

CLAIRE, THE BEAR, AND ME

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## PROLOGUE

My name is Andy McAfee. Claire, the Bear and Me is just a story. This is not my life word for word.

On the other hand:

This story began in the fall of 1985. It started out as the recounting of the true story of a young boy's death from a bear attack in Algonquin Park in 1982. Emotions in my life quickly changed it to much more than that. And it took a long time to get here.

The title I use for this story was only meant to be the working title for the past three years, but it has never changed. It pretty much covers all the bases.

There are four characters of importance in this story. There is Harvey and Claire, and a bear and a boy. There is also Harvey's wife and his friend Rob.

His wife had long since ceased to be a major character.

I don't have any friends so cynical about a failed marriage like Rob is.

Should I be thankful?

A few words about the major characters:

I guess Harvey is me. Or at least he is what I can see of me and what feelings I can identify. You never really know how many feelings you may be missing. I can see him standing in crowds of questions and all he ever does is shrug at them. One honest shrug after another.

If you wonder why I would pick such a corny and old-fashioned name for my character, it's because of this: Harvey is how I *feel*.

Claire

I was told the story about the real bear attack by a girl I knew in university whose name was Claire. Aside from that Claire is no one in particular, but she is someone very, very special. She is a perception. A guess.

If she has faults in the story it is because my perception is also not without faults. I haven't known anyone who wanted to have an affair with me like Claire does with Harvey.

(Again) should I be thankful?

I've had an affair with my perception. I've made love to the possibilities.

Sometimes Claire is someone I know. Like that beautiful woman beside the campfire in the photograph.

O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright  
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night...  
Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight!  
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

-ROMEO

### The bear and the boy

I suppose I include in all my stories people or objects or events that have symbolic meanings, but I usually decide what they will be before I write them down. There are several in this story that were totally hidden to me until I finished the story and read it myself. I am overwhelmed; this story is so personal and now I've found words and images that I've included unconsciously and they break my heart.

As for the bear and the boy specifically, you'll have to figure it out for yourself. They may not mean the same thing to you. But they are very real and they are painful.

### Finally

To me this story is clearly an attempt to justify being in love, distinguish it from infatuation, wrestle with common decency, define love's characteristics, and not draw any conclusions until they kick you right between the eyes.

Before you chastise me for being so grandiose about such crap, let me tell you that my searching found no answers that I would bet the house on.

I'm just guessing here.

10/28/88

For we cannot live together  
And we cannot live apart  
It's the classical dilemma  
Between the head and the heart  
Chris de Burgh

On nights when the moon shines brightly from well above the treetops, you might see him slowly gliding across the lake. When the water is still, you may even see his reflection. He reaches his paddle deep into the waters and moves the canoe a little farther toward the point. It is odd that he creates no ripples at all.

On quiet nights you might hear him humming camp songs to the slow movement of his paddling. He may finish two or three before he reaches the point.

On very quiet nights you may swear before God that he says "hello" as he watches you from his canoe. Even when he's almost at the point, he'll keep watching you.

On deathly quiet nights, the crazed scream of a bear shatters the calm, just as the canoe and its passenger reach the point. That's when the apparition disappears. And the water is still, and the moon is shining, and the night is deathly quiet again.

Harvey is an engineering consultant. So is Claire. Only three weeks ago they were asked to work together on a large contract. It is the first time Harvey and Claire have worked together, and they have spent a lot of time with each other in these last three weeks. That's usually not a long time, but a lot can happen. And it has.

Harvey is married, but not to Claire.

There is no doubt that they are attracted to each other. Their feelings are quickly gaining momentum, and Harvey is groping for a brake. He always told himself that he would give up everything he had for the right woman. Now it scares the wits out of him that he may have to.

It 's amazing all that will happen to Harvey and Claire in the next three weeks. That's usually not a lot of time, but there is so much that could happen.

It had rained heavily Wednesday morning, but by lunchtime the sky was clear and the sun had begun the task of raising all that water back to the heavens.

Claire was a stride ahead of Harvey as she strolled barefoot across a deserted schoolyard. There were no children in the schoolyard because it was summer vacation. Robins and mourning doves drank water from the grass and skittered out of the way when Harvey and Claire walked in their direction.

"Not much to say today," Harvey said, observing that neither of them was very talkative this lunch hour.

Claire didn't answer him directly. She also didn't turn around or slow down for Harvey to make up the step between them. "Do you feel strange being with me, Harvey?" she asked.

"Are you kidding? You know I do. But I also feel wonderful when I 'm with you. " After pausing, he continued in as serious a voice that he could muster. "You complete me Claire. I'm giddy and I'm silly once more. You've made me young again. "

Claire spun around and gave him a playful push. "You're mocking me. "

"You bet. "

"Is that a line from a movie?"

"Probably. I just made it up. More likely I just paraphrased a hundred soap opera lines. "

"Soap opera," Claire repeated to herself as she turned around again.

"What are you doing for the weekend?"

"Not much. I can't remember the last time I planned much for the weekend. I'll probably just get in a game of golf with Rob." Rob was a college friend of Harvey's who had recently joined their company.

Harvey took two quick steps and put his hand fondly over Claire's shoulder. "What I 'd really like to do is see you."

"I'm visiting my parents this weekend." Claire paused and thought. Then she added: "We could go camping together the next."

Claire's suggestion was bold and caught Harvey by surprise. He didn't notice that as he spoke again his hand was no longer on Claire's shoulder. "Maybe, let's wait and see" were the only words he could manage. He wished that he had been definite, but he felt afraid, and left it at that. Claire didn't force the issue. They walked some more.

Harvey looked at the time. It was two-thirty in the morning. He yawned and stood up and turned off the television. He hadn't paid attention to it for hours.

He had been thinking about the life he had made for himself: the woman he had married, the house they had bought, the married couples they counted as friends. The structure made Harvey feel secure. The conditioning Harvey had known from birth was designed to lead him to where he was now. Exactly where he was, happy or not. It was as if a little voice whispered in his ear, three times a day, "marry someone, buy a house, have a few friends." Change was not to be considered, and so the voice was never argued with. And divorce! That was an irrational concept, something that had never existed from his point of view. His parents must have turned the channel when it came up on TV, they must have clipped all references to it from the newspaper. Didn't his mother wash his mouth out with soap if he said "bull shit" or "what's divorce?"

So now that Harvey was actually considering divorce, he felt guilty and dirty. But also consumed. Energized.

Harvey stood beside the phone, tapping the receiver, and wondering just what would happen if he telephoned Claire, his wife overheard, and his secret was known at last. But he shuddered thinking of his comfortable life changing, of being rejected by those who he was now closest to: family and friends.

Isn't that what he would do to someone else?

A pen and pad of paper were beside the telephone. He picked them up and began to scribble out his thoughts: "Pray for the coward approaching the battle," he wrote, "with musket of water and bullets of gas. He'll spring like a half-hearted neurotic: wanting, all wanting; but safe in what he has. "

As quickly as he had finished he crumpled up the paper. He looked nervously over his shoulder in the direction of the bedroom and threw the paper in the waste basket. After staring at the discarded paper for a second, he fished it out, took a book of matches from a drawer, and burned it, flushing the ashes down the toilet.

Harvey walked to the bedroom and undressed to his underwear. He checked the alarm and put his pillow in place and lay down on the bed beside his wife. She turned and touched him, but he gently pushed her away, and in her sleep she obliged.

The ceiling was the only thing to stare at, since his eyes wouldn't close.

The pencil snapped in half against the desk and Harvey realized that he had been leaning too heavily on it. He finished off the last half of his cup of coffee and rubbed his eyes. His body felt asleep, but his

mind was very active. He walked to the window and watched the rush hour traffic not moving. He tapped the broken pencil against the windowsill.

A covered parking lot was located half a block away and across the street, and Harvey kept his gaze on it. He saw Claire emerge. His face, which had looked troubled, noticeably brightened. He started sweating. He tapped the pencil twice as fast.

