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First published in *Return to the Twilight Zone*, ed. Carol Serling, DAW, 1994

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After Father died, I stayed on at his camp. I had put off leaving for a lot of reasons. One was that I felt at peace there, in a way I hadn't for a long time, and another was the need to settle matters with my sister Evie. Maybe I still would have been there, struggling against a world intruding on my refuge, if my sister hadn't appeared to me in the guise of a False Face and the spirits had not spoken.

The camp was a cabin with two bedrooms, a kitchen and living room that were on the side facing the lake, and an attic with cots and sleeping bags. We called it a camp because that's what everyone in the Adirondacks called their summer places, whether they were shacks or mansions. Father had sold his house after Mother died, and lived at the camp during the last two years of his life, before my sister put him in the hospital.

My grandfather had built the camp and cleared the land around the cabin, but the pines were crowding in, and long knotted roots bulged from the ground in tangled masses along the path that led down to the lake. One of the pines, during the year since my father's death, had grown larger, its trunk swelling to

nearly the size of a sequoia's.

I didn't know why this tree was growing so much faster than the others, but its presence comforted me. I would sit under the pine and think of its roots spreading out under the land, burrowing deep into the ground. We had deep roots in these mountains, my family and I, and I had felt them more lately. My grandfather's people had come there early in the nineteenth century, but my grandmother's Mohawks, the Eastern Gatekeepers of the Iroquois, had been there earlier. She had grown up on a reservation in Canada, but my grandfather had met her in Montreal and brought her back here after their marriage. This land had been a Mohawk hunting ground, the forest they had traveled to from their villages to hunt beaver and deer, and where they had sometimes encountered forest spirits, long before white settlers had moved into the mountains. My grandfather had brought his wife back to her roots.

I had pulled up the canoe and was sitting on the dock, thinking about Grandma's life while watching the loon. The bird had taken up residence in our part of the lake a couple of weeks earlier, and I wondered when more loons would join it. The loon would float on the water, moving its black-feathered head from side to side like an Egyptian belly dancer, then dive. It would stay underwater for three or four minutes, and I could never predict where in the bay it would surface. I had been like a loon underwater myself for the past year, living at the camp, diving below the turbulent surface of my own life. The bit of money I had saved was running out. Pretty soon, I would have to emerge.

The wind picked up and the trees sighed. Sometimes I heard voices, as if people were chanting and singing elsewhere in the forest. Now I heard the sound of a car in the distance. It would be Evie; I was expecting my sister. Our great-aunt and a couple of cousins lived in the nearest town, but they hadn't called since the funeral, and I wanted nothing to do with them anyway; Aunt Clara had led the family faction that disapproved of my grandfather's marriage. My brothers, who lived in Seattle and Atlanta, had already said they wouldn't be visiting this summer, and I hadn't made any friends in town. So it had to be Evie, along with her husband Steve and her three kids by her first husband, my niece and nephews who couldn't sit in place without a VCR and a boom box for more than two minutes. It would be Evie, because anyone else would have called first to ask for directions, since the only way to the camp was along a narrow dirt road through the woods. It would be Evie, because we had business to discuss. She was here to change my mind.

I got up and climbed toward the cabin. A winged shape soared overhead; I looked up as an eagle landed in the uppermost branches of the largest pine. Evie's blue Honda was rolling down the rutted dirt driveway that led to the cabin. She would unload a television, a VCR, and a ton of rented cassettes, to keep her kids quiet, and Steve would sit in the kitchen making bad jokes while Evie and I cooked supper. The noise from the TV would be deafening, because all the movies my niece and nephews watched had lots of special effects. I was sure the sounds would frighten the eagle away.

But when Evie got out of the car, I saw that she was alone. "Got the whole weekend," she said, "and I'm taking Monday off. Steve's watching the kids, so it'll be a real vacation for me." She went around to the trunk and opened it. "Brought some food in the cooler, so we won't have to cook tonight." Evie took after our father, and he had gotten his looks from his mother. My grandmother had looked like Evie when she was young—a tall woman, with coppery skin, thick black hair, and dark brown eyes. I had our mother's blue eyes, and my black hair had gone gray early, so now I colored it reddish-blonde. I didn't look anything like my grandmother, but I had her soul, which was more than you could say for Evie.

I helped her carry the cooler and her suitcase inside, relieved that the kids and Steve weren't with her, but still wary. Ten years lay between my younger sister and me, and we had never been that close. We had gone for years without even phoning each other while she was having kids and getting a divorce and I was drifting, afraid to come home. She wouldn't have come up here alone just to relax and visit with

me.

