wolverine making his tracks, a brilliant design decorating my cabin. The

animal is so very small a part. In fact my obsession with the activity of the animals around this shelter tonight seems quite absurd. It is the api and Bali, the fish still beneath the frozen lake, the way ice shapes itself, the trees, the trees, and the thin soil covering rocks of great age and stern face that make of all life a queer moment in time – all these things are surely as important as the wolves moving through dusk.

Trees, the snow in the trees and snow beneath the trees. Greening. Haunting. Down they go. Go under. Under the surface. Surfaces and reflections. Reflections on this tree outside my cabin.

What tree? The White Pine outside my cabin is an eccentric, for the Northern Limit of White Pine is many miles south of here. He stands firmly in denial of good scientific delineations. And he is not diseased. You know White Pines are doomed by a bark disease? Hundreds of years ago the mid-section of this province was a vast expanse of tall, mature White Pines. Exploitative lumbering took almost all of them down and converted them into artifacts. Now a natural disease attacks the regrowth. Red Pine, hardier and resistant to the disease, will eventually step into its brother's ecological niche. But the tall immigrant outside my cabin knows nothing of this, or of Northern Limits. I wonder what limits we, humanity, are ignorant of - not geographical limits but technological limits . . . or evolutionary ones. The over-developed cerebral cortex may be a natural disease.

What does it matter anyway, my brief moment amidst all this . . . or humanity's only slightly longer moment. Compare it to water. Consider the snow. It falls from the sky, rests briefly on a branch, falls again, changes texture several times, eventually becomes fluid, moves down into lakes, only to rise again - a spirit. This movement has as much to it as the wolf hunting deer, or my wandering. Or consider the slow, to us, movement of rock, the changing of the very face of this earth. Consider these things from a non-human perspective.^b

I ramble. Lonely men, they say, talk a lot or very little. And mad men? Bushed? No, I'm not bushed, although I have been touched by the wildness here. And if I have to, I will sacrifice my sanity to the discovery of an appropriate angle of

approach, so I can formulate a new geometry of understanding.
Going down ...

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Day 95:

NOTES ON WOLVES ^a

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“Timber wolves are members of the family Canidae or dog family, and are known as *Canis lupus* in scientific terminology . . . In appearance a wolf closely resembles a German shepherd dog . . . The size of wolves is often deceiving because of their rangy appearance and long bushy hair. Total lengths, measured from tip of nose to tip of tail, may be from 48 to 75 inches. The height of shoulder varies from 24 to 30 inches. Average weights of adult males range from 80 pounds, in the north and northwest regions, down to 65 pounds in Algonquin Provincial Park. . . . The largest wolf, ever officially weighed in Ontario, originated from the Hudson Bay coast and tipped the scales at 118 pounds. Females are smaller than males and average about 10 to 15 pounds less . . . All the senses are well developed in wolves, especially those of sight, smell and hearing. Sight is probably the most important sense in locating prey . . . In general, the distribution of wolves closely approximates the southerly limit of exposed Precambrian rock, which supports a coniferous type of forest or mixture of conifers and hardwoods . . . Research together with reports from trappers and conservation officers, lead to an estimate of a total population of 10,000 to 12,000 wolves in the Province . . . Densities vary from one wolf per 10 square miles in the Algonquin Park and Parry Sound regions, to one wolf per 100 square miles in the northerly section of the Province . . . Wolves are highly social animals and usually occur in groups or packs. Each pack is a closely regulated unit that contains one dominant animal and a number of subordinates . . . As many as 30 animals in a group have been recorded in the northwest section of the Province, but this situation would be extremely rare and cannot

be considered as the normal pattern . . . Commencing in February and early March, wolves begin to pair in preparation for mating which occurs around mid-March . . . The pups commence to emerge from the den at approximately three weeks of age, but their movements are quite restricted for the first two months. During this time, the adults frequently feed the pups by regurgitating food they have consumed on their hunts . . . Some wolves are active throughout all periods of the day, but activity increases shortly before dusk when they commence their evening hunts . . . During the summer, wolves range over an area of about 15 to 30 miles. In the winter, they may cover 50 to 60 square miles . . . Wolves leave their trademark by urinating and defecating at these sites, thus informing other wolves of their presence in the area. When the next wolf comes along, it examines the site and is able to determine whether the previous animal was a friend or foe on the basis of the lingering scent. Trappers often set traps adjacent to these sites since they know a wolf will soon visit it again . . . Algonquin Park wolves feed mainly on deer throughout the year . . . In Ontario, wolves show a definite selectivity for older aged deer during the winter months . . . Wolves appear to hunt largely by chance and chase any deer they happen to intercept as they travel along frozen lakes and rivers in the wintertime, and along the edge of such watercourses in the summer months . . . Consumption of deer killed by wolves is usually complete.”

(from *Wolves and Coyotes in Ontario*)

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Day 96:
THE PLACE OF SYMBOLISM ^a

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Out here all is a symbol, not just symphonies, but lilies weighing profound upon pond water, moss pressing itself into the essence of a fallen pine; all action and reaction, tenses and tensions, all events and their eventualities; night-flowers opening to the moon - yes all intent in a forest evening, when

and where reality dances with unreality to a loon song; those images outside imagination rest here, here on rotting, fecund humus: breathing in, breathing out the fullness and meaning of senseless, pulsing life.

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Day 97:
SNOWMOBILER ^a

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I was sitting having coffee and a smoke when I heard the distant buzz, not unlike a mosquito, of a snowmobile. As I may have mentioned, the wolves never howl on the nights I hear the snowmobile (I have no idea why) and so, it being a very quiet night, I was half expecting it. Still it bothers me. If it is an hallucination, a sign of my becoming bushed, it is an odd one. A snowmobile is not the proper kind of ghost either. But then it is insane to try to choose one's own symptoms of insanity. Ha!

Little games with myself: playing solitaire. 'P It's only too easy at first, this escape into possibilities. I could leave now, pack this crazy endeavor in. Put an end to this madness, neat with an exit. Do you think I mean suicide? Ha! No, I mean no more than moving away, along an old line of geometry. Make a jagged line of a trail to the nearest settlement. Weather has turned relatively mild, and yet it is not quite warm enough to cause melt and spring lock-up. I have the gear; I have the nerve . . . or lack of it. What's the point of all this. The strain of following this to the end is too much. At night I can see them going away, especially those that went down. I can see them going down. I can see them at night going down.

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Day 98:
NEYS PROVINCIAL PARK ^a

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This park was a major Prisoner of War Camp during World War II. It is located on the cold blue shore of Lake Superior. "Camp #75, the main camp, was situated where the present trailer sites are located. It contained facilities for 500 prisoners. It has been described by one former P.O.W. as 'having the hustle and bustle of a lively town; a regular hive of activity' . . . Although information is, at times sketchy, official records point out that Martin Mueller, the olympic high jumping champion of the 1936 olympics was shot after escaping from Neys while resisting arrest . . . The peak years of operation were from 1943 to 45 . . . All that remains are a few foundations and remnants of barbed wire. More important are the fond memories shared by the prisoners of war, internees, and guards alike as they sat out the war years far from the front lines." !?!

(from "A Short History of the Neys Prisoner of War Camp"
--a flyer distributed to campers using the present day park.)

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Day 99
PRISON ^a

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This space is a prison. Or perhaps it is my determination to follow a set course that is the prison. Whatever. I continue. I lift each piece and set it in place, as I open each day, read it, and close it with a piece of my sanity to mark the page. So I space them, these pieces, I place them, juxtapose them, arrange, rearrange them, place them in a line or series, parallel one to another. Winter.

I am rereading a letter from my father, now retired. He wants to come up and join me next summer. As I am alone here,

he is alone in his urban apartment; all his years as an accountant having added up to nothing. I can imagine how his thoughts return to our early fishing trips: the smell of fresh coffee wafting over the misty lakes. The good days we had - even the days they didn't bite still were good. If he knew what I was doing! But then he was the kind of person that just perhaps could both respond and cope. Why didn't he choose to spend his life up here, instead of living a mindless and bodiless sequence of pencils and dollars. Now he is old. Old. Shit!

Took a rabbit a few days ago, so today I went out to the swamp again. There wasn't a single track visible: the wind had cleared away any traces of life.

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Day 100:

FREDRICK'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR SEPT. 18 ^a

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"Diana put an end to our relationship today. I knew it was coming. Since that silent day in the bush last month, I could sense it coming. It was in the air like the scent of autumn. She was very straight forward about it: 'I'm leaving here tomorrow'. We made final love on my beach, moving violently on top of sleeping bags. Afterwards we crawled inside the bags and went to sleep. I awoke and was alone.

"No fuss. Like I said, I knew it was coming, like I know winter is coming. I am aware of the changes that must occur. I'm not even upset. I had a few drinks rather early, but more because I felt I should than because I wanted to or felt I needed to. Also, I took a long walk along the beach.

"I feel warm inside. I feel something germinating in me: an idea, a new need.^b Diana has fertilized me with something strong and demanding. Right now the thing to do is wait, wait as it incubates."

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Day 101:
NORTH SHORE LAKE SUPERIOR [FALL] ^a

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Morning: millpond, still-pond, placid-place,
this plane of hush, ease, blue-cold looking glass
of dawn, this rest-place, calm-space, early
morning seascape, this still-pond, smooth peace-space.

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Afternoon: expanding outward, this grand end to reflection,
with shoreline crash and roll of clear-blue, noon-cold waves
that beat into submission this granite edge to Reality.

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Evening: chill of night wind, granite child,
cold hulk, shield, rock-core, frosted lichens,
ice and freeze of autumn rainbow, coming cold,
cold, cld, cld, cld, cld, cld.

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Day 102:
TRAVELING PERSONAL DISTANCES ^a

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After we returned from that fatal canoe trip, I noticed that my relationship with Mantha was undergoing a subtle transformation. We never once talked about Robinson's drowning, but this only increased the importance of that event in our relationship. All kinds of silences imposed themselves upon our conversations. Somehow a number of subjects had become taboo without either of us ever explicitly indicating they were. Death and sex, the two most ancient of taboos, were the first areas to become over-limits. And the removal of these two subjects of discourse converts all conversation to small talk.

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Once walking out of the Lakeview, Mantha slipped on an ice patch, and I hesitated to reach and hold him, so he went down on his back. Some momentary fear of touching him made me hesitate. Nevertheless we spent a lot of time together that autumn. Up until he . . . well . . . until he slipped again

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Day 103:
ABOUT BARRIERS ^a

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“Let me read you something,” Fredrick said one afternoon we lounged on a rock face at the west end of Wind Lake.

“Sure”

He pulled a few crumpled sheets of typing paper out of his jacket pocket and began to read, “May 1st through 4th. As a small tradition of five years now, two close friends from Toronto and I have taken an early spring canoe trip to celebrate the celebrated. break-up of ice on the Northern lakes. All over the North, the day the ice comes off is celebrated. It is a time of coming out.”

“Wait a minute,” I interrupted, “I thought you didn’t know how to canoe before you moved up here?”

“You shouldn’t always assume that the first person singular refers to the author.”

“But you are the author?”

“Yes.”

“Alright, go on.”

He cleared his throat and continued, “Although our schedules and the winter haven’t always permitted us to start this trip exactly on May 1st, we still referred to it as the May 1st through 4th trip, largely because our first, and most memorable, trip occurred precisely on those dates.

“We all lived in Toronto that first year and not one of us was especially experienced in a canoe, but we all shared an infatuation with wilderness and often fled our urban shelters

to wander the Northern Bush. We usually were too occupied all winter with our personal affairs, and too intimidated by the spectre of winter weather in the North, to venture out until spring – so break up was our coming-out party, the beginning of a seasonal reunion, bounded roughly by May and November (more precisely by break-up and freeze-up).

“I can clearly remember the ride up North that first year with the three of us watching anxiously out the car windows for the occasional lake glimpsed through trees and early morning mist. We had spotted several wide-open lakes but also two still ice-locked ones before we arrived at the outfitter in Algonquin Park. Leaping from the car we moaned in unison as we saw the partially ice-bound lake that we had intended to leave from. A faint drizzle was coming down and thunder was audible in the distance.

“The outfitter, as he opened his shop, informed us that we were the first patrons of the season. He casually rented us a sixteen foot aluminum canoe without asking where we intended to paddle it. Being a very self-conscious novice to this sort of thing, I was convinced he was laughing to himself. After a cup of coffee we set about loading our gear into the canoe which we had floated in the three foot wide channel of water by shore. By the time we had secured the traps over our packs, the drizzle had turned into a very substantial rain, so we ducked back to the store for more coffee.