Harvey watched Claire walk to a spot opposite the building where they worked, where he was. She stood to wait for traffic to stop in order to scoot between the vehicles. As she waited, she looked up and saw him in the window and gave a casual wave. He waved back and remained watching her. She looked up once more and smiled, then was able to cross.

Turning, Harvey's happy countenance changed. He threw the pencil across his desk.

At lunchtime they went for a drive.

"Where are we headed?" Claire asked.

"You mean I can't drive in circles?" Harvey murmured but Claire didn't take the bait. "Maybe drive by the school," he continued. "It's quiet there, at least until the kids go back to school next month."

"You expect this to go on that long?"

Harvey looked over quickly, surprised. "I hope so."

Claire smiled but still did not look at Harvey. "What are we doing?"

"Eh?"

"What are you looking for Harvey?"

"What do you mean?" Harvey asked, not sure where this was going.

"I don't know. What do you want? Who are you looking for? What is she like? What makes a happy marriage? What makes you happy?"

Harvey raised his hands from the wheel in a little sign of surrender. "You shouldn't ask me."

"Well I am."

"But from my experience I don't know what a happy marriage is. I'd be guessing as much as you."

"Then guess."

Harvey shook his head. He took a few breathes. He tapped the wheel. "I mean, like, equality, that's for sure. Common decency. Admiring someone for what they can do better," he continued, checking a list as he formulated it in his head. "Be fair. Do things together but have unique interests." He stopped and thought. "That's the easy shit. I mean, it's not easy, I'm sure it's lots of work but it's the bare minimum. I think the hard parts are what you can't change about yourself or the other person. Who you are, the stripped down core of yourselves. The instincts you have about life and each other. You don't learn



them in a relationship, you bring them with you. If that's there, well ... hmm, that would be nice. To care because you want to, not because you're supposed to."

There was a quiet moment. Harvey wasn't expecting Claire's question. He also wasn't expecting his answer, but he felt good about what poured out.

"Nothing matters about physical attraction?" Claire finally broke the silence.

"Physical?"

"Yeah."

"Like the beauty I see in you?" Harvey was quick to add.

Claire grinned "I guess that's ---"

"Like you're the prettiest girl I've ever laid eyes on," Harvey said more quietly.

"I like you too," Claire said, taking his hand.

They leaned against a picnic table at the schoolyard.

"More questions..." Claire said.

Harvey smiled. "You're in a serious mood today."

"Curious, not serious," she corrected. "I want to know you"

"I want to know you too. Shoot."

Claire turned a little to face him. "What was your parents' marriage like?"

"Whoa, that's a biggie", he exclaimed. "Okay. First off, I'm not sure. I have no idea what they thought of each other, or how they feel now. It all seemed a pretty dull affair. The daily routine was no emotion at home but present yourselves as the average happily married couple when you go out in public. There really was no emotion. The only emotion I ever saw was when my brother died and they only had each other to lean on but that didn't last long."

"Wait! You had a brother and he died?"

Harvey nodded. "I don't talk about it much. My younger brother ... he was attacked and killed by a bear. Before we were married my wife and I went camping, he came too, he went out in the middle of the night. I don't know what happened. We found him later."

After a quiet moment Claire said, "I'm sorry." There was nothing else for Claire to say.

"It seems a long time ago now. Anyway, that was the only real emotional event so far in their marriage. No other highs or lows that I can recall."

"That doesn't sound like what you want."

"No, I suppose it's not." Then Harvey laughed. "They're gonna freak when word gets out I'm separating! That'll upset the routine!" He nudged Claire. "Why do you ask. You thinking about getting married some time or something?" Then he lay back in the grass, squinted at the sun.

Claire let out a sound, half a laugh and half a spit. "Not a chance. I see so many unhappy married people, I sure don't want to be one of them. It's easier not being married. What would you do if you were single again?"

"Me? I'd just like to have a little fun."

"Oh, so play the field?"

"No, that's not what I meant. Just be different. Be me again and have fun. I haven't found it yet."

As Harvey lay looking into the sky, pondering all of the permutations of his simple answer, Claire turned and leaned over him. She gave him a small, short kiss.

Harvey moved his head so that he could see Claire after she sat up. "Our first kiss."

Claire smiled. "You can count."

Harvey studied her and she knew he was intent on watching her but she only smiled some more and looked at the grass beside him. Harvey felt compelled to ask a question. "How should I take that?"

Claire didn't look at him, smiled even more. "How would you like to take it?"

"As far as I can."

Harvey warmed up waving his driver around and looked down the first fairway. He leaned over and placed the ball and tee in the ground, making sure it was the perfect height. He straightened up and held the golf club in one hand, positioning his feet a comfortable distance from the ball. He placed his other hand on the club and squeezed until his grip felt right. He then raised the driver over his head and swung into the ball, topping it soundly and spinning it one hundred yards through the grass and dirt.

Harvey straightened up and looked at the result of his effort.

"Not enough concentration," Rob offered as he walked away. Rob had already hit his ball, it had gone two hundred yards and then some, right down the middle of the fairway.

"Or concentrating on the wrong subject," Harvey muttered.

Harvey caught up to Rob and they pushed their golf carts toward Harvey's ball.

"Can I tell you something, not for other ears if you know what I mean?"

Rob shrugged. "I think so. You and your old lady at each other's throats again?"

"She has a name, Rob. No, that's only part of it. This is a hard thing for me to say."

Rob stopped a few feet from Harvey's ball and Harvey took out a different club. His practice swing felt good but his shot only skidded along the ground for another 75 feet. They walked again.

"Claire and I are spending a lot of time together. I'm sure you've noticed."

"Who hasn't," Rob responded off-handedly.

Harvey stopped and looked at him with sudden fear in his eyes. "Really? Have ---"

Rob held up his hand. "Don't worry, I'm sure I'm the only one who's noticed. Get on with it Harvey."

"Well," Harvey tried to remember where he was in the story. "I really like her a lot. And I can tell she feels the same way about me."

"That's why you've been screwing up around the office. And why you look so awful this morning."

"I suppose."

Harvey still had the same club out from his last shot. He didn't wait to practice, he hit his ball right away. This time he got the ball into the air but it hooked badly to the right, hit a tree at the edge of the rough and dropped in the long grass.

Rob continued to speak as soon as the ball dropped.

"So stop worrying about it Harvey. Just go for it."

"You know it's not that easy, there are other factors to be considered aside from my feelings. I have to think about---"

"Your wife, your family, your friends," Rob interrupted. "I know, I know. Tell me, if they don't give a shit about your feelings then why should you give a shit about any of them?"

"I know my feelings matter, you don't have to tell me that. But so does everyone else. It isn't fair for me to be playing with hearts. They have traditions to honour." They were walking slower but Harvey stopped altogether and beat his chest with the back of his hand. "I have traditions to honour! I can't just give in to my desires."

Harvey was standing in the middle of the fairway, his arms slightly outstretched in a small, desperate measure. This didn't have any effect on Rob; he looked in the direction of his ball, not at Harvey. So Harvey started walking again.

"I can't," Harvey repeated.

"Why?" Rob shot back, sounding especially antagonistic and impatient.

"Why? Come on, you're talking about completely changing my life as I know it. My family, my circle of friends; I know only too well that they would turn their back on me. Maybe yours wouldn't but I'm afraid mine would. I've been told over and over what is sacred, what must not be changed. Follow the rules and you'll have respect and stability, they said. I believed it then and I think I still do; I'd never begun to doubt it until now. I'm afraid to lose my stability, the respect of those I've known all my life. I'm afraid of what it will do to my own self-respect. Is one woman worth that? I don't know if I can deal with that. I need life to be comfortable. And I did make a vow, and even if it was for the wrong reasons, I can't. You know?" Harvey could get no response from Rob, who stood ready to hit his ball. "What about the bond?"