The two bedrooms stood on either side of the bathroom, separated by a narrow corridor. I had been using the bedroom our grandmother had slept in during her summer visits, and took Evie's suitcase to the other. A quilt covered the bed that took up most of the small room, and a crucifix hung above the headboard. I never slept in that room, mainly because I didn't like the idea of sleeping under a crucifix, especially one that made Christ look so peaceful hanging there, as if he were only snoozing. I also knew my grandmother had come to hate the sight of the cross, which only reminded her of the nuns who had tried to beat a white soul into her. I could have taken it down, but then Evie would have been whining, "Where's Dad's crucifix?" even though she hadn't been to Mass since her divorce. My father had wanted to die here, in the room he and my mother had shared, but Evie had insisted on the hospital, so an ambulance had come up the long dirt road and driven him the fifty miles to the city. Father had lasted less than a month there, barely enough time for my brothers to realize that he was actually dying and to get to his side to make whatever amends they could.

"Mother must have hated this place," Evie said as she opened the suitcase.

"I never heard her say so."

"Well, think of it, Jennie—sitting around here, away from all her friends, taking care of us and waiting for Dad to come up on the weekends."

Maybe she had hated it. I wouldn't know, because Mother had been the kind of person who kept her thoughts to herself. The camp had been my father's boyhood summer refuge. Even after all our summers there, Mother had moved around the rooms, occasionally peering into a corner or picking up an object from a table, as if she were a guest exploring unfamiliar surroundings. But maybe Evie was only projecting her own feelings onto our mother. That would be like my sister, imagining that everyone felt exactly the way she did.

"But I guess you wouldn't understand that," Evie continued, "being practically a hermit yourself."

I would have to put up with three days of this, Evie asking when I was leaving, how I could possibly get through another winter, when I was going to find a job and get on with my life. She would get to the business about the land, too; I was sure of that now. It didn't matter. I was ready for her this time.

We went to the kitchen. "Hungry yet?" Evie asked.

"Not really."

"Let's have a drink then. Better make mine a ginger ale, or diet soda if you have any."

"You sure? I've got some of your bourbon left."

"Steve and I are trying for a kid," she said, "so I'm laying off the booze."

"You must be kidding," I said. "You have three already. How can you afford it? What's going to happen to your job?"

"Steve wants a kid of his own. Can't blame a man for that, can you?"

"Go sit on the porch," I said. "I'll get the drinks." She wandered toward the porch. Evie had always

been big, and she had gained more weight since her last visit; maybe she was already pregnant. I poured her a diet cola, along with gin over ice for myself. Once, I had liked Martinis, but had come to think of them as a drink for rich white Republicans, so now I didn't bother with the vermouth. "Your grandmother drank." Mother had harped on that, on how much trouble it had caused everyone. "Her Indian blood—that's what it was." That was Mother's explanation for any behavior she didn't want to blame either on environment or her own genes.

The screened-in porch faced the lake. Evie was sitting in one of the chairs, smoking a cigarette; apparently she hadn't given that up yet. I sat down near the standing ashtray and took out my own cigarettes. Tobacco was a sacred plant for the Iroquois; I had read that in a book. For my grandmother's Mohawk ancestors, it was a means by which their prayers could reach the spirits, and rise to their Creator. That was, I supposed, a pretty good reason not to quit. My indecision would travel out along the smoky tendrils, to be dispersed as it rose toward heaven; the spirits would answer my prayers. A stream of smoke from my cigarette drifted through the screen, then broke up into uneven strands.

Evie said, "I have to talk to you."

"I figured."

"Curt called me last night. I talked to Sam a couple of days ago, about the land. They think selling it off's a good idea. People want lakeside property, and this land's worth more now."

Of course my brothers would agree with her about selling. The land Father had left us was his only legacy. We owned everything around this small bay; the closest place, about a mile south, was another cabin overlooking the narrow channel that connected the bay to the rest of the lake. The shallowness of the channel kept large motorboats out of the bay; days could pass without my seeing more than a canoe moving along the shore. It was why the loons came there and blue herons nested in the nearby trees; I thought of the eagle I had seen earlier.

"Dad didn't leave us this land," I said, "so that we could sell it."

"He must have known we'd consider it. Why didn't he put it in the will if he didn't want us to sell?"

"Because he was too sick to think about it. Because there wasn't time. I know what he would have wanted."

"You know. You always know, Jennie. You always know all this stuff about everyone in the family that nobody else knows." Or which might not even be true, her voice suggested.

I knew things because the rest of them never bothered to listen to anybody. I said, "When I knew Dad was dying, I kept waiting for him to tell me to get on with my life. But he never did, and it wasn't until a little while ago that I figured out why. He wanted me to stay here, to protect this land."