“This time the outfitter ventured the opinion that a good strong rain would take the ice out that afternoon. We watched the lake hopefully for about an hour and detected several long cracks forming leads that led across the main body of ice.

Somewhere across the lake was the first portage, but we had no guarantee that the lake at the end of that portage wouldn't be a solid pack of ice. However, the outfitter mentioned that our immediate lake was usually a little later than most in breaking up, mainly because of its sheltered position.

“Thus it was with optimism that we jumped into the canoe as soon as the rain let up and began paddling along the shoreline toward the first channel. Already it seemed that the ice mass was shrinking. We began to forget our unspoken fear of the lead closing in on us. Exhilaration accompanied the stretching of unused muscles as we paddled vigorously down

the lead. Then suddenly the wind shifted, but fortunately the channel didn't close up, but instead widened. We continued in silence until our passage was finally and completely blocked by a huge ice floe stretching across the center of the lake like a wall. Without too much thought, for reason would have forbid the action, we 'docked' at the edge of the ice and got out onto it."

"That's insane," I interjected, but Fredrick ignored me.

"Now, having lived in the North for the last few years, I know that an experienced man can cross bad ice with little risk. He must, of course, know what he is doing. He must test ahead with a pole, judge with an educated eye, and distribute his weight most carefully. However when we three weekend canoeists from Toronto ventured out onto that honeycombed, black and rotting ice, we were behaving most foolishly. We did not have the slightest idea how to cope with bad ice. But as we dragged the aluminum canoe across the ice and slush, our minds repressing any thought of ice water and sudden, silly death, we were making a meaningful commitment. Out of this ridiculous and dangerous act - that could so easily have ended in disaster - came a very meaningful commitment. This commitment was a miniature of the type that made the original fur traders push on through unknown waters and hazards. And it is this point in time that I mark my beginning of a mature relationship with wilderness. It was definitely a foolish act, crossing that treacherous ice, but it was a risk well worth the rewards. All my subsequent involvement with the land and waters of the North has had this small, irrational act of will behind it.

"To know wilderness you have to push beyond the barrier that simply by being there marks the border of wilderness. The barrier has moved further away as progress and 'enlightenment' press on, against, it. But it still remains . . . out beyond the barrier.

"The small lake at the end of the portage was free of ice. We canoed it and then portaged again across a seemingly interminable stretch of rock and bog. The next lake we camped at for three days. This small crystalline lake is free of fish, five years have confirmed that. There seems to be little game in the area. In fact this lake offers no special attraction

and is but one of a chain of nine small lakes linked by grueling portages along a canoe route that remains justifiably unpopular. Yet we three return each spring.

“The symbolic barrier we cross each time takes us into wilderness. The ice hasn’t hindered us since then, but the weather is usually too cool for much tourism, and the second portage too much a strain for most weekenders. Our lake is not far North; in fact it is situated but a few miles from the road that cuts through the southern portion of Algonquin Park and carries, every summer, thousands of roadside campers with their trailers and TVs. But we have crossed the barrier. Only once have we encountered another party at the lake, and they were rangers. Perhaps someday soon the sheer mass of people will be sufficient to weaken the barrier, and the little lake will no longer be wilderness. Perhaps . . . in fact I suspect it . . . the lake stops being wilderness sometime after May when warmer weather increases the park’s transient population, and we are canoeing further North. Still each spring when we are three of a few dozen humans camped in the three thousand miles of Bush that is Algonquin Park, that little lake two portages from the outfitter is a wilderness, as wild as the Winisk River to Hudson Bay. I’ve been there now too, and I know,”

Bullshit! I thought to myself, you have like hell.

“When we returned that first May 4th, the lake we had started from was a broad expanse of shining water. The barrier was gone; it had melted away. Yet symbolically it still stands each May 1st, whether the ice is there or not. And we cross it to the other side.”

Fredrick was quiet for a few seconds and then put the papers away. I knew I was expected to say something.

“Yeah,” I started, “it’s a good little essay . . . rather romantic . . . but the point is a valid one. But . . .”

“What?”

“Well, you never had the experiences you describe. How the hell did you write of them so accurately?”

“That’s interesting: you think I wrote of them accurately. Have you had those experiences?”

“Yes,” I replied quickly, “indeed I have.”

“Well there’s your explanation,” Fredrick grinned.

“Huh?”

“Well I lied when I said I wrote it.”

“Oh. Well who did write it?” I asked curiously.

“Why, *you* did, of course.” Fredrick’s face exploded into a grin. ^b
The tables had been turned. He was learning. Oh yes he was learning.

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Day 104:
FUTURE TENSE ^a

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The depression that sweeps over you
When you have no direction
When you have found what you sought
When you have known your lover
When the trail wanders off and ends
You have gone to the end
You are not going anywhere in particular
You are wandering to the edge

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Downhill to the edge of the lake
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Day 105:
BAD NIGHT ^a

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Cold tonight . . . fright tonight . . . tried to get some fish
today, fish, under wood the knots in woods, thicken, too many
rings around and around and around . . . something about
sunshine. . . the boreal bush, hinter-land, innerland . . . the
Jays at campsite, sweat of portages and the light in the

clearing . . . which was supposed to be an excerpt from something or another. . . . Diana, I wish to god I could . . . confusion . . . wonder if Fredrick felt this way before he crawled out . . . death . . . why death . . . why sex . . . animal, yes that's it . . . I see it: it becomes clear.

What matters is sex and life and life is food and I am still capable of thinking and so when I eat and I think of death. Does that make sense? Cool sweet September evenings on a river in Algonquin. The bass fighting. Nature: a hallucination of friendship. Frank.

Frank always accompanied his friends in their intellectual meanderings. He used to call me a knight without armour. Before I left in the fall I asked him where I might purchase this armour he felt I should have. "O," he replied, "it is only available in major cities."

Defenseless here. I don't give a shit about anything. I want my time to be up. God am I lonely!

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Day 106:

I HAVE REPULSIVE BLOOD ^a

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Far North we drove
with every intention of getting lost –
turned down
some bush road. (back of Hearst)

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Wandered gasoline-linked to civilization,
two boreal forest fools,
madmen of the muskeg

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O we'd been warned: fuel up when you can
and never travel unprepared for trouble,
but we were quite prepared for trouble –
in fact, invited it to share our car.

.

The car made it twenty-seven miles before our linkage snapped.
Stopped.
Took off on foot,
our hoods up to stop
the buzzzzzzzzzzzzing in our ears:

mosquitos blackflies blackflies mosquitos deerflies
mosquitos deerflies mosquitos blackflies blackflies
blackflies mosquitos flies damn flies blackflies
mooseflies mosquitoes more flies blackflies flies damn
damn flies blackflies mosquitoes flies flies more more
flies

.
They soon had eaten
your eyes out
and were going for your brain
when you fell.

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I have repulsive blood,
walked another mile,
before I died.

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Day 107: GOING NUMB

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Chopping block, cleaving the water, boundary of your
reservations: these things happen. Green. Colour of envy. Colour
of spring. Modern times. Contemporary space. These edges are
jagged.

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Mantha was on the dock smoking a cigarette when Stan
skimmed in on the water skis. I figured Mantha must have come
down to watch the sunset, since he had never seemed much
impressed with the sport of water-skiing. As I cut the
outboard and coasted in, I heard Stan ask him if he'd like to
give it a try, and much to my surprise, Mantha replied that yes

he would. I glanced at my companion in the boat, but Fredrick's face was blank. I knew Mantha couldn't swim, but we had become so distant by this time, I was afraid to say anything.

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Cut. Hydro cut. Boundary cut around the park. As one grows North, one learns that these things happen. Brown. Colour of age. Colour of mud. Water and earth equal mud.

•
As Stan held the boat, Fredrick, who was leaving the next day for Timmins and his winter cabin, climbed out of the boat and scrambled onto the dock. He said he'd join him after he saw how well Mantha did. Again I wanted to speak up, tell them I needed someone in the boat to watch Mantha while I steered, but again – perhaps for fear of injuring his pride, perhaps for some other reason – I said nothing, merely waited shivering in the cool evening air as Mantha got the skis on and slipped into the seasonably cold water.

•
Slash. The cutting edge. Removing the layers, to reach under, to grab at the passing. Blue. Colour of clear. Colour of cold. The sharp lavations of ice. These things happen. Ages come to an end.

•
Stan was standing nonchalantly watching as I eased the boat out. I started up o-so easy, glanced back to see Mantha rise smoothly and gracefully with the tension in the line. His natural co-ordination and careful observation of others gave him a notable advantage whenever he attempted some new skill; I'd seen it before. We swung out onto the body of Trout Lake, riding steady as rain. Still I glanced back frequently, but Mantha seemed perfectly at ease. Deciding to do just one circuit of the island and then call it enough, I stepped up speed.

•
Slicing the surface. Skimming the surface. The line at the brink. The curve of the wave. Red. Colour of anger. Colour of blood. We can't escape our - or other's - nature. Things happen.

•

I looked back again: Mantha was still riding smooth, but then as I refocused on the way ahead, it dawned on me that he was not wearing the styrofoam float belt. Suddenly I felt the cold sweat running on my sides. Looking back again I saw Mantha was still riding along, knees only very slightly bent, leaning back and serious-faced. Then as I stared he seemed to momentarily lose control, leaning clumsily to the left and then righting himself . . . only to shake violently in the legs. Once again he seemed to lose his balance. And regain it.

I watched in fascinated horror for too long before I again looked ahead. I saw immediately that I had let us get too close to the island. Afraid to turn too sharply, and dump him off his skis, I tried to edge the boat out. It was then I heard him yell. Turning I saw him let go of the pull rope just as I heard the scream of my propeller blade scraping a rocky shoal. Flung forward violently, I was thrown against the windshield and stunned. My head swam with confused images: winter lakes, fires, waves. Somehow, though, I managed to get to my feet. My vision cleared, and I could see him struggling wildly through the icy waters, struggling slowly toward the island – the desperate movements of a man clumsily mimicking a swimmer. I kicked off my sneakers and dived in after him. The bitterly cold water was such a shock that my breath locked in my lungs. Swimming around, confused and pained, I could no longer see him: he must've already gone under. In desperation I swam and dived in the rapidly fading light, until the cold caused my foot to cramp with bone-deep pain. Then I set out for the island, barely reaching it. I must have crawled into the underbrush before I passed out.

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Moving across the edge, and slipping past. Going under. Going into. This: a beginning. Black. Colour of quiet. Colour of depth. There are places where nothing ever happens.

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Stan arrived in a neighbor's boat shortly thereafter, for he had witnessed the whole incident from the dock. They put me in hospital for the night. Next day they started a thorough

search for Mantha's body, but found nothing. We had a real cold spell a few days later, and in little over a week the lake began to freeze up.^a

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Day 108:
TAO^a

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So they start going under. Yes they do. They slip away from you, each in his or her own way. The patterns of the escape, the escape to below the surface – of water, of sanity, of civilization. Characters transformed from reality to paper cut-outs, but the alive, they rise from my creation and taunt me – shape me. After manipulating me, they slip away. Slip from sight. Beneath the surface. Into madness. Into forest, the dark of the woods.

Diana moving into the dark of the woods. Down the damp path I move, following her. The Bush is muffled in twilight, hushed in anticipation of the first nocturnal rhythms. I walk behind her. Am I tracking her? Following in her footsteps? (Or Fredrick's) Or am I simply, merely, following. It is in spring we begin . . . the tracking.

We each take our own way out. For some it is death, but that is redundant; best to choose a different way, for death will eventually spark you anyway.

Sometimes I think the beasts of the forest know that. Frank claimed that animals could know nothing of death, because their life is fully of the present - all future inconceivable. But still they'd know death from others, know death as something that happens to others. And is that so different from the way each of us knows it? If animals cannot understand endings, because they cannot understand the future, we cannot understand endings because we cannot limit the future. Green like the algae in the fecund pond by Henderson's road.

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SIÓUX LOOKOUT, NO RESERVATION REQUIRED ^a

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Day 110:
HUNTING, EATING ^a

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Cold today. Around twilight, as I prepared dinner, the snowmobile's incessant buzz started up. I didn't even bother to check it out, for I know by now that I'll see nothing. Be it madness, or be it what I used to call "reality", it doesn't matter. Got a rabbit and dinner was more important.

Took the bunny in a trap. Don't think I'll ever hunt again. Not with a gun. Sometimes when hunting for rabbits in the fall, I would feel a strange emotion, like I could hold my gun forever at that moment, that extended moment before I, it, violently broke that line of life crossing the snow – forever freezing the frame. Or the partridge in fall: the way they emerge from the brown and yellow mosaic but in one instant can disappear, merge back into it. And while that whirling instant is hanging in the air, like a hummingbird, this odd feeling washes over me, this feeling of omnipotence. Then it shatters in the roar and bloody flurry of death. It has something to do with my not being bound to the conclusion, nor fond of, the conclusion to any thing.