"Fuck the bond," Rob said without emotion as he hit his ball. It landed on the green.

"Oh yeah, it's that easy," Harvey whispered with despondence. "Not a word, Rob."

Rob suddenly laughed. "You and Claire? Interesting couple. She's sweet, but she can be tough too. I've seen her chew people up in meetings."

"She can be a lot of things," Harvey said, taking out another club.

"Why are you using a five-iron from here? Use a wedge or a nine at most."

"I should use the driver again the way I'm hitting. I'll just punch it and let it run up."

As Harvey prepared to swing Rob whistled in amusement. "Harvey and Claire ..."

The ball flew 100 yards over the green.

"What's wrong with your game?" Rob asked.

"Playing two games at once."

Claire had some errands to run so Harvey waited for her at the restaurant.

He sat with his head down, watching his hands tremble as they tried to rest on the table. He started to scratch an itch on his neck, but his hand shook even worse, so he put it back down on the table. He closed his eyes and he didn't have to watch them tremble anymore.

"A penny for your thoughts."

He looked up to see Claire standing a few feet away. He didn't move and his eyes were steady. "It would cost a lot more for my wishes." His voice was low, rueful and depressed.

She was afraid to smile despite feeling amused at his drama. She seated herself, aware that his steady gaze was following her. When she was settled and looked at him again, she saw a hint of a smile on his lips.

"You in a mood?" she asked.

Harvey broke into a full smile. "I'm trying to be, but I can't keep it up. You never let me."

"I haven't done anything."

"That's what you think."

Harvey looked away after his comment and there was a tenseness about everything he did. "I don't know what to do about this Claire."

She acted as though he hadn't said anything. "What are you going to eat?"

"I really care for you Claire." Harvey expected a direct response this time. Now she watched him, but she said nothing.

"You don't have anything to say to that?" he asked.

“No. I’ve been told that before. I’m happy being with you and you’re happy being with me. You know how I want all of this to turn out. If you can’t answer me now then shut up and just enjoy yourself and order some food.” Her voice was soft, but it was also firm.

And so Harvey ordered his lunch.

It was late at night. Harvey sat at one end of the sofa with his feet up. The music he had been listening to had been over for 20 minutes. Now he was falling asleep. As he did his mind was going over, again and again, his alternatives regarding Claire, his marriage, his whole life. His head fell to one side and rested on the side of the sofa; and he slept.

Harvey had a dream:

It was a dismal night in the city. Harvey stood in the cold rain on a sidewalk next to where he worked. He was waiting but he wasn’t sure why.

Some cars passed on the street and Harvey realized that he knew all of the people in the cars. He looked down the street and could see more approaching. His parents were in one car, his sisters in another, and in another some friends he had known since childhood.

Suddenly Harvey was terrified that Claire would come out of the doorway behind him, and she may give him a kiss. He knew how they would react, how disappointed they would be in him, and all the names they would call him for not loving his wife. He wore a huge raincoat and could open it to shield Claire from their view but he was naked under the raincoat. He wasn’t sure what to do, which action was worse.

He stood and shook as they went by. He decided not to do anything and stared at his bare feet, wet from the rain and muddy puddles.

When he looked up the traffic was gone. He glanced behind to see if Claire had come out, but the doorway was now a mirror. His image spoke to him.

“You have a demon to kill.”

“Why?” Harvey asked.

“Because it is after Claire, and it is after me.”

“Will it kill Claire?”

“It doesn’t have to,” his reflection answered. “But it will kill me. Claire will die if I die.”

This made Harvey upset. He began to cry.

“I can’t let Claire die.”

“Then don’t let me die.”

“What do I do?”

“Come into the mirror.”

Harvey reached his hand forward against the mirror but it was solid and his hand went no further.  
“How?”

His reflection turned and moved away. Looking back over its shoulder it said angrily, “You have to want to!”

Harvey felt terrified. He screamed at the image to come back. He pounded his fists against the mirror. And then he woke up.

Harvey lifted his legs off of the sofa but he was weak and had to wait several seconds before standing up. He walked to the bathroom and closed the door, then turned on the light. He shut his eyes to the brightness momentarily, then began to focus on himself in the mirror.

Harvey held his hands between his face and his reflection. He had trouble keeping them steady. Spreading his fingers he pushed them into the hair of his temples and he looked into the eyes in the mirror: frightened, alone, uncertain. His fingers stopped when they got above his ears, before they passed through his hair completely. Wavering slightly, Harvey remained in that position for seconds, then minutes, searching the eyes in front of him. He was sweating and it pooled on his brow, spilled over, running down his cheek, mixing with tears, falling from his chin.

“What do I do?”

Thursday was a busy day. Harvey and Claire worked a long day off-site, at client offices, prioritizing information, comparing notes, entering data, interviewing and re-interviewing clients. He got little pleasure from the work; his mind was on other things. Despite being in the same building they saw little of each other and they hadn’t stopped for lunch but planned to meet later for supper.

At one point they crossed in a hallway that was otherwise vacant at that moment. Instinctively they embraced and kissed. Harvey was ready to let her go but Claire kissed him again, then started kissing his neck. “Make up your mind fast,” she whispered. Claire rushed down the hall and around a corner while Harvey watched. He stood still for several minutes and briefly forgot where he was and what he was supposed to be doing.

They chose a small, quiet restaurant outside the city where no one they knew were likely to stop in. They drove in separate cars. Claire arrived ten minutes before Harvey.

During the meal they discussed work and what they had gained from the day’s efforts.

After they were through eating the topic changed.

“The weekend is almost here,” Claire started. Harvey guessed where she was leading. She continued. “I booked a camping spot for us for the weekend at Dipper Lake. It’s very secluded there, pretty much in the middle of nowhere.”

Harvey raised his eyebrows in surprise. “I know. I know Dipper Lake well.”

“You do?”

"That's where my brother died. He was found at the point." Dipper Lake is so named because it is shaped like a dipper. The point is where the imaginary ladle meets the imaginary handle.

"We can go somewhere else then."

Harvey still looked surprised. "That's not the problem. I haven't been back since, but it shouldn't bother me to go there."

Claire reached for his hand and held it tight. "Then let's go. Let's make a break, just the two of us."

"There's more to it than that Claire."

"Why?"

"It isn't *us* that would be making a break. It's me. She hasn't a clue. She knows I don't love her, but I doubt if she believes that anything will ever change. I don't know if I'm ready ---"

"Are you unhappy now? In your marriage I mean."

"You know I am. But I need to wait for the right moment."

Harvey's voice rang with the tone of a doubtful promise. Claire recognized it and leaned back, distancing herself from Harvey, the hope in her face gone. She took the serviette from her lap and put it on the table. She stared at it as she played with the corners and flattened it out. Harvey knew she was planning what to say next and gave her the time.

Without looking up she began. "This has been fun, this little game we play Harvey. The single woman flirting with the married man. The lunches are fun, the kisses feel good, but exchanging wishful glances is not enough. I am tired of playing this kiddy game. I'm ready for an adult relationship and I really see no reason for you to wait. When you see things the way I do, come and see me, because like I say, I'm tired of this game."

Claire folded her serviette and stood up. As she turned, she heard Harvey clear his throat.

"Claire?"

"Are you ready now Harvey?" she said with skepticism in her voice.

Harvey had his mouth open to speak but when nothing came out, he closed it. His lips felt dry and quivered. He enjoyed the game so much.

Claire gave him a knowing nod, then turned and walked out of the restaurant.

Rob walked briskly into Harvey's office, swung a chair around and sat down. Harvey barely had time to look up.

"You can be such a shmuck Harvey."

"What are you talking about?"

“Claire talked to me for a while this morning, that’s what. She wants to know if you are ever going to make a decision, that’s what. And she says she cares for you a lot but she can’t keep feeling guilty and she can’t keep waiting either. That’s what I’m talking about.”

“Oh.” Harvey touched his forehead and rubbed the lines that formed. “Sorry to get you caught in the middle.”