"That's crazy. He was so doped up toward the end he probably couldn't think straight. He must have figured you'd have enough sense to get back on your feet by now. This land's worth nothing to us this way. If we sell it, we can—"

"It isn't ours," I said, "not really. It's like we're the caretakers, that it's a trust. I've been feeling that way the whole time I've been here. It isn't our land, it's our people's—Grandma's people."

"Are you on that again?" Evie stubbed out her cigarette. "How can that stuff matter to you? Look, I

loved Grandma, but she wasn't all that much use to anybody when she was alive. If Grandpa hadn't had to waste so much money on her, maybe there would have been something left for us." She took out another cigarette and lit it. "You can afford to be sentimental about these things, but the rest of us have kids. I'd like to be able to do something for them."

That was the excuse that explained everything. "I have kids, so that gives me license to be an asshole. I have kids, so I'm entitled to do things I'd shy away from or have doubts about otherwise, because I have to think of them." At least that's how it sounded to me. Whatever happened to "I have kids, so maybe I should try to pass on some wisdom and principles?" But my sister didn't live in that world. Maybe no one did any more.

"And Curt's got a son almost ready for college," Evie went on. "He told me he wants Brian to get somewhere." That sounded like Curt. My brother would think he was doing the world a big favor if he gave it another lawyer or M.B.A.

"It isn't as if the state hasn't set aside plenty of undeveloped land already." Evie gestured with her cigarette. "We're not rich, you know. We can't keep this our little private bay forever."

I tried to think of what to say, but the gin was getting to me. Evie wouldn't understand if I told her that I still caught glimpses of deer coming to the bay to drink, that we had to keep the land as it was so that the deer could still come here. I couldn't tell her that having more people around would probably frighten off the turtles that sunned themselves on the logs across from our dock. Evie would be thinking of future college bills and expensive technology for her kids and the new baby with Steve, not deer and turtles.

"It won't be the same," I said. "I saw an eagle in that big tree today. He won't stick around if builders start tearing things up. We could leave something behind, Evie, a bit of untouched land people might appreciate having someday."

"Listen." She leaned toward me. "We can still keep some of the land around this camp. You'd hardly notice the difference. We could sell the rest off in large parcels, so there wouldn't be too many places built." She sounded like a white woman, with her talk of selling the land and carving it up, but that was how Evie thought of herself. It's that Indian blood that caused most of the family troubles; better forget you have any.

"I'll just bet the developers will listen to you," I said. "They'll say, Sure, I'll just put one summer home here and make fifty grand instead of building five and pocketing a hell of a lot more."

"There are limits," Evie replied, "what with having to put in septic systems and all. If you ask me, this place could use some development." She squinted as she stared toward the lake. "For instance, that big tree there is completely out of hand. Somebody should have cut it down a long time ago. If you cleared out some of those trees, you'd have a much better view."

"That tree stays." I was on my feet. "It's Grandma's tree—she planted it herself when Grandpa built this place." I don't know how I knew that. During the year I had been living at the camp, I had looked out at the tree without ever thinking about it. Why had Grandma planted a pine there, when pines already surrounded us on all sides? Yet somehow I knew she had planted it. Maybe she had told me once, and I had simply forgotten until that moment.

I went into the kitchen, took some ice out of the refrigerator, and poured myself more gin. The evening wind was picking up when I got back to the porch. The pines sang, the wind rising into a muted cheer and then falling into a sigh, but a deeper moan nearly drowned out the song. I heard a rumble that might

have been distant thunder, but the sky was still salmon pink, the clouds fingers of navy blue.

“It was cruel,” I said then, “what Grandpa did to Grandma.”

“What do you mean?” Evie asked.

“Buying all this land and saying he did it for her.”

“You call that cruel? It showed how much he adored her.”

“No, it didn't,” I said. “He was saying, Here, I bought this land, this little piece of the mountains that used to belong to your people, because I made a lot of money in lumber. And you can have a little of your land back because a white man got it for you.”

“You're crazy, Jennie. Grandpa loved that woman. Do you think he would have stayed with her all those years if he hadn't?”

That was the way the rest of them saw it. Grandpa was the long-suffering saint and Grandma the alcoholic he hadn't been able to help. He had checked her into every expensive hospital he could find, but that had not kept her from going back to drinking when she got home. He had sold his business to stay with her, and at the end of his life, the money was gone. Grandma had outlived him even with the drinking; she tapered off toward the end, spacing out her drinks, but not enough to save either her liver or my father from her medical bills. No wonder the rest of them blamed her for their lives of tract houses, credit card bills, and tedious jobs.