Partridge. When you first carve a well-prepared partridge, your nose is assaulted with an awful dead game smell. But the first bite into the meat, and the fine, rich explosive flavour exorcises this spirit of the dead. Mantha, probably joking, claimed that there was a popular belief among his people that this smell was really a spirit come to tempt the hunter to waste.

Anyway, tonight I ate rabbit. Taken from a snare. It was good. It is cold tonight.

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Day 111:
CROSSED-WINDS RULES

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- “(i) Stand with your back to the lower wind and if upper winds (or clouds) come from the left hand then the weather will normally deteriorate.
- “(ii) Stand with your back to the lower wind and if upper winds (or clouds) come from the right hand the weather will normally improve.
- “(iii) Stand back to the lower wind and if upper winds (or clouds) move on a parallel course the weather will normally not change very much.”^a
 (from *Instant Weather Forecasting in Canada*
 by Alan Watts)

• Again the metaphor, the symbol: here where weather matters, you find the relationship of movements similar to emotions. It is good to be where these things matter, and it is good to be able to make predictions – almost necessary.

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Day 112: OLD CONCEPTIONS, NEW CONCEPTIONS^a

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Northern Ontario: Middle North: Green North. The people are festering pockets, sores on the face of the earth. Tentacles of disease stretch out from each concentration of poison; the toxins stream out along these tentacles, spreading the disease of human life.

Can you weigh it, measure it, number the angles and arcs? Can you describe a woman's figure with three numbers, or capture her personality with a column of scores on "psychological traits"? Can you crack the shield to the core? When you turn off the lights and walk out of your flimsy shelter, do you count the quanta of light from the stars? Has anyone added up the mathematics of loneliness or lust? Humans live at the edge always. They count, but they don't count.

North is a place to recognize your place. North is a big space; ours is a small place. Hours is a small time. With any set of numbers always supply a conversion scale. Relative.

What am I doing here. Chipping rock? Taking a sample from a population, and then not even randomly? I am no scientist, no geometer, no biologist or geologist. A mere fool with a typewriter in a cabin in the wrong year. I'm a speck in the eye of space.

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Day 113:
TODAY'S SCRAP OF MADNESS ^a

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Sure. Like wind. Like spring. Sometimes we made love. You know all about the wind. It is another key that almost fits. I've come to hate the cold. Cold. Cld . . . cld . . . cld. Sometimes we made love along the trails. Trailing, tracking. It seems so appropriate. Once I fell asleep afterwards. I find it hard to sleep. Time eats at me. Once I fell asleep afterwards, and she left me there. I awoke to some night sound that was gone before I came completely up from the mists. The mists of morning, of sleep. Deep sleep. Without dreams. Up from the mists. I awoke to some night sound that was gone before I came completely up from the mists, perhaps a screech owl. Perhaps a scream. Weird to awaken on the forest floor in the dead of night, the wind passing overhead through the tree tops like cars on a highway just beyond the next rise. But no highway. No sleep. Nothing but that lone pine and me and the cold. God what I wouldn't do for a bit of rest. Just beyond the next rise. Sunrise. Beyond the next rise. I stumbled out. Stumbling around like some fool. Snowblind. I hate this place. I feel the walls closing in on me. I keep writing. Talking to the walls. I stumble over my words. I stumbled out onto the trail and back to my car. There was no point. There is no point. It is as meaningless as growth and decay. Meaningless as human relationships. There was no point

in asking her why she didn't wake me; there was never any point in asking. There isn't any point in asking anything. I sit here, cold as death, and type word after word. Why bother? It would be nice to just sit idly all day and all night, letting the cold gradually turn me to ice. But pointless. There was no point in asking her why she didn't wake me; there was never any point in asking her why she did any thing . . .

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North. It is madness, drunkenness, rootlessness. I have made it my home. Mantha understood. Frank only thinks he does.

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Day 114:
DRUNKEN INJUN ^a

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seething brain pan
bed pan
panhandler happy in Longlac summer
lacking money maybe
more than many mostly
this marvelous injun telling ^b
again again
an adventure sure to get a rise
from a white man plus the sunset
over land and this long lake
I make quick
of this a twisted verse
where he recalls in gravel voice
the pure and white-face nurse
he laid he said
when mad quite mad
and hospitalized for being so
seven unsad years ago
tho I'm sure he lied grinning sighing
as I finally gave gravely generous

still a quarter less
than just price
for his visions of the night nurse
and this mad injun together rolling
in cross-cultural lust
a mere imagination ago

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Day 115:
THE REMAINDERS

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Robinson drowned. His wife survived widowhood in Toronto. Mantha drowned. Fredrick off in the Bush discovering madness. Champlain gone west. (probably to a voyageur death) Diana? Diana escaped back into the dream she had first emerged from.

And now we received word that Thomson too had drowned. Frank and I sat across from each other sipping our beer. For some reason his face irritated me that evening. It seemed lined with the same pedantic and pompous lines that his mouth constantly phrased.

“Did you know Mantha was the only one that dropped Diana, rather than the other way around?”

“No, didn’t know that,” I confessed.

“Do you know why?”

His school-master tone irked me. “No, and neither do you,” I replied.

Frank smiled forgivingly at me as he spoke, “The explanation is simple. Much of the North remains a frontier, and a frontier is not a woman’s most natural habitat. Thus it seems that few women act at home here. The few that do not seem totally out of place are either common and simple to the point of anonymity or else very strange, almost animalistic personalities. So while the elements make men taciturn and reactionary, usually cynical too, they make women bitchy or frumpy. The

bitches are more natural. Now Mantha was also a *natural*, and he understood the nature of bitches. It is connected with his . . .”

“You know, Frank,” I interrupted, “you talk more *shit* than anybody I have ever known.”

He didn’t like that. For the first time since I’d met him, his face registered *hurt*. I honestly thought he was going to cry. He got up and left without saying a word. Yet I knew I had, in one instant, made him hate me.^a

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Day 116:

AD FOR A SIMPLE TREE KILLING APPARATUS^a

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Carry this handy quart plastic can on your belt, a belt-loop is provided on the can collar. The pistol receives the herbicide through a flexible plastic hose 4 feet long. With the convenient pistol injector, squirt the herbicide into the notch made in the tree with a frilling hatchet.

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Injection: 1 millilitre

Order No.: K-83

Price: \$14.99

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Day 117:

AFTER A CERTAIN TIME^a

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After a certain time you crawl out:

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spit blood, pine needles

(five inches, two to a sheath)

and curse the worm that'll possess you

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when your time comes,
and you can hear it coming . . .

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Day 118:
MISPLACED ^a

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Of course it didn't make any sense at all. The man had no place in a swamp. No place wandering blindly through quagmire wearing an expensive suit. It was, definitely, most unnatural.

The heron, one moment an indistinct segment of landscape, suddenly rose into the air: great wings tormenting the thick stillness - a long grey ribbon of excrement arcing behind it. Startled, a few redwing blackbirds scolded, then the silence sealed shut again like the surface of the water momentarily split by the fleeing heron's feet. The man was standing knee-deep in the murky water, gas bubbles slowly surfacing about him, surrounding him with a nauseous aura of rot and decay. The sun was hot and the day clear, but in his mind it was a misty, foggy weather that prevailed. There an old woman's face, contorted into a grotesque grimace of amusement, materialized briefly only to rapidly fade again into the streaming mists. Sweat beads rose on the man's forehead. The temperature was in the eighties, and deerflies swarmed about his head - their incessant buzz a foil to the oppressive silence. Slowly he bowed his head and saw that he was standing in a channel, part of the monstrous, wet labyrinth of the marsh, while on both sides of him grew spring sawgrass and cranberry-bush. From somewhere the command came: a single step. Then another up onto the insecure support of the vegetative mattress; now he was only in water to his shins. Back in the fog the old woman was saying something . . . something about a different

route, but then she faded again. Overhead the sun reached its apex.

The man probed desperately for some memory of self, of intention, but just as in real fog the effort to focus where there is nothing to focus on soon became painful. Then his self-attentive mind dimmed out. He scanned the expanse of bog and border-life. He felt the slow cycles of change and return like waves washing past him. Movements: spasmodic and irregular. I'm walking, he thought briefly, then dismissed the observation as irrelevant to his environment. Ahead of him was an island of higher land with a small population of stunted spruce. I am going to the island, some part of him realized carelessly, going to an island . . . no man (no mind?) is an island ... from a book ... I have something to do with books. This small remembrance rose into, then past, meaningfulness. He placed one foot into the muck and began to lift the other.

He staggered drunkenly on through the mire. The marsh extended for several miles in any direction. In the autumn, certain areas on the periphery were invaded by duck hunters, and even a few cranberry pickers would wade into the interior. But it was midsummer. Beneath the still surface catfish lazed in the mud . . . until disturbed by the ungainly movements of the passing man.

He reached the island in about half an hour: stumbling onto the relatively dry humus, he collapsed and closed his eyes. The dream came to him immediately. He was following himself through the swamp, and someone was following him; the circle turned on itself with the background changing slightly but always seeming familiar. The dream went on with little variation as he stumbled along through the maze of shallow channels, as he occasionally disturbed some wild fowl that shifted noisily away, as he moved in intricate circular paths. He never caught up to this other self, and behind him the hunter never gained or lost distance. The sun began descending, and the dream went on. And on.

When he opened his eyes, he immediately knew where he was that is, he knew he was on an island in a great swamp. The fog was gone from his brain. He felt extremely clear-headed and, by glancing at the sky, was able to quickly calculate both approximate remaining hours of daylight and which direction was North. He understood his immediate position with cold

objectivity, and the past (or future) no longer seemed to matter. Now he knew where his wallet was, and he knew its contents could identify him. But why bother?

Removing his wallet from his suitcoat pocket, he flung it into the nearby reeds where it landed with a nearly inaudible splash. The old woman's laughter echoed through his head. Grimly he took out his key case and flung it too into the brown and brackish water. Then he began to walk due North.

Rising in the distance were high hills of poplar and pine, and if his estimation of distance was accurate, he would reach the edge of the marshlands almost exactly at sunset. One step at a time through acid bog, through the steady drone of insects, he progressed. His leg muscles ached, and his exposed skin was caked with blood from fly bites ... but his attention was outward he was sensing the rhythm. Like some foreign object being shifted along and away by cilia, he moved. Almost a dance. Around him: the void, the place left forever long time ago. He inhaled the rich stench of sweat and the marsh gas that each step released from the soft underbelly of this world. Onward he moved, outward.

He was accurate in his judgement, and he stumbled up the muddy shoreline just as the red ball of the sun slid below the horizon. In the dim light of the dusk forest sat the old woman beneath a twisted jack-pine. She was smiling almost gently as she commented, "Considering everything, you did well."

"I see what you meant," said the man shakily, dropping to his knees with an exhaustion more spiritual than physical, "I see what you meant about the swamp." Then he passed out, face into the soil.

The old woman began to laugh, her shrill, century-scarred voice cutting jaggedly through the twilight quiet. Her face dissolved into a swarm of insects; her body already now just the rotten stump of a once strong pine. But no one observed this, just as no one observed, a few miles away, the magical process of decay and regeneration performing its alchemical miracles on the wallet. The keys had already begun to rust.

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"I was twenty-five," concluded the man, staring at the young woman beside him at the bar, "and twenty-five is very young to learn such things."

“What did you do afterwards?”

“Oh continued at my old occupation. There is nothing you can do about it, don’t you see? I mean when you just don’t belong, all you can do is make your self ... well ... I guess the word is - inconspicuous.

Diana looked him over: he would do.

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Day 119:
FOUR PARKS, FOUR PERSPECTIVES ^a

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1. Algonquin: stream and creek, moose in the reeds, hot spring sun.
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2. Quetico: rock and jack pine, granite land, wide lakes and west wind.
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3. Lake Superior: pictographs and blue-green rollers, gravel river banks, the abstracts of islands in the inland sea.
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4. Polar Bear: ice floe and wet meadow, wide and shallow rivers from nowhere, geese in clouds, cold.

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A movement too.

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Day 120:
HAMSTRINGING

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A common misconception about wolves is that they bring their prey to ground by hamstringing; that is, by tearing the

large Achilles' tendon. This belief is supported by a great number of historical accounts from the writings of early settlers, trappers, explorers and woodsmen. However recent scientific evidence collated by David Mech in his definitive work *The Wolf* have failed to support this belief. In fact, Mech concludes that wolves definitely do not hamstring their prey; rather, they attack the throat or the flanks, and are actually afraid to get near the powerful legs of moose and deer.