“Hey, I don’t mind being in the middle if I saw that you were doing something about your miserable little marriage. You don’t do things together, you don’t talk, you don’t share anything, you won’t have kids. It’s so fucked up but you keep hanging on. I can’t figure why.”

“I know. I know.”

“Then stop clinging to your sense of tradition. You have to see beyond your out-dated values. If you can’t leave those values, those morals behind, they’ll kill you.”

Rob stood up when Harvey didn’t offer a response. He just shrugged and left.

Harvey dialed a phone number for the camping sites at Dipper Lake. Yes, the proprietor acknowledged, there had been a cancellation for that weekend. Harvey booked the site for himself.

They spoke to each other on Friday as though nothing had happened. That was because the subject was always light: the contract, the weather, what they might do for lunch on Monday, the contract, the weather. He knew that talk of their relationship would only force his hand and he was reluctant to show it. His quiet wishes and her quiet concerns were enough that day.

“Enjoy your weekend,” Claire said when they went to the parking lot in the afternoon. She was not being sarcastic. Harvey could tell she meant what she said.

After the long drive from the city to the lake Harvey steered his car through trees that lined a driveway from the lake road to his campsite. It wasn’t the same site he’d been at years before, but the lake was small and the area looked familiar. This would be a good spot for him to be alone for a couple of days and relax, and reflect on his life to this point, especially the last five weeks.

It was almost dark when Harvey had finished setting up his tent, put a small dingy in the water and had a bite to eat. He unfolded a lawn chair and perched it at the water’s edge. The land was flat at the water so that he could use the bow of the dingy to put his feet up. Harvey leaned back on his chair and opened a beer and took a drink. The point was a short diagonal swim from where Harvey sat. His campsite was at the bottom corner of the imaginary ladle near the imaginary handle. The walk around the imaginary handle was only a half hour along a well-worn trail. Around the imaginary ladle, the long way around, it would take an hour or more depending on one’s pace through the trees.

Harvey couldn’t hear a peep from other campers on this particular evening, or even see campfires or flashlights. The lake was bright from a near-full moon that hovered over treetops and spread its light



like a white tablecloth across the surface of the lake. Hardly a sound was made except for small ripples at the edges of the lake that licked at the sides of the dingy beneath Harvey's sneakers.

Not only was the beer intoxicating, so was the serenity of the evening. Harvey fell asleep in his chair before he finished his six-pack.

Harvey opened his eyes. There was a canoe in the middle of the widest part of the lake. A young boy of 12 or 13 paddled methodically, moving in the direction of the point. The boy and the canoe seemed awfully out of place, everything else seemed so still. Even the water took no notice for not a ripple was made.

Harvey looked without blinking or breathing. The boy looked very much like his brother.

As the boy and the canoe moved closer to the point Harvey could hear a melody which he didn't recognize. The boy's lips moved, and he even turned his head to look right in Harvey's direction. He may have smiled when he did.

Harvey's attention was transfixed on the apparition as the canoe reached throwing distance from the point. His eyes were blurry from the beer and because he had been sleeping. He was lulled into just watching the silent movement on the lake.

Suddenly there was a tremendous roaring scream from the point and Harvey woke up completely. He jumped forward and beer bottle on his lap rolled into the lake. When he focussed again on the point there was no boy, no canoe. He sat back in his chair again.

After several minutes of catching his breath, waiting for his heartbeat to slow down, Harvey decided he had had a dream. The scream was certainly real, it had woken him, but the visit to this lake after years, and for the first time since his brother had died, had had a greater effect on him than he expected. He had dreamed he had seen his little brother in a canoe on the lake.

Harvey folded the lawn chair and several minutes later was asleep in his tent.

Before leaving the city Friday night Harvey had listened to the weather report, so he was prepared for the light rain that fell on Dipper Lake Saturday morning. He read a book in his tent.

When the rain stopped early afternoon, Harvey pushed the dingy from shore and drifted on the lake. He propped the lawn chair mattress against the stern and continued to read his book. The sun soon came out.

His only objective that day was to finish the book. It was a very relaxing day.

As dusk fell the moon was clearly visible again and it lit the lake. As he had the night before, Harvey sat at the water's edge, but he drank no beer. He was still convinced that he had been dreaming the night before, but his brother had seemed so clear.

Harvey missed him. Though they were born 10 years apart they had been close and his brother had looked up to him, relied on him. So Harvey's curiosity caused him to keep watch of the lake that night.

An hour passed.

The boy was there, paddling the canoe across the lake.

Harvey hadn't seen it appear, it was just suddenly there. He felt himself go numb. The canoe made steady progress toward the point and tonight Harvey could understand the song being sung. It was a camp-song of sorts.

"Eight-eight bottles of beer on the wall, eight-eight bottles of beer. Take one down and pass it around and there's eight-seven bottles of beer on the wall." And so on.

Harvey stood up. The boy seemed to notice this and looked right at Harvey as he paddled and sang. The moon was bright, so that there was no doubt that he looked right at Harvey. He was smiling.

The boy stopped one song and started another. "Row, row, row your boat," he sang.

From shore Harvey fidgeted, tensely moving side to side. He could see the boys so clearly, but the canoe moved away from him toward the point. The boy had to look over his shoulder to maintain eye contact. Harvey felt helpless.

"Hello. Who are you?" Harvey cried out.

The boy stopped singing only for a moment, then started another camp-song. "There's a hole in the bottom of the sea," he sang.

The canoe was close to the point and Harvey assumed he would land there. He was about to push his dingy from land when a bear screamed a blood-curdling roar into the night. It seemed that trees shook and the ground rattled, and the great calm sky could splinter into little pieces and fall into the lake. It jolted Harvey so badly that he took two steps backward and fell over the lawn chair.

There was nothing on the lake but moonlight. There was not a ripple. The sky hadn't even splintered or fallen. All was intact and still, the same as it had been 15 minutes before.

With a push and a jump Harvey was in his dingy and gliding on the lake. He put in the oars and rowed toward the point.

As he approached the point he saw a clearing in the trees that lined the water, but it was several hundred yards to the imaginary ladle side of the point. He wasn't sure where the apparition had disappeared so rowed to the clearing. He threw the rope around the closest tree. The lake was so calm that the boat would not drift, so Harvey didn't think to tie it.

He wasn't sure where to go now. He could see the path in the moonlight, so he went to it. He stood and observed how it wound and disappeared into the trees toward the point, and he wondered what he should do now.

"Hi big brother."

Harvey spun around and stepped back quickly. Losing his balance, he fell against a tree and stayed there.

The boy did not approach. Neither he nor Harvey moved, but Harvey's mouth fell open and he blinked rapidly.

After moments of silence Harvey swallowed and spoke. "Say something."

"I did. I said hi to you."

"What are you?"

"You know who I am. Don't be afraid of what I am."

Harvey went to speak again but his voice failed him. He began to cough, and stood up only to trip again. Each time he stood he would lose his footing and kept falling farther away from the boy. His panic continued, and just when it appeared that he might keep his footing and run, the boy moved quickly toward him, his palm in the air.

"Stop!"

Harvey sat down limply, his eyes wide with terror.

"Don't run out on me Harvey. You have to help me. Come this way." The boy signalled to the path that led to the point.

Harvey stood up, and moving slowly and hunched over, followed the boy along the path. No words were spoken and the boy never looked behind him. Harvey followed anyway. When Harvey took several steps through mud he almost had his shoe sucked off in the soft ground. Harvey noticed that the boy left no trace of his steps in the mud, or cracked a twig, or displaced a leaf.

After several minutes the boy stopped. The water was all around ten feet behind him, and Harvey knew it was the point. The boy turned around, but looked beyond Harvey.

Harvey wet his lips, but his voice escaped cracked and high-pitched. "What are you doing? Why have you brought me here?"

The boy gave no sign of even hearing Harvey. He stood motionless on the path that led to the water.