Maybe I would have blamed her myself, but I had spent too much time as a child sitting with her when my brothers exiled me from their games. To Evie and my brothers, our grandmother was only an old drunk who sat in the corner and mumbled to herself; that was the Grandma they remembered. They didn't have the patience to listen to her, to see that her disjointed musings made sense once you put them together. The Grandpa I had heard about in her words wasn't the loving husband Evie saw, but the man who had forced her to live among people who despised her, who had refused to let her go.

“The wild Indians'll get you.” That had been Curt's favorite taunt at our camp when he was tormenting our younger brother Sam. “When you're asleep, the wild Indians'll climb in your window and scalp you.” Indians had nothing to do with them. They had never noticed how Grandma closed her eyes when she heard Curt's words, how her hand had tightened around her glass.

“I don't even know my clan,” I said.

Evie exhaled a stream of smoke. “What?”

“I don't even know my clan. Grandma used to say that. She'd say it in this low voice, so nobody else would hear, but I did.” She had said it as if knowing the name of her clan would have freed her from her prison.

“Probably said it when she was drunk.” Evie leaned back in her chair. “It doesn't matter, Jennie. It's got nothing to do with us.” She was quiet for a while. “Being alone up here all this time—no wonder you sound so funny. Look, if we sell, you'd have enough to make a new start. You can think of where to live, have time to find a job. Hell, maybe we can get enough so you don't have to work at all.”

As the gin slowed me down, I wanted to shout that I was going to find work—waitressing, office work,

or whatever—in the nearest town, that I could lay in enough wood for the winter and buy enough meat for myself cheaply from a hunter once deer season started. I knew what I had to do; it was time to lay it all out and show Evie she had to go along. I was about to raise my voice when the cabin suddenly shook, and the floor dropped from under my chair.

The disturbance lasted only a moment. Before I could speak, the floor was once more firmly under my feet, the evening still except for the gentle sound of the wind.

“Whoa,” Evie muttered. “Did you feel that?”

“Just a quake,” I said. The mountains had them once in a while, mild ones that barely made three points or so on the Richter scale, but I had never felt one quite like that. Usually, everything would get very quiet, and then there would be a sharp sound like a sonic boom, and after that a small bounce before things settled down. This time, the quake had come from deep underground, as though the earth was giving way.

“Jesus,” Evie said, “I thought the whole place was going to fall down. I’ll have that bourbon after all.”

I got her the drink, and then another one when we sat down in the kitchen to eat the sandwiches she had brought, and by then Evie was wandering down memory lane, droning on about our adventures at the camp when we were younger. She seemed to get most nostalgic about the times the boys had ganged up on me, or about how Curt and Sam would always push me off the dock, even when I was dressed, even when the water was freezing cold. I didn’t mind. At least she had forgotten about real estate for the moment.

She went to bed early, tired from her drive, and I sat on the porch with another gin, trying to think of how to persuade her and my brothers not to sell our land. Brilliant ideas about how to convince them flashed through my mind, only to be forgotten a second or so later. My face was stiff, my body numb. I was really drunk by then, and felt as if I were wrapped in cotton and looking at everything from inside a long tunnel. The big pine tree near the path seemed larger, and then I saw a face in the bark, a carved mask like the ones my ancestors had made.

That had to be an illusion, a trick of the moonlight shining through the boughs. The face changed as I stared at it, reshaping itself into that of a wolf. Seeing a face in the tree didn’t frighten me, though, because I had noticed other strange things lately—marks and symbols on trees that looked as though they had been made by knives, the throbbing sounds of drums in the night until hooting owls or the snarl of a bobcat drowned them out. I had grown to accept these passing sights and sounds, which seemed to belong to the forest and mountains.

I must have fallen asleep after that, and woke up on the studio couch in the living room, my head pounding. I lifted my head, then realized I would never make it to my bedroom without collapsing or vomiting—maybe both. My head fell back, and then I was outside, under the big pine.

Two men in feathered caps and deerskin robes stood near the tree. One lifted his hand, and then I looked up to see the eagle flutter its wings in the branches overhead.

“Do you know what tree this is?” one man asked.

“My grandmother’s,” I replied.

“It is more than that. Your grandmother planted the cone from which it grew, but that cone fell from an

ancient pine, the one under which I had my vision of peace, the vision that united the Five Nations of the Iroquois. I am the Peacemaker, child, and this tree—”

But before he could say anything more, I was back on the couch, covering my eyes with one hand against the light. “Jennie,” my sister said.

“Jesus Christ.” My jaw ached, and even moving my mouth hurt. “Turn off the light.”

“You're drunk,” she said.

“So what?”

“Is this what you do when you're alone, just drink yourself silly?”

“No. This is what I do when you guys won't leave me alone.”