He resolves this discrepancy between historical accounts and contemporary evidence by suggesting that either wolves have changed their habits or the historical accounts are wrong, part of the false mythology that surrounds the wolf. I tend to suspect that people accept the myth of hamstringing because it fits their preconception of the wolf's character: hamstringing seems somehow devious, and the wolf is stereotypically considered a sly and devious creature.

Interesting, no?

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Day 121: MISTABEO ^a

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What fool am I? Whom do I fool? It is into bathos the madman dips; tragedy is not for those that wander in personal fantasies. The hard man of arrogant reason falls, fails, perhaps nobly . . . but the madman is a joke . . . a joker ... joke. Green fields. The sun eating ice.

Thomson gone under too. Murdered? Murdered by a moment of incompetence irrelevant to the nature of things? The expert canoeist falls from his canoe. The expert fisherman gets tangled in his fishing line. The swimmer drowns. You don't need one skill if you have the other.

Thomson, the artist. One who approached the Northern landscape with the appropriate perspective. His paintings were no trite imitation of European pastures. His beauty was a harsh

beauty delineated with broad strokes and extreme tensions. The artist as madman?

So he went too. All the bodies. So they all went their way ... their *own* way. I have Frank to think of these cold nights. Frank, my giant. Frank, my friend. Frank, my protector ... for Frank was so reasonable.

I am up against the wall. It is time to press against rock.

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Day 122:
APRIL FOOL'S DAY ^a

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The smell of spring in the air.

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Day 123:
THE SPRUCE PADDLE ^a

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A paddle is a very special tool, and every canoeist has very definite ideas about length, and shape, and type of wood. Personally I prefer the conventional design for a paddle but with the blade a bit larger than is usual and the length a bit greater than is usual for a man of my height. Also I prefer the spruce paddle to other woods. It is light and strong, although it will split more easily than ash or maple when used in emergency situations such as fast water. I'm willing to take that chance.

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I think back on my attempts to help Fredrick, prevent his becoming half-blind. Whenever I could get his attention, I tried in vain to ease him into some small awareness of the other side. Tried, but tried in vain. I even invited him to canoe out with me

to the Manitou Islands in Lake Nipissing. These islands are about six miles from shore at the nearest point, and the lake is notorious for its sudden changes: millpond to raging sea. Being very shallow and very exposed, a sudden wind can produce a short vicious chop that is much more dangerous to a canoe than those long and much larger rollers of Lake Superior. Perhaps, I thought, a sample of the irascible indifference of this lake to men and canoes would snap him out of his blind obsessions. I deliberately picked a day when weather signs indicated a change from balmy, sunny, windless peace. I was taking a bit of a risk, but I figured that unless we got caught right halfway, the worst result would be getting marooned temporarily on the islands. And I made sure we took lifejackets. As luck had it, however, the weather remained calm, we might as well have gone canoeing in Henderson's pond. At one point Fredrick turned to me and said that he really couldn't see why the lake had such a reputation for being dangerous . . .

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It becomes worn to fit your hand. You have a feeling for it a sense of what a tool should mean: it becomes an extension of your arm, part of you . . .

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Day 124

USES ^a

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Sure we all use people. Mirrors, barriers, levers, probes. Moving in. Moving out ... out . . open water, weather. North. Northern weather. Un-predictable. My lust and I share certain traits: / Death gray passages / thru forbidden fens; / Lack of trust / of each other; / And intensity of whim / not unlike weather / in the North. ^b So.

"Unpredictable, that is the most predictable aspect of that woman, that she is unpredictable." Frank was probably right. The vicarious. Sure I used, use, Fredrick. A way in and a way out. ^c

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One season of the stress of alone, and he cracked.

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Me? Who?

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Day 125:
A VISITOR ^a

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Tonight I had a visitor. Ridiculous? Alone in the middle of nowhere. No sense to it. True enough.

I was sitting reading before the fire, and contemplating the part of this puzzle I have put together so far, when I heard the, by now familiar, whine of the snowmobile. However, this time it didn't circle the cabin; instead the, sound grew steadily in intensity until I knew it was right outside my door. I didn't rise until I heard the knock. Finally, I thought, finally! A man alone has more nerve than one would think. Perhaps the mere acceptance of something beyond the natural takes the bite out of one's fear of confronting it. Anyway, I wasn't even shaking as I opened the door . . . and invited the man in.

He took off his helmet and boots and thanked me for allowing him entrance, saying something about his carburetor malfunctioning. He was a big man, but he didn't look ghostly or anything like that. My mind has been playing tricks with me for some time now, and I was quite willing to accept him as a perfectly normal human being. I offered him a drink. I even was tempted to ask him what he was doing riding about the Push in the dead of winter, but I was afraid of some bizzarre response. He took the drink, and we sat in uncomfortable silence for a few minutes before he spoke.

"I froze to death four weeks ago."

"Was it bad?" I heard myself asking calmly.

"No ... no, after the fear, it wasn't bad at all. I just sort of ... relaxed ... funny ... kept thinking about soaking in a hot bath."

"One has to be careful in winter out there."

“Yeah, I know.”

“I guess you do,” I said with a nervous laugh. And then I couldn’t keep it up, this ridiculous small talk with the dead. A shiver ran thru me and I asked in a trembling voice, “Why did you come here?”

“I told you - trouble with the damn carburetor . . . that’s what did me in originally - bloody thing! Besides I have a message from Frank.”

“What?” asked I, in a cracked voice.

“He said that he is sorry he never told you the truth about Diana.”

“Which is?”

“I don’t know,” the man replied shrugging, “that’s all he said.”

Silence. We both drank and stared at each other. He looked very much alive. His face seemed vaguely familiar, but his eyes were strange - filled with a resignation so deep you could drown in it.

I finally gathered momentum again and spoke, “Why do you keep circling my cabin?”

“Nowhere else to go ... and . . .”

“And what?”

“and Frank asked me to keep an eye on you.”

“Frank is alive. You’re . . . dead. How can you talk to Frank?”

“I’m talking to you, aren’t I?”

I couldn’t think of a reply that I would have the nerve to verbalize, so I was silent for quite awhile before I blurted out, “Damn it! Go watch someone else, damn it, please leave me alone. I prefer the wolves.”

“So did Fredrick,” he said rising. “I understand.”

As he zipped and buckled his boots he muttered what sounded like an “okay”. Then he slipped his helmet on and went out the door without saying goodbye.

I waited for the sound of the snowmobile. Finally it came. The engine sounded rough, just as if the carburetor were malfunctioning. Then I heard him drive off.

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That was three hours ago. Right now I’m rather embarrassed at being so rude. After all my longing for human company!

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Day 126

VARIETY

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“As one progresses to the North, the variety of species decreases. The tropics are rich with a multitude of plant and animal species; a taxonomist could easily go mad. But this multitudinous variety gradually diminishes as one moves toward the higher latitudes, until in the high arctic the survival criteria are so stringent that only a tiny fraction of this planet’s species are properly equipped to live there. (The insect variety dramatizes this fact: in the mixed temperate forest of southern Ontario there are twenty-thousand different species, at treeline around a thousand species, in the tundra roughly three hundred species, and in the high Arctic estimates are twenty-four to twenty-five different species in the whole of that vast region.)

“Man, too, is selected by the climate and geography of the North. The harsh criteria for physical and psychological survival weed out the great majority of men. Certain definite personality characteristics are almost prerequisite for a continued existence above certain latitudes. The often bizarre variety of personalities harbored in the large urban areas is not found in the North. This is not to say that Northern men are all very similar, for the North certainly has more “individuals”, more “characters” than any comparable region in the world. Rather, the permanent Northern resident shares certain specific characteristics with his neighbor, and it is these shared characteristics that link the Northerners with each other - even across the tremendous distances that are involved.

“I do not intend to list these common characteristics here; let me only say that those attitudes of mind and body that can cope with vastness, solitude, and the often dangerous indifference of nature create the commonality.

“Then there are the transients who act as a continually changing foil to the stable residents. Many different people make forays into the North, for many different reason. Often

they temporarily find what they are searching for . . . although sometimes they are stunned and surprised to find something quite the opposite of their desires. Most of the transients cannot endure the kind of life demanded here and remain visitors, shielded by the bits of South they surround themselves with and by the knowledge that their contact with this space is soon to end. In this contrast of the permanent and the transient, and of the civilized and the wild, one can more easily detect what it is the North offers an individual. It is the wealth in detail and contrast, not in gross variety, that makes the North so very rich.”

(from *The Green Refuge* by F. Singer) ^a

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Day 127:
STRAIGHT EDGES ^a

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. . . pain you. The actions of people
. .
confuse you; their tracks
look twisted; their motives dangle beyond
your comprehension. There are women stalking
. .
the concrete, but they
avoid you, your eyes; your eyes
are green and hungry. You find . . .
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Day 128:
THE DANGER OF BEAUTY ^a

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The big danger for the artist is making it *beautiful*. Everyone knows that something merely pretty is often trite, but the beautiful, because of its rarity, is a real temptation. So few realize that beauty is an evil, a flaw, in the creation of contemporary art. Thomson knew it.

Mad hatter civilization. Give me this peace that seeps into my bones with the cold. I see his landscapes. I traveled with him, and I learned to see the Bush as he saw it. Stark. Give me the stark, the hard-edge ragged.

He did usually keep people out of his landscapes. Only the eye perceiving. Only the eye. Not I. Green maze. He shaped lines ... and was shaped. The rhythm was there. Man only as a passing rhythm.

Green-eyed and hungry. The weather is changing. How long have I been here? Am I forever . . . or just a season. Seasons shift. Tom was taciturn. He spoke with the strokes of his brush. I try words and am tempted by beauty. Repress it and it becomes pretty. The muck of past clogs my thoughts.

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Day 129: FORESHADOW^a

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A smell of false spring again today. The air warm and the smell of ice rot. I know enough not to trust this false spring. But it is a hint, a tease, of the inevitable thaw and end. If I was to leave it would have to be soon, before the danger of rotting snow and cracking ice makes travel impossible. Perhaps already it is impossible: I am tied to the season and must go with it to the end. I guess I know now, as I have from nearly the beginning, that I'll stay to the end. I helped myself along with the possibility of escape and abandonment, but it was only a case of fooling myself.

I'll finish this now, and get the seasons seal on it. "April is the cruelest of months." Spring is the cruelest of seasons. More suicides, more mental breakdowns, in spring than in any

other season. Spring. Spring again. In spring begin the tracking.
In winter seal the record.
Under ice.

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Day 130:
SOME SKETCHES FROM A CANOE TRIP
[from TOM THOMSON] ^a

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. .

North Lake.

The feel of the paddle; our rhythm against the wind.

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. .

Weight of canoe and pack,
And shock of boot on rock
As forest life

Steps aside
To let us pass ...

.
. .

Alternating rhythms of strokes and steps
(alternating movements of some musical
improvisation).

.
. .

A portage opens (at its end)
Onto a small peninsula of soft sand
Sucking at our needs;

.
. .

Among dead pine desolate pine dead heart burnt out.
Standing is sinking
In this primeval place

sinking . . .
The muck of past.

.
. .

We launch into the shallows

Thru the scrawny clinging arms of reeds.

.
Opposite shore is green and bright and today
(sun being there not here).

.
Passing into open water future . . .
Passing into deeper water . . .
Water passing around bow and stern . . .
Pressing toward lake's center,
We drift at last and take
One drink of water.

.
.
Set to sleep as everything wakes up.

.
.
All sight is drizzled over in five a.m. light . . . rain
Trail climbing up not
To drop down . . .

Instead

We encounter . a small determined . body of water
Hiding high in the hill with its running over
At the edges.

.
Less see the lake than feel its small laden mass of isolation;
Somewhere thru the mist it has settled in its hollow
High . . . without looking down.

.
Crossing it: treading on some sleeping thing

.
In the deadening drizzle sudden:
A dark hulk . moose . crashing out . . .
The early morning quiet cracked open like a shell

.
Canoe rocking.

.
We push thru screams of red-winged blackbirds Toward a
point Where other undaunted moose with calf stands watching
Us struggle thru reeds round beaver huts and fears ...

.
Realizing

this high unnamed lake . is actually
 A tight center of activity
 For those very other –
 Does not end the isolation
 And alters
 Nothing

of man's ignorance

of early hours

And the oldest movements.

.
 .
 The rhythm again.

.
 Clouds cover.

.
 The rhythm again . again.

.
 .

Lean Lake.
 Staring down the long and narrow water stretching westward:
 The current's detected thru its perfect calm: a still,
 Evil snake of peace against the rippling ground of wayward
 And less directed waters. Glides like life without will
 Thru its canyon walls of pine and maples, spruce and firs,
 Which rise in turn like waves to wash against the gloomy

sky's

Restraint. Tho one may see for miles on a clear day, it
 Seems that one understands much more beneath these

darkened skies.