Not receiving an answer, Harvey began to take a few steps backwards, the way he had come. When he did the boy turned to him, suddenly upset.

"Don't go big brother! Please don't go, I need you!"

But Harvey continued to retreat. He kept his eyes on the boy and he felt behind for his way with a free hand.

Suddenly Harvey realized that there was something large moving toward him from behind. He stopped and looked around.

A huge brown bear was running on all fours toward him, careening along the path, snapping low overhanging branches. Its lips were drawn back, exposing the teeth that opened and closed with each angry stride.

Harvey turned ninety degrees and plunged into the thicker forest off of the path. He was certain the bear would come after him but he felt the rumbling of its charge pass him. He heard the boy scream with the same terror he felt. He turned the direction of his dash so that he would meet the path again closer to where he had left the boat.

Branches whipped in his face and cut him, and he ran into fallen trees knee high from the earth, but his feet moved so quickly that they remained under him before he could fall. Harvey saw the open space of the path from the moonlight, but as he lunged onto it his foot caught a root and he fell face down on the middle of the path.

Intending to pick himself up quickly, he glanced toward the point. He froze for a moment.

The bear was standing upright on its hind feet. As it faced the water it threw back its head and screamed into the night, a loud extended roar. At its feet was the body of the boy, laying like a heap of laundry that had been dropped.

Harvey rose slowly and as he did the bear turned and faced him, not moving, only looking at him.

As fast as his legs would go, Harvey went for the break in the trees where he knew the dingy had been left. He wasn't sure whether that thundering movement and shaking was the bear coming after him or the violent force of his head impacting on his shoulders with every step. He didn't sneak a look behind him.

The break in the trees appeared around a corner without warning and Harvey dove at the dingy which contrasted with the water. He landed with such force that he sent it drifting into the middle of the lake. Although safe he rowed furiously to the other side.

Harvey was completely drenched in sweat by the time he pulled the dingy from the water. He panted loudly and his eyes were so wide that he looked unnatural rushing to pack the campsite. Once the trunk of the car was opened he pulled the tent down and jammed it in, not taking the time to fold it. The trunk wouldn't close so Harvey just left it open.

The only noise in the night was a light wind brushing leaves together, and Harvey's panting and moving around. His motions were jerky as he dropped the portable barbeque and lawn chair on the tent, and he continually looked around him, looked behind him. Harvey rushed to the edge of the water and dragged the dingy to the car. His adrenaline allowed him to lift it over his head and he began to place it on the car top carrier bars. When a sudden thrashing began in the bushes twenty feet behind him Harvey jumped and spun around, inadvertently pushing the dingy over the edge of the car. The crash of the boat landing on the ground and falling heavily against the car caused Harvey to spin around wildly again. This time he screamed a little. Harvey quickly climbed in the car and put up the windows. From the car he saw that the thrashing in the bushes was two squirrels.

After several minutes Harvey stopped panting but his eyes were still very, very wide. His mouth was still open.

He looked out at the little dingy and his hand tried to open the door, but there was little spirit in his effort.

When the door failed to open right away, Harvey put the key in the ignition and started the car. As he sped away, the dingy scraped along the side of the car then fell upside down at the campsite. Harvey looked back at it, and as he did he fish-tailed off a tree as the small drive met the lake road. Not stopping to look at the damage he continued back to the city.

Harvey didn't go home Saturday night or Sunday. But he did call Claire Sunday afternoon. Claire lived alone in a small townhouse in the suburbs. She could tell he was upset and invited him to come over. He went. And Harvey told her everything he had seen and heard that weekend.

When his story was done Harvey collapsed on the sofa. He trembled. He could think of nothing else to say and Claire asked no questions. When she moved over to hold him he fell asleep in her arms.

A clock on the bedside table said 1:15am when Harvey woke up. He was in an unfamiliar bed and he couldn't remember how he came to be there. He turned on a light and saw several pictures of Claire with family. He turned off the light and went to the bedroom door. After his eyes had adjusted to the darkness again, he opened it.

Streetlights illuminated the living room just enough that he could see Claire asleep on the sofa. He crept out softly and sat in a chair and watched her as he slept.

Claire was asleep on her back and her long hair was bunched on the pillow like a bonnet. Her breathing was low and steady and she hardly moved at all. At one point she wriggled her nose and her hand waved at the air in front of her face, but otherwise she was motionless. The toes on her left foot were not covered by the blanket. Harvey watched them, he wanted to move over and kiss each one.

The chair squeaked as Harvey stood up and Claire opened her eyes.

"Is that you?"

Yes, I'm sorry, go back to sleep."

"No, I'm awake. If you're awake I want to make sure you're okay."

Harvey haphazardly tried to tuck her in. "No, no, no. You get your sleep."

Claire turned the light on over her. Harvey stopped trying to tuck her in and sat on the floor next to her.

"I'm okay now," he said. "But I don't remember you putting me to bed."

"You were very willing," she laughed. "Aren't you cold?"

"Cold?" Harvey glanced down and realized he was wearing no pants, only underwear. He blushed as he grinned.

Claire lifted the blanket and patted the spot beside her. "Sit here and we'll cover you up." So he did. He didn't notice that he wore a t-shirt of Claire's. It said 'I'm a 10' on the front. It only came to his belly button because he was stretching the shoulders.

"So you're feeling better?"

Harvey nodded. "Much better. It may take a while to believe what I saw but I'm not as frightened now."

"When you fell asleep I didn't know what to do. Maybe I should have let you wake up so you could go home but you looked so worn out."

"Go home? I don't think I'm going to. I'll ask Rob if I can move in with him for a while."

Harvey turned to Claire and they looked at each other. Claire looked surprised but Harvey was even more stunned by what he had said. He spoke again. "I guess that's it. I've just decided."

"I don't want to be the reason that you're deciding that. You have to really not want to go back."

"It's okay, I said I'm moving in with Rob and not you, so that's not the reason. No, this is long overdue, there are so many reasons and feelings that I have ignored." He licked his lips and folded his hands on his lap. He started to speak again, slowly, as though Claire may not understand the full meaning of each phrase if he didn't take his time.

"Now may be a good time to get some more things out in the open. Claire, we've talked about a lot of things these past few weeks, but we've never mentioned love, and we haven't talked about my marriage and what it means to me. I've got to say a few things about them now."

Claire nodded. "Go ahead," she encouraged him.

"Well, where do I start? I know, I'll tell you about something I read once in a prologue to a novel. It was the author's thoughts on love. What he says is that his experiences with love could be better described as common decency, just treating someone well for a short time or even a long time. Love really doesn't have to have anything to do with it. Who knows what love actually is anyway, no one has ever defined it for me in a way that rings true, and the word is so over-used and said so carelessly."

"You're right about that," Claire said with emphasis.

Harvey continued, looking at her. "I can't begin to describe it, and neither does the author of that novel. But he suggests a philosophy that I've always admired, and that I wish I could live by. He wishes that people who are conventionally supposed to love each other would say to each other, when they fight, 'please, a little less love and a little more common decency'. That's an honourable approach, don't you think?"

Claire smiled and agreed again. "It is."

"I thought so too," Harvey repeated, his forehead knotted in seriousness and his voice slow and measured, caring for each word that he was choosing. "But think of the order of the philosophy for a second: less love, then more common decency. This is where my marriage comes apart. I have learned to show common decency, but I never knew the love in the first place. There has to be love *first*! I may not know exactly what it is but I know what it's not. It's not nothing. I *has* to be something." Harvey paused and touched a spot on his shirt over his heart. "I haven't felt any love in here to begin with."

Forgetting his embarrassment, Harvey moved from the sofa to the window and slowly paced around in a small circle while Claire waited silently for him to continue. His eyes gave away a measure of fear and his hands clasped and unclasped over and over.

"I wonder what you think of me. You must like my company, but I wonder if you secretly think I'm heartless for not having any affection for my wife and for having this affair. And do you secretly think I'll do the same thing to you five years from now. Am I right about any of this?"