She pulled me up from the couch and helped me toward my bedroom. “You ought to know better, Jennie, what with—”

“I had a dream. I have to tell you—”

“You probably had a nightmare, in your condition.” She let me fall to the bed, then took off my shoes.

“It wasn't a nightmare.” Something else my grandmother had said was coming back to me. Dreams were important; in the old days, an Iroquois who had a vivid dream would go to every longhouse in his settlement, recounting his dream until he found someone who could explain it to him. I didn't think Evie would be able to explain my dream to me, but it clearly had something to do with our land and the tree outside, so I felt it was something I had to tell her. Maybe the dream would persuade her to give up her plans.

“I was outside,” I continued, “and these two men—I'm positive they were Mohawks, or Iroquois anyway, were standing—”

“Give it a rest,” Evie burst out. “I'm going back to sleep. Talk to me when you're sober.” She stomped out of the room.

I don't know why I thought telling her about the dream would bring her around. The fact was, I didn't have to come up with brilliant schemes for keeping the land. All I had to do was tell Evie I wasn't going to sign any papers, and she and my brothers wouldn't be able to do a thing. I hadn't wanted to state the matter quite so bluntly, but she had pushed me to it, so there was nothing else to be done.

But I didn't know if I would have the fortitude to hold out against my brothers and sister forever. I could disappear, but the rest of them—Curt especially—wouldn't give up until they found me, and they might use my disappearance against me. If they got desperate enough, they might even get me declared incompetent, and they would have enough grounds, what with my wanderings, erratic work history, and bouts of manic-depression. I had gotten my mental shit together before coming home, but it could still look bad, so I'd have to make sure they couldn't find me. If that meant leaving the forest that had finally calmed the storms that often raged inside me, I would still have the comfort of knowing the land was safe.

I slept for a while and woke up with a bad case of the dries. Somehow, I managed to stumble into the bathroom for a glass of water, and then the telephone in the kitchen started ringing. I found my way to it,

shading my eyes against the morning light as I leaned against the wall and picked up the receiver.

“Hello,” I mumbled.

“Hey, Jennie! This is Curt. Gosh, it's great hearing your voice again—been a long time.”

I sank into the chair below the phone. “Yeah.”

“Evie said she was going up there this weekend. Wish I could be there with you guys.”

I always got nervous when my brother sounded cheerful, especially at that hour of the day. “She's trying to talk me into letting the rest of you sell,” I said.

“Well, I know, but don't think we're going to get rid of the camp or anything. I was talking to Sam last night, and we were thinking that maybe you should get the deed to the camp, along with your share of whatever we get for the land. We owe you something for taking care of Dad before he went to the hospital, for coming home when he got sick.” So Curt was offering me a bribe. “I know the place means a lot to you, so maybe you should have it. Of course, I hope you'll let your old brother come to visit once in a while.”

I was silent.

“You'd have enough money to get another place for yourself, get a new start, but the camp would be there for the summers. You could—”

“I won't sell.”

“What?”

“I'm not going to let this land be sold. I won't sign any papers. I won't go along with you.”

“Jennie? Jennie?”

I rubbed at my aching temples, refusing to answer him.

“I want to talk to Evie,” he said at last.

My sister was standing in the doorway. I got up, handed her the phone, and went to my bedroom. Evie was talking in a low voice, but sounds echoed in the kitchen, so occasionally I caught a few words.

“Crazy” was one. The words that disturbed me most, though, were “power of attorney.” So they were considering that option already.

A rumbling sound came from under the cabin. Another small quake, I thought; they were certainly coming more often lately. I heard Evie hang up, and then the banging of pots in the kitchen. I dozed off, and woke to find Evie carrying a tray into the room.

“You need breakfast,” she said as she set the tray down. “There's coffee, eggs and toast. You'd better rest today—you look like you might be coming down with something. I'll stay here until you're feeling better, and then I'll head into town to pick up more groceries.”

She handed me the coffee; I sipped at it. “You should know better than to drink so much,” she went on,

“what with your manic-depression and all.” She was already laying the groundwork, but not out of malice. Like my brothers, she was probably half-convinced that I really was demented, and that it would all be for the best in the end. Evie could persuade herself that I would be better off in treatment, with others handling my affairs. She would play nurse this morning until I felt better, and then go off to town, where she would probably call Curt from a public phone so that they could decide what to do next. They would tell themselves they were saving my life, that they were helping me.

“You look like death warmed over,” Evie said as she lit a cigarette. I set down my cup. She seemed to be holding a glowing coal to her lips as coils of smoke drifted toward the ceiling. Her dark eyes glittered, and her face was as still as a mask.