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 .
 Portage thru bog and burnt-out land.
 A beat skipped.

.
 It comes a shock
 How stark
 The land gnarls
 Its images
 Into apathetic
 Tension . . .

.

•
Thunder Lake.
With its jungled island and brewing storm,
Acquisitive waves and grand opening of the heavens
Thru which are racing racing wisps of storm;
Knowing not if it might slow and turn
Or pass us by,
We seek the shelter of the tall bent pines,
So unlike our shelters of belief,
And there stare with awe
Upon the frightening lines of strength
Tensed from sky to wind to water;
One cannot help but wonder
At the weakness of one's own regrets
Against that great uncaring sky.

•
•
A distant point leeward
Stands crystalline distinct.

•
The rhythm again
Then sleep.

•
•
Awaken to a golden dawn:
Kindness not based on pity or duty,
The beauty of this dawn.

•
Moving on
Rhythm of the stroke
Channel narrows and banks begin to rise
Growl and roar of stony rapids
Dodging rock in foaming waters
Timelessness and thoughtlessness
Complex reaction movements guiding
Us through.
Present.

•
Beyond the rapids rests a still marsh,
Barely cut by the shallow river. Here
We sit back, the canoe can find its own way

Into the wind, carried along the gentle current
Toward the peaceful settling shores of another lake.

•
•

Misty Lake.

DUSK with its murder of perspective and distinction, the camp fire and the fires in the sky become equal. Loons wail, wolves howl and the sound of rapids in the distance create no order. The world divides into dim and black, and the waters reunite with the land. Night is a return to the beginning. Knowing our own irrelevance, we ourselves return - sleep.

DAWN lowers itself to the surface. The mist slides from the lake's center, revealing a lone gull nesting on one bare rock, and clings to the green walls entrapping it. Dead trees appear where a white agony to vision had been, and their starkness is a pleasure. As the sun burns the trapped dream away, the wind rises to ruffle the surface calm.

•

A beaver flaps its tail to dive
And change direction like the wind
That swings at two from a soft passing
Toward the North to a stiff pressing

On the east ...

•
•
•

The rhythm and time passing.

•
•

Ink Lake.

Isolate
Overcast sky
The black glass of water
The quiet as wind cancels wind
The stunted jack pines
Lining this perfect small circle
And separating it
From the nothing beyond
This place without shelter
With only death to recommend it
This place one suspects even

Animals avoid
This circle is dead center
Of Nowhere.

.
Leaving it is moving outward.

.
We have to accept. We have to accept.
The rhythm.
The weather.

.
.
Spiral Lake.

With arms of water extending outward in all directions.
From the bluff
One can watch the otter cut the glass of a dusk-still lake,
Observe the sun's discreet disappearance,
Campfire smoke as moving spirits over the waters,
Sweet cool water reflecting the warmth of peace
Without the west wind.

.
Somehow we can tell it will rain tomorrow.

.
The feel of the paddle; our rhythm against the wind.
North Lake.

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Day 131: PICTOGRAPHS ^a

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Another artist, another time. It is cold with the cold of
damp this morning. Another time. This is the last month.

 Misshibezhieu. Power, fabulous panther. There are
great links holding this all together. Lynx.

 Somewhere in the past. Somewhere beyond the
mosquitos you will come to the bright clearing at the end of

the portage. Here the trip becomes easier again, as you float your vessel and push off away from weight and insects.

Misshikinabik, great serpent. Snake. Snaking trail to the rock face. Face it. The face of the artist distorted in concentration. Here in this out of the way place.

Away. Float away. Five canoes, three days. Three objects of reliance. Oh. O Mikinok. Slow. O so slow, going down slow.

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A crack has formed in the ice on the lake. I find it impossible to believe it will stay, expand.

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Day 132:

THE DEATH OF TOM THOMSON

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Tom Thomson went out alone to go fishing one day and never returned. He was found drowned, a fishing line tangled about his legs, in Canoe Lake. ^a

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I like to think that if Thomson had lived to old age, he would have spent his last days painting pictographs on the rocky shorelines of the Algoma region. In all probability, however, he would have given up painting altogether, or deteriorated into a scenist ... that's the real world.

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But then what do I know of the real world? ^b

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Day 133

BLIZZARD

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It snowed all day today. And the wind was so strong the cabin seemed to vibrate with the steady beating of it. This is the worst storm since the big blizzard that hit mid-February. I laugh when I think how anxious I was to fool myself that Spring was here!

White, not black, is the colour of death. My mosaic contains several large white pieces. In fact, these pieces seem to be the aesthetic epicenters of the whole.

I feel coldly sane today. I think perhaps the greatest madness was my counting of days. Now I know there is no end to this season. Individually we all die or go insane, but the season has no end. No end. No end. No end. No end. No end. No end. No end. No end. No end. No end. No end. No end. No.

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Day 134:
VOYAGEUR DEATH ^a

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“The trade routes were rivers and lakes and not necessarily peaceful reedy rivers, nor pleasant mirrored lakes. They took their toll of lives. When a voyageur died on the trail, his companions buried him and over his grave erected a crude wooden cross. The early journals speak of clusters of crosses along the way -- sometimes as many as twenty or thirty in one spot. The commonest causes of fatality appear to have been drowning, strangulated hernia, or injury in a fall. The commonest locations of tragedy were rapids and portages.”

(from *Fur Trade Routes of Canada* by Eric Morse)

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Drowning:

sudden

balance

off

into froth screaming

the turning heels over head
(something about current differential)

then that

ROCK

head smashed open like a melon
lung sacs of foaming water quick
and dead.

.

cross, cross, cross, cross, cross,

.

.

Strangulated hernia:

sudden

liftstrain

pain

gut burst out

then weakness, abdomen

distended like inner rot, no food
for days

dazed

the belly full

of poison, slow

death.

.

cross, cross, cross, cross, cross, cross,

.

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Falling:

sudden

stump

ble

canoe

crushing

down

neck thick

snapped

like a dry branch,

then the brain

alone,

then death.

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cross, cross, cross, cross, cross, cross, cross,
cross
over.

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Day 135:
FREDRICK'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR SEPTEMBER 30

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“I know now what it is that obsesses me. I know what impulse has been growing within me, and I’m going with it. I want to know the Bush for one season - its most archetypical season. I have decided irrevocably to isolate myself and survive the winter in the Bush North of here. I have learned enough to survive, to endure, and that is the only challenge. I must explore new boundaries, jagged and disarranged movements.”^a

“I went to the store in town today and began purchasing supplies. I’ve written to a contact in Timmins who once told me he had a piece of bush with a cabin on it that he wanted to sell. If I work fast, I can be gone into it . . . by the middle of next month. I’ll see the height of autumn and the threat of winter from a new perspective. This will be the return: I will follow the direction Diana was pointing.”^b

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Day 136:
I’M GOING TO BEGIN THE TRACKING^a

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I’m going to begin the tracking (the noise deafens you: struggling against excess you separate bone from muscle) out into the white waste of each other (lose yourself in a maze of

useless possibilities, worthless memories, outmoded ploys)
take a canoe down white water (lost and clothed in fur, search
and search but fail to find) white water white water white
water (misery itself and halfway dead).

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Into the Bush. .

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Day 137:
UNDERTOW^a

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Images from my dreams: a wolf tearing at a deer
carcass; Diana naked with the moon washing over her body; a
lone pine beat by a gale from the North, crying out; my father
dead lying on a beach at dawn, while insects leaving the larval
stage emerge from water to wriggle across the sand; my arm
severed at the elbow, tossed into the woodpile; a man falling
slowly, ever so slowly into a black field; the sun exploding
and pieces of shattered glass (ice?) raining from the sky;
Frank telling me some great truth (secret?) in a just inaudible
voice; the man on the snowmobile riding off the edge of a
rotten ice shelf into a cold blue death; Fredrick's face with a
look of total horror and bewilderment; the cabin walls closing
in on me while outside someone calls out an incomprehensible
name; and a lake lashed with rain unchanging, continual - a
horrible rain . . . Sleeping alone, you wake to no warmth other
than fever.

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The mystery perhaps is the thing that first catches in
one's throat. The *why's*. The mystery of sounds without
sources . . . effects without causes. It keeps the peace from
becoming intolerable, and adds the tension that makes it art,
not death. The mystery that a human being can never solve,
only destroy.

One way to enter another world is to exile yourself from
the old world. For a time you will be in limbo, but man is a

territorial animal. Man is an animal, still. Movement through. Return to. The tracks that lead away from the isolated farmhouse, into the woodland. One is bound to find a place.

One way to enter another world is to exile yourself from the old world. For a time you will speak a language you don't understand. You will see the shadows of things only. You will know in your heart you don't belong, but then knowledge of that sort will grow irrelevant.

One way to enter another world is to exile yourself from the old world. For a time the mystery of the dream will be upon you. Green light will filter through memories, but soon the meaning of the word mystery will become unclear. Distinctions like dream and real will be found to be confusing.

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Tonight I finished what is virtually the last of my food supplies.

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Day 138: KINNICKINNICK TOBACCO ^a

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When you've been long time in the bush and you've been long time in the bush and your tobacco supply, your tobacco starts to run low, low, Kinnickinnick leaves make a fair substitute. This plant, this plant, sometimes called Bearberry because of bears' predilection for its hard red berries, Bearberries, grow, this plant grows over much of the northern forest. Bush. It trails, trails along, along the forest floor and possesses tiny pink blossoms. Lovely against the shiny dark green oval leaves. Smoke. Collect, collect I say, collect the leaves fresh, dry them thoroughly, pulverize them and mix, mix, mix in with your remaining tobacco supply. Smoke. If your tobacco is completely smoked up, the leaves can be used straight, although the smoke will taste a bit, a bit, acrid. Smoke.

Smoke. Whether the smoke from the Kinnickinnick leaves is better or worse for your health than tobacco is not known.

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Day 139:
HUNGER PANGS ^a

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Eating at my own flesh, for nothing else, nobody else around. Self-cannibalism. Consuming my own flesh, burning my self like a small candle. I hunger. Hunger for food, for human contact, even for the smoke from real tobacco. I hunger for crowds even. Noise. Gluttony and communality. I want the vices again. The curve now cuts into my own flesh. The angle is sharp. The space has become edge, and the edge is honed to the thinness of time. I follow trails. I wander blindly. Where is it going; where is it leading me? I see tracks, but never any animals. Am I the only animal left? Only the sound of blood flowing. Nothing else. Not another's blood, but only my own. O for the sound of someone else's blood flowing! My life is a wound. The wound from the edge of this space. I hunger for sleep without dreams. I need a song to put me to sleep. I will sing myself a lullabye. ^b

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Day 140:
AN OLD FOLKSONG ^a

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Little Jocko flows, flows,
White pines sigh the wind,
Lord, Diana's lost her heart,
Still
Little Jocko flows, flows,
A river like a life

Follows channels partially
Partially cuts its own.

.
Little Jocko flows, flows,
The cabin burned one night,
Lord, Diana's lost her man,
still
Little Jocko flows, flows,

.
A river like a life
Cascades wildly sometimes,
Sometimes goes quite still.

.
Little Jocko flows, flows,
She's left it all behind,
Lord, Diana's left her land,
Still
Little Jocko flows, flows.

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Day 141:

FREDRICK'S JOURNAL ENTRY FOR DECEMBER 1 ^a

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“Light snowfall. Today, last entry in this journal. I am too busy learning the skills to worry about leaving marks on paper. I see illiteracy as an advantage. I want the record of this winter in my soul, not in some notebook.

“The cold has become permanent, inside and out, and this frightens me a bit. The snow coming down is like a door quietly closing. Otherwise I am totally confident about the coming winter.”

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Day 142:
THE COMING OF TOTAL UNITY ^a

.
. .

This is it: the greening. Pine needles in your hair. Fredrick never wrote a word again. The conquering curvilinear ate his brain like a worm. Madness and spring fevers. He came out cracked. You know that. You ... who are you? Meeting at the intersection of cold and night. How they howl! They pile up the bodies. Who is left? In a week they come to get me. Who? I don't know. I don't know if I can still speak. Ah, the pieces are almost arranged! sun, I know a short-cut thru the Bush. Know thy origins. No, it is a week and a half. Who can keep track of time. This is Spring? Why is it so cold? I've laid it all out on the floor: a topographical map made from the scraps of interaction. Spring is coming. They are coming to take me out. I am indifferent. I am rock, tree, clear light on spring lake. I am still here.

.
. .
. .

Day 143:
DEATH IN THE BUSH ^a

.
. .