Claire shifted on the sofa so that now she kneeled, and she bunched the blanket around her bare legs. "Just keep talking," was all she said.

Harvey moved the side of his hand back and forth over his mouth in a ponderous manner. "Okay, I'll try to be very specific about how I feel and you can decide what you should think. You know, I'm decent to my wife, I really am, but I care for her the same way I care for my sisters and that doesn't mean I want to spend a lifetime with one of them. My feelings don't go beyond decency and a little caring. That's not her fault and I don't think it's my fault either. I just don't feel anything. I can't find the affection and respect for her that I need."

He suddenly laughed and threw his arms up. "Other people probably couldn't care less about feeling that way, but it makes me unhappy." His arms slapped back to his sides. "No," he said, "it's worse. I feel empty, abandoned by my own self. It doesn't matter what else that's good that happens in my life, I'm learning that to be happy I must feel some of the aspects of love, or at least have some hope for it. And I can't while I'm married to someone that I don't feel anything for. I know there are hundreds of reasons why men and women have been divorced or have stayed together before; but that's their story, not mine. What I want, what I'm hoping for, is to experience love with someone, for her and from her. It seems I underestimated how vital that is to me, but not anymore. And so now I choose to be married no longer."

"A married man who's not in love is like a ping pong ball. His emotions bounce back and forth. So do his actions. For three years I feel I've been the ball in an erratic game of ping pong. I don't want to be the ping pong. I want some weight. I want to be a rock. Immersed in love, not floating, but surrounded by you."

Harvey moved back toward the sofa but rather than sit beside Claire on the sofa he sat on the floor at her feet. With the tip of his finger he began to gently massage her exposed knee. As he spoke his eyes concentrated on his moving finger. So did hers.

"When I finally do feel love Claire, I'll ... well, I know it will be more than common decency. She will know my thoughts, my desires, my concerns. I'll open up and let her see my emotions there in the open, each one pleading to be understood and hugged. The good ones and the not-so-good. There won't be any reason to hide, no reason to withhold affection or feelings of any kind. She will be enveloped with all of the little by-products of love, everything that makes the next moment special. And I won't let you down."

"And what of love? I still don't know what it's all about even though I've rambled on about it and called it by name so much. I've only had glimpses of it, but the longest glimpse is the one I feel for you. We've only known each other a short time and we haven't said that old cliché 'I love you' to each other yet, and I'm still not prepared to say it because you'd only sit there and wonder what the hell I really meant."

(Claire smiled and nodded). "Instead I'll tell you how I feel and warn you that this could be the stuff that love is made of, but I'm not really sure."

"I can't put it into words easily. I know how I feel when you're here and how I feel when you aren't. It's a yearning, a strong, so, so strong yearning; and that corny phrase my 'heart aches' really isn't so corny to me. Because it *does* ache. I feel it ache. The muscles tense in my chest and pull all the way to a lump in my throat like desperate, desperate men engaging in a tug of war from both sides of a deep pit. I don't want to fall, really."

"Claire, this sounds very strange: I was watching you sleep and I can see how beautiful you are, and I know how sweet you are, and I can listen to you all day and I want to be with you so badly; but what I feel is like I just saw the end of the movie when Old Yeller gets shot!"

Harvey cocked his head to one side and shrugged. "That's how I feel."

Claire didn't say anything. Only she leaned closer and pulled him into her.

It was 1:30am again, but this was the next morning. Harvey sat in a car under a streetlight on a corner several blocks from Rob's house. He had stopped there hours earlier while bringing a load of belongings from the house he shared with his wife.

As he sat there he pointed at an imaginary place in the air near the dashboard. In his mind he was pointing at Dipper Lake. That felt like the middle of his troubled life. He knew he would have to go back there.

It was Wednesday night and Harvey could finally relax. He had spent the last couple of evenings moving some of his belongings into Rob's house. Rob shared his bungalow with two large dogs, Max and Daisy. Harvey had the room in the basement because the three bedrooms on the ground floor were in use. Rob slept in one, he used another as an office, and Max and Daisy slept in the third. They had matching single beds.

Rob came downstairs where Harvey was watching television.

"What was it you said you needed to borrow?"

"Your rifle," Harvey tried to be nonchalant.

"My shotgun? What for, you've never hunted?"

Harvey held up his hands. "I know. I really need it for the weekend. Believe me, it's important and I'll be very careful with it. I'm taking it camping."

Rob was clearly agitated about Harvey's request. "I don't like this. Are you sure you aren't doing something stupid? Your life just took a big turn this week."

"I'm sure." Harvey looked steadily at Rob without wavering and Rob knew that he was very serious about having it.



“Have you ever used one before?”

Harvey shook his head. “No. You’ve got to show me.”

They went outside and Rob let Harvey perform all of the necessary functions for firing the gun, except for putting the bullets in, assuming that was obvious.

Rob was going out Thursday night and Harvey had promised to feed Max and Daisy. Rather than cross the city again to go to Claire’s house, Claire followed Harvey from work in her car.

As they pulled along side each other in the driveway, the little rain falling became heavier. Harvey tried to use sign language to explain that he would go first and unlock the door. Claire shook her head, pretending that she didn’t understand. Harvey began again, moving his hands and pointing and motioning as though he was turning a key. Claire replied with signals that made no sense. As Harvey was starting again, Claire stuck her tongue out at him. She got out of the car, so Harvey did the same.

“I would have opened the door for you so you wouldn’t get wet.”

“It’s only water. It’s romantic to kiss in the rain.” So they did.

Harvey pulled at his white dress shirt that was becoming more wet than dry. “You really just want to see through my shirt when it gets wet,” he said.

“After I’ve seen you in your underwear? Give me a break.”

They ran up the steps and into the house.

While they were eating the pizza they had ordered, the doorbell rang. Harvey answered it.

Claire couldn’t see the entrance from where she sat in the living room, but she heard Harvey’s wife. The conversation was pitiful. Anger and hurt on one side. Helplessness and hurt on the other. Harvey had left behind some laundry but that was hardly a reason to hand deliver it. The conversation was not long and after a moment of silence she left.

Harvey walked slowly back to the living room. He glanced at Claire sheepishly, not sure what she might say. She offered a question: “Feel any different?”

“No,” he said immediately, firmly. He sat down. “Lots of sense of duty, no sense of love. I’d be crazy not to let love win out.”

Harvey continued eating the piece of pizza he had before the doorbell rang. Claire went to the kitchen for more.

Harvey was lost in thought and it was a few minutes before he realized Claire was taking a long time to come back with her slice of pizza. He stepped around the corner on his way to the kitchen but stopped.

When his wife had been at the front door, she had stepped toward him several times and she had left muddy footprints on Rob’s carpet. Claire was on her hands and knees, vigorously cleaning away the dirt with a wet cloth.

Harvey went back to the living room.

Later in the evening, when the rain had almost stopped falling, Harvey and Claire had taken Max and Daisy for a walk but went out again, to a nearby park. The rain and the evening air were warm so Harvey and Claire put on light raincoats over their shorts and t-shirts. They walked in bare feet.

Harvey spread his raincoat across a bench so that he and Claire could sit down and be dry.

"Why did you get married anyway?" Claire asked.

Harvey shook his head, kicking pebbles to the grass. "Why else? She was pregnant."

"You don't have kids now."

"No, we don't," he whispered. Harvey remained quiet. He kicked a square foot clean of pebbles and studied the arrangement of the stones on the wet grass. He closed his eyes and held back a sob.

Claire touches his arm nervously. "Then you really didn't have to get married."

"I still felt I had to. I didn't love her and I don't know if she even loved me then. There was so much confusion then, so much sadness." Harvey raised his head and looked across the wide field. "I had no guts then and I don't have any guts today. I've just never beat it."