Masks, I thought, and recalled something else I had read. I had been reading a lot while living at the camp, going into town to buy old books at garage sales and to take others out of the library. That was how severed I was from our traditions; I had to pick up a lot of my people's lore from books. Now I remembered reading about the False Faces.

The shamans called the False Faces would come to the longhouses to heal the ill, bearing hot coals in their hands. They would put on their masks and sprinkle ashes over the ailing person, and if by some miracle they saved him, he had to become one of them. I drew in Evie's smoke; an ash from the end of her cigarette fell on my hand.

She was a False Face, I suddenly realized, but one who served evil spirits. She would nurse me and heal me and bring me back from the dead. Then I would have to join her and my brothers and the society of those who bought and sold and tore at the land instead of living lightly on it, giving back what they took from it. I would have to live in their world.

“Get away from me!” I was on my feet, struggling against her as she tried to restrain me. Evie was three inches taller, and a good thirty pounds heavier, but I broke her grip and pushed her against the wall. She fell, and then I was running through the living room toward the porch. It was dark out there for that time of day. I lifted my head and gazed through the screen.

The big pine had grown during the night. Its trunk was much wider, almost cutting off the dock from view. Nothing could grow that fast, and yet the great tree's roots now twisted over much of the cleared land around the cabin. I looked up through the lattice of green branches at a patch of sky. The pine had grown past the trees around it; I could no longer see the top.

“Oh, my God,” I said under my breath.

“You crazy bitch.” I turned to see Evie stomping toward me. “I tried to be reasonable about this. You really are nuts, and—”

“Get out!” I shouted. “Get the hell out of here.” I went at her, but she jumped back before I could hit her.

“You'll be sorry for this, Jennie.”

“Get out!” I swung at her, then ran after her as she retreated across the kitchen. My knee caught the table, and I was suddenly on the floor. By the time I got up, Evie was gone.

I stumbled toward the door. Evie was making for her car across a maze of roots. A bulge in the ground appeared near the cabin, as if a giant mole was burrowing nearby. “Evie!” I shouted, but she was inside

the Honda and barreling up to the road before I could get to her. Brown tentacles snaked after the car, scattering dirt and grass. I don't know if Evie saw the roots. Maybe by then she was too concerned with getting away from her crazy sister to notice anything.

The ground heaved under my feet; roots spread out around me as I walked back to the cabin, swelling in size until they reached nearly to my knees. The pine now blocked most of the path leading down to the lake, and the smaller trees around it nestled in the furrows between its roots.

The cabin shook, but I felt calm as I sat down at the kitchen table. It came to me that I had been waiting for something like this, and that the pine and its burgeoning roots might solve my problem. Nobody would want to buy land near a spot where trees behaved this way.

I went to my bedroom, picked up the remains of my breakfast, then made more coffee. The floor trembled, but I made no move to leave. A glance out the kitchen window revealed that the roots had surrounded my car and that more had tunneled up to the road; I would never be able to drive over them. I might be able to get to the camp overlooking the channel on foot. Maybe the people there, the closest neighbors to me, had seen the giant pine springing toward the sky. Perhaps its roots were already moving in that direction.

Father had posted a list of numbers near the telephone. I found the number of my neighbors, then dialed it quickly.

“Simmons here,” a voice said in my ear.

“Mr. Simmons, I'm your neighbor, Jennifer Relson, from the other end of the bay. I think I'd better warn you that a tree around here seems to be out of control.”

“What?”

“It's growing really fast. I can't even see how tall it is any more, and the roots are going all over the place. What I'm trying to say is they might come your way.”

“What?”

“The tree's roots,” I said. “They're growing all around this camp now, high as walls!”

“Look, lady, I was just on my way out. I don't know what you're smoking, but—”

I hung up. Maybe he would believe me when he saw the roots moving toward him, if they got that far. How far could they spread? I went outside to find out. The tree's trunk had grown as wide as the cabin; the pines around it swayed as smaller roots twisted across the ground, then burrowed into it. I climbed over roots, into the ways between them, and over more roots again until I could see the lake.

The yodeling cry of loons greeted me; five more had joined the one I had been watching. The pine didn't seem to be growing any more, but long bands of brown bark were winding among the trees on the other side of the bay. I sat down, resting my back against a root. Dark veins snaked through the forest until the hills across the lake seemed enmeshed in a network of tunnels.

Strangely, none of the maples and pines seemed harmed by the roots, which bulged up and around the trees without crushing them. The loons bobbed on the smooth, mirror-like surface of the water, the turtles basked on their logs, and deer had come down to the opposite shore to drink. The birds and animals

were undisturbed by the roots branching out around them; the loons filled the air once more with their wild laughter.