Here
is a communion of indifference: blood, bone and flesh
of a slain animal.
Hatred absent
in the spruce
muskeg.
Winter hiding
in the spring
fevers.

.
Here fires don't purify.
Packs weigh too much.

Trails lead no where.
Here is a communion of indifference.
Here:
Flies in your hair,
your mouth,
your nose, your ears, your eyes -
eating into your brain: their own partaking
of the body of God.

•
Here who cares why
sunsets bother?
Death cares.
Death breathes and lives on your air.
Death waits patient at the bend in the river.
Death nurses a grizzly.
Death kills time below the falls.
Death lights your fire.
Death gives and death takes away.
Death is natural.
Nature is an obscene word
for a way of dying
without feeling or caring,
caring if the flies devour your cortex.

•
Here is a communion of indifference.

•
Here thoughts grow muddled.
Wilderness: a clean, well-lighted place.
Wilderness: death unadorned.
Sleep is dawdling.
Muskeg.
Sphagnum moss devouring lakes.
Climax forest:
little death.
The flies grow sick from overeating.

•
Here:
A trout leaps like a spark
off the waters of dusk.
Your dreams of a future
ended, You'll die in the quiet arms

of lakes, not in the distant wards
of some cadaver's hospital.
The fear has passed
as you sit sharing lunch
with death gnawing at your innards;
life burning all around you in green
flames of spring. Perhaps here,
here,
is a reasonable place to pass.

.
Here is a communion of indifference.

.
Here:
notice the green of summer's envy of spring,
more lush than beginnings,
and admire the fire of autumn's desire for summer,
more brilliant than warming,
and when
winter, white
and callous in its purity
illuminates the night
you will start to feel
the need for death
and certain other minor
vices.

.
Here you stumble through muck,
the gnarled swamp images of ancient
death.

Death sucks at your legs.

Muskeg.

Standing is a waste of energy.

Energy is always conserved.

Muskeg.

You fall into the mire, inhale
dead water.

You are needed here,
though nothing cares.

.
Here is a communion of indifference.

.

Here no one really cares if you die.
 If you die, turn
 to no more, no
 body, no matter
 who you are,
 really cares.
 Some thing some one
 might stand to profit or loss,
 but that is just a spin-off.
 Your death:
 irrelevant as the average Tuesday in March.
 Your body:
 maybe a delight or disaster alive,
 dead,
 it's neither here nor there.
 The living goes on
 like rain in spring.

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Day 144:
WIND CHILL FACTOR ^a

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Wind Speed (mph)	Actual thermometer reading (degrees F.)									
	30	20	10	0	-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60
	Equivalent temperature (degrees F.)									
0	30	20	10	0	-10	-20	-30	-40	-50	-60
5	27	16	6	-5	-15	-26	-36	-47	-57	-68
10	16	4	-9	-21	-33	-46	-58	-70	-83	-95
15	9	-5	-18	-36	-45	-58	-72	-85	-99	-112
20	4	-10	-25	-36	-53	-67	-82	-96	-110	-124
25	0	-15	-29	-44	-59	-74	-88	-104	-118	-133
30	-2	-18	-33	-48	-63	-79	-94	-109	-125	-140
35	-4	-20	-35	-49	-67	-82	-98	-113	-129	-145
40	-6	-21	-37	-53	-69	-85	-100	-116	-132	-148

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Wind speeds greater than 40 mph have little additional effect, and actual thermometer readings lower than -60 are rare.

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Day 145:
COUNTDOWN ^a

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I'll be out of here in a week. What is out there now? For all I know the world is gone. Maybe that's why it is so cold. This is April 24th - it has no right to be cold. Or is the cold inside me? Diana took her warmth (and mine?) from me. The wolves are howling. Tonight they call me. "Come, come, come run with us, into the Bush," they call to me. It is in spring they mate and the pups are born and it is time to begin ... the tracking. Frank will come back from the living. Frank will come back with me. We will go out together into the Bush and find her. There will be a carcass of a deer; it will not be rotten. Are they all dead? or mad? No, Frank is out there with the wolves already. He is waiting. I am waiting. In a week they come and get me. Me, see, bee. . . the bees don't sting ... wing, wing ... fly away home. Here is home. The Bush is home. You indulge my angle of descent. Indulge hallucination. Frank will explain it. Or Mantha. No, Mantha is dead! Gone under. The south too is gone, Robinson gone under. Thomson gone under. Mantha gone under. Fredrick gone elsewhere. Who are they? They are me, and we are them. I piece it together. Champlain broke his neck. Crack the bunny rabbit's neck. Food. Food keeps me alive. Ritual keeps me alive. Each day a piece. For everything there is a season. For every lover there is a year. Winter here. Here is home. The Bush is home. The snow is rotten. Spring. Spring again. Again. Aging. Was I ever young? Is this it? Does it fit? Green, green, green. The wolves howling. Crack-up. Turn again. Rise! Then go under. Caught in the trap of the cycle's turning. We belong and we do not belong. Where? Here. Here is home. The Bush is my home. They understand, each in their own fashion. Reason and unreason. Dream and nightmare. Summer and winter. The inevitable fall . . . and spring.

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Day 146:
BREAK-Up ^a

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“Break-up. The day the ice comes out. Begin here: this is the start of the year. The world has been closed since November, since freeze-up and first snow. The animals, the birds, gone mostly. The land silent except for the occasional thunder of ice shifting. There are two seasons: winter and other. Winter begins with freeze-up and ends with break-up.

“At first winter is a pleasant change. You haven’t put the canoe in the water for weeks, for the weather has been typical of late fall - cold, damp and overcast. Ice has formed along the shallow shore of Lake Nipissing; quiet streams have had their surfaces solid for a week. The stark, bare outline of those trees that had been brilliant splashes of red and yellow in the golden days of autumn are now depressing in their gray austerity. The snow comes and it is good. Soon you can strap on cross-country skis and travel through the peaceful winter landscape, hissing along through bush that was impossible all summer.

“But winter is long in the North. By January the pleasures, the peace and silence have all lost their attractiveness. The cold is exciting only when it sets records; usually it is just constant irritation. By February many men begin to drink much more than usual. In the far Northwest the last months of winter produce mental symptoms close to psychosis in many inhabitants. The waiting begins. The waiting for spring. And spring is break-up.

“By April the days are warm, longer. The snow is melting and dirty. Some mornings you wake to the fresh smell of budding life ... but some mornings the cold is back with a vengeance. The rivers and streams are running, as the sap is running in the Maples. White-water canoeists in their long underwear are back in their crafts, riding the icy swells of run-off flooded rivers, racing toward some lake still sealed in ice. But slowly these rivers eat into the lakes; open water appears at the mouths of streams and along the shore. The lake ice changes from glare white to a rotting black.

“Animals reappear ... and birds. Hungry, sleepy bears tramp through the forest. Buds appear although it will be almost a month before the land is fully green again. This is the in-between

season for those that travel in traditional ways. The ice on the lakes is now unsafe for skis or snowshoes, and the snow in the bush is rotten underneath from melt and won't support a man. But soon the old highways will be open: the waterways.

“The ice is gone from the shallow shoreline of Lake Nipissing. Then comes the first big break. There is open water in the body of the lake. Early canoeists weave their way up the leads, enjoying the impressive and refreshing contrast of hot sun and icy water. Gradually the ice floes become a hazard: demolishing docks, piling up on peninsulas and islands. The warm rains come and further erode the remaining ice. Smaller sheltered lakes open up. Finally the big lakes, Lake Nipissing, Trout Lake, open, break-up. The last ice disappears in minutes. Here is the symbolic end of winter, end of deathlike silence - season of contemplation. The compass points open.”

(from *The North* by F. Strange) ^b

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Day 147:
TOWARD THE LIMIT ^a

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Amazing! This morning I smell spring in the air. The time of beginnings, ha! End, rather. I am pushing this to the end now. Pushing into print the last pictographs on the rock face of this space. Piecing in the very last pieces. Building my non-Euclidean geometry. Making the final topographical notations. Lonely terrain. I've been alone too many months to count. (Arithmetic has no part in this equation of mine.) Spring is a woman. I want a woman. Woman, contact. The loneliness eats at you, consumes your thoughts. Loneliness is Windigo. Loneliness is Nature. Nature is an eye. Devours you.

Hungry. No luck fishing. No food left. Maybe I should hunt.
DO NOT FEAR THE WOLF. LET THE HUNTER LIVE.
Strange how all I think of is death or food or my peopled past.
Or cold and warmth. My obsessions. More and more I'm
convinced that when I come out there will be nothing there.
The cities and towns will have gone back to fireweed and
seedlings. Return of the wilderness. Wildness. Return.
Coming out. How many nights out here? 147. Wish for the
return of my ghost. We could talk about how the air grows
thick as the temperature drops twenty, thirty, forty, below.
Wish for the end. Wish for the wolves. This shelter, and the
need for this shelter, is hateful. This typewriter - hateful. This
damnable determination to finish this - hateful. Frank-Diana.
Me. Fredrick, a mirror. Broke my mirror. What do I look like?
I don't even have my self to keep myself company. The
landscape is breathing - slow and deep. Yes, I smell spring in
the air. Spring.

.
. .
. .
. .

Day 148

MURDERESS ^a

.
. .
. .

She came with arrow. She came with wind and water.
She came with madness. Armed and dangerous, she was. She
knew they had no right in the heart or womb of her forest.
Gods were on her side. She did not care if they cared. She
came armed with cycle and season, with rhythm and unreason.
She came, as lover and murderess, into their minds.

She came as bitch and retribution. Armed and
dangerous. Trespassing is sacrilege. She became huntress and
hunted, haunting and haunted. She took them one by one, with
weapon appropriate to each kill. She left one for last. Winter
was her final arrow. The cracking of ice her signal to make
the final kill.

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. .
. .

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Day 149
WOLF CYCLE^a
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There are three kinds of wolves: 1) the wolves of reality - loyal, intelligent, social and indifferently brutal in surviving; 2) the wolves of fantasy - vicious, sly, evil and created from man's darker side; and 3 ' the wolves bred of those two that patrol the wilder regions of my head. This poem speaks of this hybrid only. It is not for those who know or only want to know one or the other parent. The offspring is not intended to portray his father or her mother, although he has a part of both within her.

.
.
"The Gray Wolf, or Timber Wolf, *Canis lupus*, has never, to the best of our knowledge, made an unprovoked attack on man in North America ... On the other hand, there are so many stories of wolves falling upon and killing people in the Old World . . . that we cannot discount such tales altogether . . . It is quite possible, too, that the wolves of Europe have lost some of their fear and respect for man by interbreeding with domestic dogs."

(from "*Wolves*" by George Goodwin)^b

.
.
It is in spring they mate and the pups are born and it is time to
begin

The tracking
In spring ignorance begin
The tracking
The tracking

.
Wolf tracks are like those of a domestic dog
But wider.

.
Mother.

.
Harken to her
The wolves wail

Why won't you
Tho sun pales
Why won't moon
Harken to her

•
Frank with me here and now

•
Frank says you're a bitch ... pure and simple ... and somehow I
feel I should be angry ... but I'm not interested in dominance . . .
only interested in you . . . my dear dear Diana.

•
Pity,
My dear our love was but lust removed from dust and saved
for us by fear.

•
Standing still in the steady rain of early May beside canoe and
gear
We watch the wind that beats and breaks the drifting ice and
wonder
Why spring must always start in such a softly wet yet jagged
manner.

•
Somewhere near under hemlocks has begun, it's begun:
the extirpation of innocence and the sun's ascent,
response to savage fucking at winter's end, the end
end of our season.

•
This time of year
the undergrowth
is clear and travel
easy overland
Misleading introductory notes
to an advanced text.

•
Meanwhile somewhere up ahead
a conception is occurring,
recurring.

•
DO NOT FEAR. THE WOLF
LET THE HUNTER LIVE

•

under brambles, animals
a suburban bitch
under fire
starting to twitch,
brush, bush fire
the bitch, no
animal, under
brambles

•
Remember, dear, when you told me you did not care to be
domesticated, and I claimed that your trouble was that you
already were too domesticated. You always went so ungently
into each dark night, so loved the hearth and feared the horror
of your wilder side. Then somehow you got left in the
wilderness. Well, do not fear, we will find you . . . find you
there.

•
Where?

•
Where wolf where? where wolf where? Where wolf where?

•
DO NOT FEAR THE WOLF
LET THE HUNTER LIVE

•
the lakes, portages, pass
like bats in the night
or owls and mice
or days and days
dazed
by vistas, our sight
cleared of cataracts
wracked
by winds and rain
and the blood sucking
insects, we pass
the lakes, portages, pass

•
Pass time
On peaceful days we write our commentaries on the water
surface,
candid as only the lonely can be.