Before Claire could say anything, Harvey stood and walked away. He stopped when he was some distance from her, next to a large oak tree.

Claire left him by himself. It was twenty minutes before he looked around to see if she was still there. She walked over cautiously, not right to him, but leaned against the tree.

"What are you thinking?" she whispered.

"It's what I have to do."

"What is?"

"Go back up to that lake. That's where it started."

"When?"

"Tomorrow night."

Harvey looked at her, her back against the tree, one leg bent and her foot knee high on the bark, and her eyes lowered to the ground. She was careful and quiet but there for him.

He moved closer to her. He stood really close and she had to put her knee down and she straightened up to move closer to the tree, reclaiming a fraction of the space Harvey had stepped into.

"You're standing awfully close."

"I guess I am."

"Is there anything you want?" Claire asked, her eyes still on the tiny space of earth between their toes.

Harvey sighed with a smile. "Yes. Do you really want to know what it is?"

Claire's head slowly moved from side to side. "Yes and no."

Harvey said nothing and stood still.

Finally, Claire looked up to meet his eyes. "Mostly yes," she conceded.

He touched her hair over her ear as he started to speak. "I'd like to see parts of you naked."

"Parts of me? Not all of me?"

"Just parts."

"Just parts?" she repeated.

"Uh-huh."

"What parts of me?" she asked, taking his hand from her hair.

Harvey put his arms around her and pulled her shirt loose from the back of her shorts. He tucked his hands under the back of her shirt and began to caress her skin. "First, I'd like to see the small of your back ... naked, exposed."

Claire grinned. "Okay. What's next?"

"I want to see your naked intuition," he said without hesitating. "The little thoughts that make you giggle but you don't say. The sense you have when you're about to say something but don't, or when you hear something that surprises you. I want to see how you feel when you know you're right and you don't know why. When you sense that you have to ask something and you don't know why you need an answer, only that it's important. I want to see that."

He paused and moved his hands to her front. "I want to see your belly-button with no clothes on," he said, touching her there.

"That tickles me," she whispered. "Okay, you can see those things, I'll ..."

"Shhh," Harvey touched on hand to her lips. "I'm not done. There's more."

She nodded.

Touching her stomach gently, Harvey started to talk again. "The next thing I want to see naked is your truth. What do you dare to confess only to yourself, what do you see in yourself when you're totally honest, and how do you really feel. I want to see it. And what do you know you need. What really has to be there to make you happy when you're twenty-five and forty-five and sixty-five. And what do you want to make you happy now."

His hands moved again. "I want to see your thighs. Where your skin is white, under your shorts, away from the sun. And then while I'm touching your thighs, softly, softly, I'll ask to see your fear." Harvey rested his forehead against hers and his eyes were both intense and loving. She looked at the mix of hair on his chest and listened to his voice so low, hardly a whisper.

"Show me the thoughts that terrify you, but you can't explain why. And describe the images that make you shudder and sometimes makes you cry. I want to see it all. No clothes, no makeup, no hair tossed over the sensitive fears. Let me look, let me know every crease and pore and shadow. I might look one in the eye and say 'Boo!'. Or I might hide from it with you. But I have to see what it is, naked and shivering and scary."

She finally looked up at him and a little fear was surely in her eyes. It seemed to her that he wasn't going to say anything else.

"Those are nice things to say," she said.

"They're true," Harvey answered.

"Isn't there anything else you want to see naked?"

"There's something else?"

"Think hard."

"You're right. There is."

And he saw it. And she showed him.

It was seven o'clock, Friday night, and dusk would set in soon. Harvey had the campsite set up and had already perched his lawn chair at the water's edge. Tonight, he would see if his brother would appear. Tomorrow night he would act. That's what he told himself, but he also was worried about whether he could stay the whole weekend. He hadn't unpacked everything. He could leave in a moment's notice.

Harvey had the same campsite as the weekend before. His dingy was still there.

A car turned down the path from the lake road. Harvey recognized it as Claire's. As she pulled it next to his he ran over and opened the door.

"What are you doing here? Oh Claire, I really think I've got to be alone this weekend."

Claire had turned her head toward him, but she didn't look right at him, and she didn't move, and she didn't say anything.

Harvey walked away and Claire took items from the car to the tent.

An hour later Harvey put his arms around Claire. "I'm glad you're here, but I'm really frightened. I don't know what I'm doing here or what I'm planning to do."

"I know. Rob told me you had taken his gun."

Harvey turned and laughed ruefully. "This is nuts Claire. We don't need to be here." He started to shiver even though it was a warm evening. He gestured at the tent. "Let's just pack it all up and go back to the city."

Claire took his wrists in her hands and held them steady. "No, let's see what's up here."

After a moment Harvey seemed to regain his courage, although his voice was not convincing. "Right, let's see. I'll make a spot for us to both sit by the lake."

He put a blanket on the ground and he set the lawn chair down for them to lean against, and they sat and held each other. And they waited.

It seemed a long time for a little time to pass. Neither spoke and Claire was starting to sleep.

Harvey always watched where he had first seen the canoe the other times, but he thought he saw something move at the point. It was hard to tell from this distance in the moonlight. But at least there was moonlight, once again there were no clouds to get in the way.

Harvey looked back and the canoe was there. The boy was in it, paddling slowly and looking straight ahead, toward the point.

Moving very cautiously Harvey shifted his shoulder so that Claire's head bounced. "Wake up Claire," he whispered.

She opened her eyes and was about to speak when she saw the boy in the canoe. Her mouth remained open, but no sound came out.

"That's my brother," Harvey said. "I don't know how, but that's him."

Claire was in an uncomfortable position and as she moved a small rock dislodged and rolling into the lake with a plop. The night was so quiet that even that small plop could be heard echoing.

Both froze, afraid they were found out and the boy would disappear. Instead he looked right at them, smiling as though all along he knew they'd been there. Then, as he turned to face the point again, and paddle again, he began to sing.

"Eight-four bottles of beer on the wall, eight-four bottles of beer ..."

"Do you hear that?" Claire gasped.

"I do."

"That's a ghost Harvey. I wouldn't have believed it."

They sat and watched the boy paddle. His young voice barely sang but it was clear to them in the night, over the water. When he finished the first song he started another.

Claire felt Harvey take her hand in his. His hand was cold and wet and she looked away from the boy and she could see how strongly he squeezed her hand in his, but the feeling didn't connect to her thoughts. She didn't seem to realize that Harvey squeezing her hand was painful.

When the boy began his third campsong, Harvey spoke.

"He's almost at the point."

"Is that where he's going?" Claire asked. She was watching the boy glide through the water and sing softly and sway in the eerie moonlight.

Harvey didn't answer. Claire looked at his face and saw drops of sweat running one after the other down his temple. His eyes were wide and she could see the tension in the lines of his face.

The silence was broken by a high-pitched roar that lingered and echoed. Claire jumped and gasped and she looked and the boy was gone.

Then nothing. The night was still. There was no sound except for their breathing.

"Is that it?"

"Yes."

"Does it kill him?"

"I don't know."

Claire was crying. "Does it kill him night after night Harvey? That's not right!"

Harvey stood up, trembling. "I really don't know. Listen, if you want we can get out of here right now." Harvey certainly wanted to.

"No." Claire spoke firmly. "We're okay." She motioned to the campsite. "We have two cars and a gun and each other. We're fine. We could use a campfire but it's late for that I suppose."

Harvey picked up the blanket and went to the tent, feeling numb. When Claire joined him, he began to feel better.

As they slept Harvey felt very secure. Every so often he'd open one eye and would be reminded of what was nestled against him and he'd smile, even though he was mostly asleep.

Click! Harvey was aroused from his sleep but his eyes remained closed. Click! He opened one eye and saw Claire standing over him.

"Gotcha!" she said. She was holding a camera.

"I must look terrific," he grumbled and tried to roll over.

She kicked the sleeping bag. "If your vanity needs the 'after' picture then you need to shave and go for a swim."