I turned away from the lake and clambered back over the roots. Above, the cabin nestled among curved brown walls, an outpost of order in the midst of disorder. The phone was ringing when I went inside. I waited for a bit, then picked up the receiver.

“Listen, Jennie,” my sister said. “I’m trying to understand, I really am. I’m willing to come back if you’ll promise to be sensible.” There was the sound of country-and-western music in the background, which meant Evie was probably calling from the Brass Rail, the only bar in town. “If you don’t,” she continued, “I’m going to call Curt and Sam, and discuss this, and we’ll decide what to do about you.”

“But you can’t do anything,” I said. “You won’t get past the roots. They’re all over the place now.”

“You’re out of your mind.”

“Didn’t you see them on your way out?”

“I thought it was only your manic-depression, but you’re really out to lunch. That does it, Jennie. I’m calling Curt as soon as—”

“Go ahead and call. You’ll just be wasting your money. There’s nothing you can do.” She didn’t answer. “Evie? Evie?”

The line was dead. I wandered through the cabin, trying to sort out my thoughts. The electricity still worked, and water came out of the bathroom faucets. If I didn’t look through the windows at the bark barriers entwined around the place, I could almost believe everything was still normal. Somehow, the burrowing roots weren’t affecting the cabin, but that probably wouldn’t be the case for long. Eventually I would run out of food, and the roots would keep me from driving into town for more. There was no reason to stay anyway. How could my sister and brothers sell this land now?

I packed some food and a canteen of water, then struggled over the roots down to the dock. The roots winding among the forested hills had settled down, but now a brown wall cut off Mr. Simmons’s camp from view. He had said he was on his way out when I called; he would certainly be surprised when he tried to drive back. There was no point in going to his place anyway. I would try for town. I didn’t think about what I would do if the roots had spread that far.

I dropped the backpack into the canoe, then climbed in and paddled out, looking back when I was halfway across the bay. The pine towered overhead, as tall as a skyscraper, dwarfing everything around it, its needles as long as arrows. The surface of the lake was dappled by the green shadows of giant boughs. There had been some peace for me under the tree my grandmother had planted; maybe its limbs would grow vast enough to shelter the world. I paddled out from the shadows toward the far shore.

I beached the canoe at a spot where the land sloped gently up from the water, then shouldered my backpack. The tangle of roots on the hillside above had cut me off from a path that led to the nearest road. I scrambled over one thick root, into a ditch and up another root, then sat down to consider my options.

Even if I managed to find the road, making it to town might be pointless. If the roots had spread that far, I would only find chaos, and be forced to try for refuge somewhere else. I lifted my head and gazed across the lake at the camp. The cabin was hidden, the great tree a branching green canopy shielding the

forests below. Roots were looped among the reeds near the shore; I thought of them tunneling under the water. The mountains beyond the bay, made blue by the distance, were now covered by thin brown webs.

So the roots had already spread that far. In the middle of this unexplainable event, sitting on top of a root that gently pulsated under me, I was surprised to find that I could still think rationally. Reason told me that my only choice now was to find the road, follow it to town, and figure out what to do after I found out what was going on there. If I kept climbing this hill, I would eventually reach the road, however many roots barred the way.

The tree was still stretching toward the sky, as if time was accelerating. I imagined the great pine springing into space, its boughs embracing the moon as its roots clutched at the earth. A wedge of ducks, quacking loudly, dropped toward the lake; the water blossomed around them as they landed. Maybe that was keeping me sane, the fact that the birds and animals I had seen were acting normally, that the roots had not harmed or frightened them. Perhaps the animals were somehow blind to them. I narrowed my eyes and stilled my thoughts, and the roots became translucent, as if I were gazing at one image superimposed on another. But the root under me still throbbed, as though sap and nutrients were coursing through it, and I felt the ground shake as another root slithered past my feet. The great pine and its roots might save this bay from intruders. I wanted them to be real.

As I stared at the lake, an eagle flew out from under the great pine, soared over the bay, then dropped toward me and landed in a branch overhead. It watched me for a while, waiting.

“Well?” I said. The bird fluttered its wings, then lifted from its perch.

The eagle wanted me to follow. I didn't think of why a wild bird of prey would want me to follow it anywhere, but sensed that it did. The eagle led me. Whenever I was lost and uncertain of which way to go, it would return and circle above me before flying on.

I climbed over roots and down into wide ditches, then thrashed my way through underbrush. Roots were looped around berry bushes and arched over creeks. The staccato tapping of woodpeckers filled the forest, and once I glimpsed a rabbit before it hopped over a root and disappeared. I kept going, following my feathered guide through the tangled tendrils of wood until my backpack seemed as heavy as a boulder and my arms felt like useless baggage; my legs were cramping from climbing over so many roots. It was beginning to dawn on me that I should have come to the road by now, that the eagle was only leading me even farther into the forest.