.
Frank insists that wild dogs are the most dangerous of animals, for they do not know how to kill efficiently and do not know what is fair game or dangerous (like man) and thus will attack anything and maim it often to begin consuming still-living creatures and lust lust why are we so removed from the glory of your indifference.

.
But you are different, Diana, dearest Diana, for you care. My dear, you care.

.
DO NOT FEAR THE WOLF
LET THE HUNTER LIVE

.
Frank

.
Remember when we were young smoking cigarettes Cigarettes
filched from dirty dashboards
Of unlocked cars parked two blocks
Away we stood on street corners . . .

.
A long way from the wolves.

.
Thumbing to the city park to stand
Around the trees to thumb back to
Stand around street corners Sixty-
Fifth and Hermitage Avenue . . .

.
A long way from the wolves.

.
Talking of cunt we'd never entered
And how if you got to squeeze her
Tits she can't stop and how we are
So cool smoking our cigarettes . . .

.
A long way from the wolves.

.
In the alley swigging rye until we
Think ourselves drunk swaggering
On Sixty-fifth yelling obscenities
At the neighborhood whore, Alice . . .

•
A long way from the wolves.

•
Some of us went to college most to
Army some to jail and some still
Stand on other corners a while
And some very few started . . .

•
The long way to the wolves.

•
In the undergrowth wolf pups play at fighting and fucking.

•
The undergrowth is getting heavier; travel harder,
as spring progresses, brambles thicken
spring fed lakes rise
the young wolf springs
again
again
at imaginary mice
again
as spring progresses, brambles thicken
wolves are howling
howling

•
DO NOT FEAR THE WOLF
LET THE HUNTER LIVE

•
In the undergrowth wolf pups play at fucking and fighting.

•
The teacher that taught Geography
I s getting laid at home
By her Biology teaching man.

•
And the sun burst
On the medallion
Between those sixteen-
Year-old's breasts
Is tempting a man
Old enough to
Do better.

•

There are various schools, various teachers.

.
The forest path
With blackflies
And the female
Mosquito is not
The place to do it.

.
Not near wolf tracks, Diana, not even in the spring:
The spring we always waste.

.
Youth wasted on youth.

.
There is so much to learn in the beginning
 so much to follow to the end.
Bend in the river.
 Lover.
I know you had your reasons for fucking and going, and that
 is just it:
Reasons, reasons,
They were only reasons.

.
Frank is reasonable, the carcass
of a deer is so much meat to him.

.
We stand over the still warm flesh and Frank begins to
expound again: "An animal doesn't die like a human. Death
comes to us with heavy footsteps, the first distant echoes are
heard in early childhood, but it comes to an animal swiftly and
silently. The human spends his life dying; the animal often
only seconds. With our mind it is not only impossible to learn
to live like an animal, it is also impossible to learn to die like
one . . ."

.
Did the deer die
only at the moment
of death?

.
Breath passing for the last time out.

.
Out into moonlight

moonlight

moonlight

Full moon

.

DO NOT FEAR THE WOLF
LET THE HUNTER LIVE

.

Advance by moonlight

.

This trail
Where is it going?
Who cares? Who cares?
This early summer night?

.

Who cares where?
Where wolf where?
Diana cares
Where wolf where?
Diana cares, cares,
This early summer night

.

Summer night of jack pine and stunted spruce.

.

Camp fire flaring up ... for a moment
Where is it going?
What time?
Time
Pine
Cone tossed
Into summer fire
Fire flaring up ... for a moment
For a moment I see
I see us all in front of our fires
Some pine and lonely
Some electric and crowded
And lonely
All of us huddled
Against the night

.

Diana, she cares

.

Farther up the hill the trees creak
To protest the age and temperature.
Shifting with the need and the land
I leave the fire to die to die
And go to the shore to enter
My canoe and push off push off
Into the lake with its dark
Where is it going?
With its incessant movement.

.
The fire watches me depart
Pulling water behind me
And when light waves mount up
I rest to drift
Does it care?
The time is other
The need not of fire
We make what we make
The reason or the lake is not clear
And the movement is slow
One second movement
Incessant
Movement.

.
Where is it going?

.
The long way to the wolves

.
DO NOT FEAR THE WOLF
LET THE HUNTER LIVE

.
Die like an animal

.
Die

.
Diana

.
Diana, Diana, you were such a liar.
Diana, Diana, you did fear the fire.
Diana, Diana, you were such a liar. s

.

Diana

•

Die

•

Die like an animal

Live like an animal

•

In undergrowth

Schooling complete

Young pups grown

Now go forth

To kill deer

•

Hunting beneath the moon.

Tracking beneath the moon.

•

It is in summer that we follow the trail easier and without thought; more drifting than tracking. We continue without effort though often lost in the thick and lush undergrowth. Like lust that has become familiar but not stale. Frank often laughs at nothing. You, Diana, you no doubt are laughing too. There are blueberries in August.

•

ravens circle

circle circle

as the pack feed on deer

with torn soft

underside . . .

•

You partially understand its beauty, don't you, bitch?

Your breasts heave as you breathe deeper, don't they, Diana?

•

Breasts, thighs, nighttime cries, fireflies, break ties

All your whys

And needs.

•

Dear Diana.

•

You've learned the lessons

But failed the test

Of reindeer moss

Indifference.

•
The heat of days:
the cool of nights.
Fireflies.

•
DO NOT FEAR THE WOLF
LET THE HUNTER LIVE

•
But fall is the loveliest time of year
Where evergreens and dying colors mix.

•
As the herd return to their cities
quitting their pitiful
scratching at surfaces.

•
The wolves are more open in their intentions.

•
A few hunters and killers
Remain
... remains in the woods ...

Dear deer.

•
And the west wind has picked up a chill.

•
Loveliest, loveliest dying of year.

•
The Fools Lake Pack watches from a rocky knoll.

•
Youngest and oldest will die
First and why is a question
Land and wind and water can
Or will not answer for
There is no time or far
Too much time for such
Metaphysics.

•
They watch with indifference, watch man pass.

•
Two room flats and tidal flats
Streams of people murky waters . . .
What protection

Can man expect?

What protection

Does the Precambrian Shield
Afford?

•
DO NOT FEAR THE WOLF
LET THE HUNTER LIVE

•
We are learning, aging, turning.
The bush is not as dense.
We aging, howling, turning.

•
Then suddenly the first snow gives survival priority.

•
into it
the fire out
movement speeds
down trails past
scats with hair
and deer shit
we push past
places of rest
keep moving
into woods
in time with
the beating
of the cold
sun against
frozen air
while the land
crackles down
beneath our
weight and snow
shoes the woods
breathing in
and out with
our own breath
we are now
tracking not
to kill just
to track to

chase back to
origins
and there are
only vague
traces there of
where it all
began back
when back when . . .

.
We were in school remember wild blueberries he said as we
pushed through the snow and now I said what do you think of
the snow the cold the icy passing of maudlin to body and hand to
the damnable snow, deep deep snow?

.
It will keep you warm if you bury yourself in it Frank muttered
and was gone.

.
Frank was gone.

.
DO NOT FEAR THE WOLF
LET THE HUNTER LIVE

.
Time

.
Time alone interminable as only winter glare can be.

.
I learned to forget whose tracks I was following, his or hers, or
mine in circles, turning, aging, it did not matter, all go nowhere,
there is no goal, just a style leading to an eventually, a
conclusion or end, no, no, just a precipice.

.
THEN THERE HE WAS OR SHE
it could've been the bitch
Didn't have time to see
It was him again at last I guess
The way he made me stare at him
I wanting no conflict of dominance
I wanting only to continue following
In his tracks,
And not too close either
But he came about so fast from way ahead to right

Ahead and made me
 Stare
 His wild eyes welded to mine across ten, maybe fifteen, feet
 Yet I saw or rather sensed a tree to my left that would offer
 balance

And I stared
 Stared back at her
 And when she came at me I
 Put my left hand straight-armed against that tree
 Jerk-kicked with my right foot
 Got her throat as she leapt and sent her sprawling and coughing
 Skidding across packed snow and rock
 I took out my knife slow, deliberate and calm, and stood back to
 tree

Waiting. One second.
 For he rolled to his feet darted around and leapt again
 My knee
 Caught him full
 In the chest stopping his jaws from reaching me
 And I simultaneously jabbed the knife into his throat
 She took the knife
 Down with her coughed wheezed blood
 Right at my feet still ready to go again
 But I spun
 From that tree and blood and fled
 Knowing he couldn't chase
 Knowing I was he
 And you are me.

.
 The depression that sweeps over you
 When you have no direction
 When you have found what you sought
 When you have known your lover
 When the trail wanders off and ends
 You have gone to the end
 You are not going anywhere in particular
 You are wandering to the edge

.
 Downhill to the edge of the lake

.
 From a rocky knoll half the pack watches

.
The other half follows you to the edge of the lake
and onto the ice ...

.
You know your casual flight is hopeless:
Finally you are going all the way to the wolves.

.
Your blood on the snow. Dead lover.

.
.
.
.

Day 150:
TO EVERY DEATH THERE IS A SEASON ^a

.
.
.

The ice cracks. The bow springs. The arrow sings. Through
the passing and out the crack, crawl into light. This is where it
ends: the light of the clearing at the end of the portage. The
green at the end of winter. Spring.

.
“Spring is a virgin, Summer a mother, Autumn a widow, and
Winter a stepmother.” This old Polish proverb just misses
getting it right. I watch the geese pass over.

.
The pieces are spread on the floor in a pattern not unlike the
pattern of undergrowth on the floor of a forest. A foolish
attempt, redeemed by my insanity. Crack-up. Break-up.

.
I’ve piled up the bodies. Spring cleaning. Time to move out,
move south. Time to find a next, a nest, a place to rest. This
space turns out to be unbounded but finite. The test has been put
off too long.

.
The pinch, it fails ... in the pinch comes failure. Move on in this
dream ... somewhere else, winter approaches ... angles of ... this
doesn’t matter ... no mind ... just like her. Diana, you were but a
wind blowing dead leaves from the trees. You were warm and
useless as Spring.

.
.
after a certain time you must crawl out.
.
.
.
.

Day 151:
LAST DAY ^a

.
.
.
Tomorrow they come and get me. You.
.
.
.
.

Day 152:
BUSHED ^a

.
.
.
After a certain time you crawl out:
.
spit blood, pine needles
(five inches, two to a sheath)
and curse the worm that'll possess you
.
when your time comes,
and you can hear it coming . . .
sliding over the asphalt surfaces.
.
Things no longer look right
when you come timeless out of the Bush:
straight edges pain you. The actions of people
.
confuse you; their tracks
look twisted; their motives dangle beyond
your comprehension. There are women stalking

•
the concrete, but they
avoid you, your eyes; your eyes
are green and hungry. You find you cannot
•
understand their words,
or the small movements of their hands,
or the place where they hide away their sex.
•
And the noise deafens
you: struggling against excess
you separate bone from muscle, lose
•
yourself in a maze
of useless possibilities,
worthless memories, outmoded ploys.
•
Your sphincter twitches,
yet you dare not squat. Crawling
ridiculous on city streets, you're watched.
•
Things are no longer
green . . . and blue . . . and white,
but very strange not looking right
at all. Death
passes by in a motor car,
all dressed up in suit and tie, dressed
•
to kill she passes by.
While you, lost and clothed in fur,
search and search but fail to find your
•
hiding rock.
Misery itself and halfway dead,
you curse the city, with all its women,
•
yet no proper place
for a man to go
and die.

ENDNOTES

Endnote marks are given in lower case letters beginning with ‘a’ anew each chapter/day. In list below the number preceding the letter indicates the chapter (narrative day).

.
Any material quoted or referred to directly is credited immediately after the quotation, and full bibliographical information for all this material is given in the bibliography; hence, quoted material is not referenced here.

.
Also, please remember that the map is an important piece in this puzzle/mosaic; and this is the reason many of the notes give co-ordinates to help approximately locate on a map the place where some of the incidents occurred.

.
.
.
1a: It is December First. The piecing begins in this cabin North of Hearst: 50° 25’ N. Lat.; 83° 30’ W. Long.

.
1b: I can believe in Kant at this stage, but I have a strong suspicion that my faith will be tested.

.
1c: Consider the history of science and its present state.

.
2a: Location: 46° 35’ N. Lat. ; 79° 20’ W. Long. (not far outside of North Bay).

.
3a: Location: 52° 5’ N. Lat. ; 91° 7’ W. Long.

.
4a: Location: In the cabin.

.
5a: An outright lie; nothing is the same today.

.
6a: The tone of these words is from the past; I find myself doubting them even as I put them down.

.
7a: Location: In the cabin.

.

7b: Up here the layers aren't burned away -- they are scraped away by the cutting edge of glaciers, the abrasive edge of stone.

.
8a: Location: 53° N. Lat. ; 89 ° W. Long.

.
9a: But all choice is an illusion.

.
10a: Location: Trout Lake outside North Bay. Time: Not December 10th.

.
11a: The line is distinguished from the ray in having two end points.

.
12a: This space is full of barriers.

.
13a: Location: 46° 35' N. Lat.; 79° 20' W. Long.

.
14a: An exaggeration of about fifty miles. I am prone to exaggeration.

.
14b: Nor entirely incorrect. It is all a matter of perspective.

.
15a: I will not use all of Fredrick's journal, but will instead pick and choose those pieces that fit my scheme.

.
16a: *Funk and Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary* (Canadian Edition, 1974).

.
17a: A list, I'm afraid, as idiosyncratic as my bibliography.

.
17b: The critical symbol.

.
18a: Unjustly, I should add.

.
19a: Location: 46 ° 35' N. Lat. ; 79 ° 20' W. Long.

.
20a: It is December 20th; tomorrow is officially the start of winter.

.
20b: He was a good judge of character.

- 21a: List based on information from Canadian Mammals by Austin W. Cameron.
- 22a: Location: In the cabin.
- 23a: Location: 48° 21' N. Lat. ; 90° 43' w. Long.
- 24a: *Marked By The Wild* edited by Bruce Littlejohn and Jon Pearce (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1973).
- 25a: A symbol for my earlier perspective. Winter is changing things very rapidly.
- 26a: Location: 46° 36' N. Lat. ; 79° 20' w. Long.
- 27a: Location: A mirror in North Bay.
- 28a: A study in personality conflicts.
- 28b: A good example of this is Algonquin Park. Maps indicating distribution of wolves in this area of Ontario perfectly outline the park, for wolves are common within the boundaries of the park but rare outside. Maps indicating the distribution of coyotes in this area also perfectly outline the park, for coyotes are rare within the boundaries of the park but fairly common in the surrounding rural and cottage country.
- 29a: I am obsessed with geometry, numbers, the measurable parameters of emotion.
- 29b: Hence his existence can be tested.
- 30a: Information derived from the same source.
- 31a: Blood from a rock.
- 32a: No resolutions - I haven't the time.
- 33a: Location: Omnipresent.

- 34a: Another little joke.
- 35a: Location: My mind.
- 36a: Information from Carhart's *The Outdoorsman's Cookbook*. See bibliography.
- 37a: Location: Near the border.
- 38a: Location: 50° 28' N. Lat.; 80° 18' W. Long.
- 39a: Is this Kant or the rejection of Kant?
- 40a: Location: 51° 50' N. Lat.; 87° 32' W Long.
- 41a: The source for this list is *Native Trees of Canada* by R.C. Hosie
- 42a: I can't locate this.
- 43a: Location: Northeastern Sector of Algonquin Park.
- 43b: A temptation carefully engineered by Diana.
- 44a: For some reason I feel each day has to have a footnote without first adding this extra fragment. little bit extra tacked on. I can't move away from the typewriter without first adding this extra fragment.
- 45a: Most of the information for this chapter comes from *The Illustrated Natural History of Canada: The Canadian Shield* by Barbara Moon.
- 46a: Location: In the cabin, mostly.
- 47a: Location: Back near the border.
- 48a: Location: The White River that drains into North Lake Superior, Marathon.
-

49a: Although I died on the White River, my spirit lives on in this cabin.

.

50a: See Euclid for clarification. See me.

.

50b: They don't worry about wolves.

.

51a: Location: Somewhere in the future, somewhere in the Bush.

.

51b: I should have realized, if I had more foresight, that this was a sign of what would happen if he went *in* alone.

.

53a: Location: 53° 50' N. Lat.; 91° 05' W. Long.

.

54a: Perhaps I should've said - *numb*.

.

55a: Location: 50° 11' N. Lat. ; 80° 03' W. Long. 0

.

56a: I want to say something about this, but I don't know what. I don't know why I'm doing these footnotes ... why I'm doing this mosaic at all ... or why I'm here. Here. Where?

.

57a: Information on this chart was taken from a tourist pamphlet distributed in Thunder Bay.

.

58a: Nor is it an allegory.

.

58b: Rum.

.

58c: Your choice.

.

59a: Location: 50° 51' N. Lat.; 87° 12' W. Long.

.

60a: Location: 46° 35' N. Lat.; 79° 20' W. Long.

.

61a: Location: At the cabin.

.

62a: Contrapuntal.

.

62b: I don't have the source of this quote with me out here, but I am sure it is correctly attributed to William O. Douglas.

.

63a: Location: Brent in North-central Algonquin Park.

.

64a: My view of things, in general, is growing dark. What am I doing here?

.

65a: You will eventually find out where these quotations come from, so for now I want only to add that as I look ahead the darkness grows thicker.

.

66a: Location: The Magnetawan River where it parallels an access road to the West-central sector of Algonquin Park.

.

67a: Location: Toronto Store.

.

68a: I feel as though I'm working my way uphill.

.

69a: The source of this list is *Fishes of Ontario* by H.H. MacKay.

.

70a: Uphill.

.

71a: Location: Nearing the end of this line.

.

72a: Location: 55° 30' N. Lat.; 86° 27' W. Long.

.

73a: Steeper than ever. Passage is difficult.

.

74a: Suddenly the darkness seems to be passing, and a great whiteness looms up.

.

75a: Location: Unknown.

.

76a:

.

77a: Location: Unknown.

.

78a: Things no longer look right.

.

79a: I have made it through the center (or revolved around it) and now I see things differently, although certainly not any clearer.

.

80a: With envy.

.

81a: Location: Cerebral cortex and the limbic system.

.

82a: Location: Back at the cabin.

.

83a: *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold.

.

83b: *The Singing Wilderness* by Sigurd Olson.

.

83c: The author of the book from which this essay is quoted is one of the characters in this, my, mosaic.

.

84a: Ortega y Gasset has elaborated a system of epistemology based on the concept of perspective, and his theory probably was an influence on my own thought. It is important that one doesn't confuse epistemological relativism with perspectivism.

.

84b: Diana's middle initial was A.

.

85a: Location: The far side.

.

86a: Location: The North.

.

87a: The beast phoenix.

.

87b: "February Tundra".

.

88a: Disaster like disease runs in the family.

.

89a: I, too, was on this train.

.

90a: Location: 51° 25' N. Lat.; 94° 27' W. Long.

.

91a: Location: You figure it out.

.

91 b: Here is a hint.

.

92a: Location: Back in the present. Present, gift.

.

93a: Location: Somewhere on the Albany River. 93b: Read "North".

.

94a: I pick them from my brain and flesh.

.

94b: At least try to, damn it.

.

95a: N. B.

.

96a: See "Some Critical Symbols".

.

97a: Location: Back to earth, back at the cabin.

.

97b: Using Tarot Cards. I toy with concept and emotion. I keep shuffling, dealing myself a new future, a new past.

.

98a: Location: On the North Shore of Lake Superior near Marathon.

.

99a: Location: March 9th.

.

100a: Location: North Bay an infinite time ago.

.

100b: All needs are the result of artificial fertilization. How clearly I see him now - the innocent fool!

.

101a: Location: Near the White River.

.

102a: This is about growing old. Growing cold. Growing season. Going season. This is about far enough. But I have to continue.

.

103a: About mirrors.

.

103b: But not without losing face.

.

104a: Location: April 28th.

- 105a: Although I am seeing things more clearly now, I find that I'm seeing them from too many angles: I get horribly confused.
- 106a: Location: You can find this place in a number of different places.
- 107a: His father, he told me once, also drowned . . . and was never recovered.
- 108a: Location: They have gone beyond locating. They have gone down the path.
- 108b: You and I make the rules, but a number of the players cheat.
- 109a: Location: 50° 09' N. Lat.; 92° 08' W. Long.
- 110a: Location: Back at the cabin. I should add here or somewhere that all locations are approximate; distances are too great up here to worry excessively about precise locations.
- 111a: This is not the same Alan Watts that flooded the Western World with diluted Zen. This author is of the Northern World.
- 112a: Sure of this as of any thing else. Sure. Sure. I trust the Crossed-Winds Rules. (I stand facing North, and the upper winds come from the West).
- 113a: Location: Back at the cabin. In the white and green center. Go find me somewhere on the rock-face. Or is this back at the cabin? Maybe this is back at the junction of male and female.
- 114a: Location: 49° 47' N. Lat.; 86° 36' W. Long.
- 114b: Mantha in disguise?
- 115a: It was too easy. Easy as killing. Easy as dying.
-

116a: Location: Toronto Store.

•

117a: Location: Borderlands . . . of season, of civilization.

•

118a: Location: The Lakeview Tavern in North Bay.

•

119a: Location: Memory pared down by the elements.

•

120a: See bibliography.

•

121a: Guardian Spirit, usually of great proportions.

•

122a: Me? You?

•

123a: This is April, next is Maple. Dies somewhere in the Spruce. From Ashes to Ashes. From Dusk to Dawn.

•

124a: From day to day. Why can't it all end! From moment to moment. From memory to madness.

•

124b: We form hypotheses to explain what happens. This is from my first one.

•

124c: Read "getting fucked."

•

125a: Location: April 4th. (They tell me this is well into spring).

•

126a: He was such a quaint fool!

•

127a: Location: Borderlands . . . of season, of civilization.

•

128a: The more crazy one becomes, the more prone one is to philosophy.

•

129a: Spring teases like a woman. Season of the Bitch.

•

130a: Location: Algonquin Park, a circle route that brought us out where we put in.

•

131a: Location: Lake Superior Park.

•

132a: Location: Just off the highway that cuts through the southern part of Algonquin Park.

.

132b: Location: Elsewhere.

.

133a: I go on: sticking these notes over the seams between each day. I use them to get my bearings. Which way do I go? On.

.

134a: Better than the slow rot.

.

135a: Fool! Fool, fool, Fredrick you fool!

.

135b: Follow, follow, follow her you fool!

.

136a: Follow. I follow the fool - makes me fool twice over. I'm the fool in the mirror.

.

137a: Going beneath the skin.

.

138a: Nothing left, but what is here. And there is so little to sustain a man out here!

.

139a: The brain when deprived of external stimulation, begins to generate its own stimulation: and one goes mad. One cannot feed on one's own obsessions.

.

139b: A sweet farewell to consciousness.

.

140a: Diana taught me this song. She claimed it was a folksong, but it is possible that she simply made it up herself.

.

141a: The beginning (of my end).

.

142a: Only in death ... or the total fragmentation of madness.

.

143a: Last rites.

.

144a: The body must be preserved.

.

145a: Limbo.

.

146a: Fragmentation.

.

146b: The pseudonym of one of the characters stumbling thru this maze.

.

147a: None.

.

148a: Diana, Diana, you were such a liar.

.

149a: My last movement.

.

149b: Who the hell is George Goodwin? Who the hell am I?

.

150a: The pieces drift apart.

.

151a: Judgement Day.

.

152a: Location: Here. Now. Nowhere.

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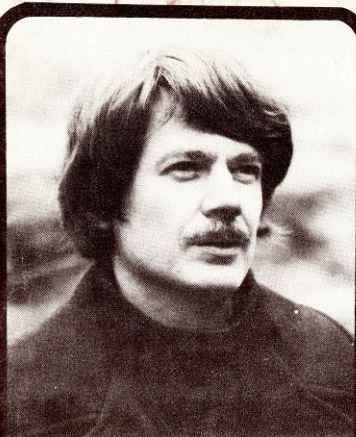
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I believe that literature, like science, is a way of exploring different perspectives; and I believe that the results of these literary explorations, like the results of science, are always inherently tentative. It is for this reason that I choose to call my major works *hypotheses*. Bushed, completed February 7, 1976, is *Hypothesis 2*.

Ken Stange



Ken Stange

Born in 1946, Ken Stange grew up and spent most of his life in large cities. In the early 1970s he moved to Northern Ontario and began work on his "Hypotheses".

Reviewers have called his work "precise and elegant" (*Quill & Quire*), "delights and difficulties" (*Toronto Globe*), "analytic" (*Toronto Star*).

A *Books In Canada* reviewer compared his work to that of young Birney and concluded: "Images of decayed death abound, making Stange a poet to be soon looked for in the tradition of Atwood, Ondaatje, and Newlove."

He presently lives in North Bay, Ontario with his wife and two children, where he receives a lot of mail addressed to a Mr. Strange. He insists that while *he* may be (strange, that is), his *name* isn't.

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