I leaned against a tree, cursing myself for my stupidity. Had I been thinking clearly, I would have stayed in my canoe, headed through the channel and then hugged the shore until I reached town that way. Now I was too lost even to find my way back to the canoe. I might have given up then if the eagle hadn't flown back and landed on a branch just above me.

“I suppose you want me to go on,” I said. “Not that I have much choice.” The bird tilted its head. What was the point, after all, of going back to a world where I had always felt displaced, where something inside me had constantly threatened to burgeon as wildly as these roots? My previous life had been as uncontrolled as this growth, a manic lashing out followed by a burrowing into depression. Like the pine my grandmother had planted, I had been waiting to gather my strength. I don't know whether my grandmother had meant this to happen, or if she had been ignorant of the pine's power, but I would take my chances among the roots burrowing into the earth, among the trees the great pine was protecting.

“Grandma,” I whispered, “you planted some kind of tree.”

The deep green light of the forest grew darker. The eagle disappeared. I struggled on until I reached a small clearing. Ahead lay the largest root I had yet seen, a rounded ridge of bark as high as a good-sized hill.

I was too tired to go on. I stretched out, propping myself against the backpack. The air was still; the birds were silent. My ancestors had believed there were spirits in these mountains, but I was more fearful of animals that might be lurking nearby. Then a darker thought came to me, the kind of grim reflection I often had just before falling asleep, a thought that becomes a sinkhole swallowing every fragment of hope.

Maybe I was as crazy as Evie believed. Maybe the sudden growth of the pine tree and its huge, spreading roots were a delusion. I wanted to save this land so badly that I could imagine the supernatural had intervened to save it. I had called up this vision, and the small part of me that was still sane was able to perceive that the surrounding land and wildlife were unaffected by my imaginings. Maybe I would wake to find everything as it had been, and be unable to find my way out of the woods. Fear locked my muscles and dried up my mouth. I might wander these mountains until I joined the roaming spirits of Indians who had never been laid to rest.

“Perhaps you will,” a voice said. “Maybe this is all an illusion after all.” The voice was inside me, but I opened my eyes to see a woman standing near the root. She wore a long cloak decorated with beads and a band with eagle feathers over her brow, but the darkness hid her face. “Perhaps what you see is only a vision that will vanish, and you will return to the world you remember. But you cannot find your way back to your canoe without help, and even if you made it to the town, what then?”

“My sister’s there,” I replied, “and she thinks I’m a few cards short of a deck as it is. She’d have all the reasons she needs to put me away. Can’t really blame her, you know—she has other priorities.”

“Do you want to go back?”

The answer shot out from me before I could hold it back. “No.”

The woman vanished. The ground lurched; I looked up to see trees swaying wildly. I jumped up and grabbed for a tree limb as the earth yawned under my feet. Roots were sinking all around me, groaning as they burrowed into the ground. I guessed what it meant. The tree had reached out with its roots and would now send them deep into the world to entwine them around the earth’s heart. Then I lost my grip and was suddenly rolling down the hill until something hard rushed up to meet me.

I must have lain there throughout the night, because when I opened my eyes, the forest was green with light again. I was afraid to move, expecting to feel bruises and aches, fearing that I might have broken bones. But when I finally sat up, my body obeyed me easily, bringing me to my feet as effortlessly as it had when I was younger.

Most of the roots had vanished, but I felt them pulsating beneath me. The giant root still lay across the hill, and now I noticed that the trunks of the trees around me were marked by lines and patterns that pointed upward. My backpack lay near me; I slipped it on. I had as much chance of reaching safety by following the carved markings as I did doing anything else.

I hurried up the hill, then climbed the root, clinging to ridges in the bark, resting my feet in its cracks. The backpack tugged at my shoulders and pressed against me with its weight. I kept going until the ground was far below me and it was too late to turn back. I climbed, afraid to look up or down, until I reached

the top.

There were no giant roots in the valley below me, only maples and pines of normal size. They stood around a field planted with corn and squash, and in the distance, I saw the wide leaves of tobacco plants. Smoke rose from the roofs of the longhouses beyond the field; people waited in the doorways, men and women in deerskin robes adorned with beads.

I don't know where this land is. It may be the past, or a far future, but I don't know enough astronomy to look up at the night sky and find out. It could be a world that might have been. Whatever it is, something has guided me here, to the place where I will make my home and live out my life.

I stumbled down the other side of the root and went to find my clan.

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