When he didn't respond, she dragged the sleeping bag, and Harvey in it, out of the tent. It was hot and dry outside.

Saturday was an uneventful day. Claire tried to coax him into walking the path around the lake but Harvey resisted. When she set out on her own he finally agreed to follow, and he brought the shotgun. But he carried it more like he was ready to run with it than shoot with it.

Together they cooked an early supper on the barbeque but only Claire ate anything substantial. After they had washed up, Claire suggested they build a fire. Harvey had collected wood and bark earlier in the day and it was scattered about the pit where campers before them had built their fires. He started to put it in place.

"Let me get the fire going for us," Claire said as she stooped over the wood.

"I don't mind helping," he professed, a little surprised that she wanted to do it alone.

"Just sit back mister. I can handle this myself."

Harvey sat down and crossed his legs a few feet away and watched her.

Claire gathered the wood and bark to one spot. She rolled newspaper on the pit and piled the bark and kindling over the paper. The larger logs were leaned on each other over the rest. It took a while for Claire to structure the wood the way she wanted it to be. As she worked her hair would fall forward across her eye and cheek and she would sweep it away with the back of her sleeve.

She eventually reached the point that she could light the fire, but the repeatedly the match went out before the paper could light. The breeze was almost non-existent, but at the angle she crouched it would catch the match and snuff it out. She moved to another position and the next match worked and the paper caught. She moved the paper around to spread the base of the flames and in no time the fire was a high blaze with the larger logs slowly beginning to burn.

As Claire sat back, Harvey spied the camera at the top of her duffel bag. He picked it up and put it to his eye.

Claire sat on a tree stump and was staring vacantly in the direction of the fire. Harvey took the picture then lowered the camera just enough to see what he had captured.

Just barely he saw the flames reflect, one on her cheek, another on her brow. Her beauty is locked by the frame and locked in his memory now.

She is still, as she would be in the photograph. Anyone would tell you that she is still. Her hair is tossed a little, like wheatfields in a wind at dusk.

A spot of grime is smeared on her forehead and the dirt of her efforts are on her hands. That would convince anyone that she is real, proved that there was an effort.

But it's the eyes that really hold you. They never really look at him. Fixed on an image, something he can't know: maybe the fire, maybe a sneaker, maybe a dream. What was she thinking?

"I just took your picture," he said.

"I know."

She remained motionless a few moments longer, then stood up and looked in his direction, but it was in the area of his feet.

He walked over and lowered her back to the ground as they kissed.

In the course of touching and embracing, Claire unzipped the picket of Harvey's jacket and felt objects inside.

"What are these?"

"The shells for the shotgun," Harvey answered. "I don't want to lose those."

He gave her a second to close the picket up again, but he didn't know she was having trouble with the zipper. He rolled over her and she forgot about the zipper when he started to touch her. The shells fell out unnoticed. The only shell he would have was the one he had put in the gun earlier in the day when they had walked around the lake.

Dusk approached and Harvey was more and more nervous. Claire had already sat down by the shore even though it was a full hour before the usual time the boy appeared. Harvey hadn't come near the water's edge and Claire couldn't see where he was. She went to find him. Claire found Harvey squatting behind the tent, clutching the shotgun.

"Harvey?" she said softly.

He turned and looked at her quickly; his eyes were frightened, his mouth was open and his lips quivered.

"Are you going to be all right?"

He stood up and put out one hand pleadingly. "Please, Claire. Let's leave right now. I don't know if I can do it."

"On Thursday you were determined to come up here. You had something to do, remember?"

Harvey looked surprised as he answered. "I don't know. I can't remember what it was."

Claire looked away for a second and felt disappointment, and anger. She looked back at him. "Harvey! That bear is killing your brother night after night!"

"No, only while I'm here. I don't know if it happens when I'm not here." Harvey was talking more calmly but the whine was still in his voice. "If we leave it will be fine, things will be okay, it will be comfortable. I don't have the guts for this."

"You won't ever forget this Harvey. He kills him night after night. It kills a part of you, night after night. You will always have to live with knowing what happened here at Dipper Lake!"

"I already know what happened here. He died five years ago!"

"He dies every night!" Claire screamed.

Harvey turned around and squatted again. "I just want to go home."

"Which home would you go to?"

Claire asked, but Harvey said nothing. She walked around in front of him and grabbed his chin and raised his face to see her. "What home do you mean Harvey?"



He couldn't look her in the eye.

"Goodbye," she said without emotion and walked away.

Harvey expected to hear her in the tent gathering her things, or even getting in her car right away, but he heard nothing. Alarmed, he stood up and peered around the side of the tent. He just had a glimpse of her disappearing from the campsite into the trees. She was on the path going the short route to the point.

He paused. His hand touched the pants pocket and felt the car keys. He could leave if he wanted to. His mind suddenly saw the image of her in front of the fire a short time ago, and he bolted after her.

There was plenty of moonlight again that night. Harvey could distinguish the path from the trees as he raced through the woods.

Claire had lost her way on the path, but she could see the water and followed its contours. And as she turned, she was moving toward the point.

It was only fifteen minutes before Harvey reach the point. He had heard Claire's movements as she ran through the woods ahead of him, but she hadn't stopped at the point. He paused for a second, then kept running after her.

There was a campsite just past the spot where Harvey had landed his dingy the weekend before. They had planned to take the dingy over to the point that night also.

The trees opened up and Harvey ran into the middle of the other campsite. This one was larger than theirs, and an even larger clearing was behind it, cut away for throwing a frisbee or hitting a baseball. Claire was sitting on a log beside the firepit. She was out of breath. So was he. Neither could speak.

When they had recovered, Claire motioned toward the forest. "I think we should build another fire here."

They quickly gathered some sticks and logs from fallen trees on the fringe of the campsite. They set them in the fire-pit and Claire produced the matches that were still in her pocket. Harvey used his socks to help get the fire started.

The fire was big. It made the whole campsite and clearing very bright.

"Now what?" Harvey said.

Claire shrugged and pulled his arm. "We walk back to the point I suppose. You have your shotgun, so let's do it."

"We don't even know if the bear is real," Harvey reminded her. "I don't want to be here," he reminded himself.

They stepped into the trees and Harvey stopped walking. Claire saw it a moment later.

The boy was standing on the path five feet away. "Hi big brother," he said.

Nobody moved for minutes. They studied each other.

Finally, Harvey broke the silence by whispering to Claire, "he's going to want to go to the point."

Claire didn't hesitate. She walked over to the boy and together they walked along the path toward the point. Harvey followed, looking behind him, looking around him.

When he looked ahead he often had trouble distinguishing between the steps of the boy and of Claire. Except that Claire was leading and the boy was following her.

They reached the point. The boy sat on the ground and began to cry. When Claire moved closer to Harvey, the boy stood up and followed her. So she sat beside him.

Harvey took a position where he could see both directions on the path and he crouched on one knee.

They heard it. Rumbling steps and snapping branches. This time it was coming from the imaginary handle of the lake, the direction they would eventually want to take back to their campsite. Harvey set himself but his hands shook awfully and he tried to cradle the gun against his chest to keep it level.

The bear turned the last corner and was in sight. Claire knew it would be big but she gasped: it was huge! And its great paws slashed the ground with each stride, and its jaws were wet and its teeth clearly visible in the moonlight. Its eyes were cold, focusing on the spot where Claire and the boy sat.

Harvey pulled the trigger.

The bear was jerked to one side and rolled into the trees. It let out a yelp of pain and surprise. It was certainly real. But it wasn't dead. It rolled upright and ran through the trees away from where they were. At the last point of the path that could be seen, the bear crossed. It was running on three legs, its front left leg was dragging and useless.

The crashing the bear made through the trees stopped after another twenty seconds and it began to howl. The pain was obvious in each scream.

Claire looked at Harvey. He hadn't moved from the position he was in when he had shot.

"Reload! Reload!" she urged.

Harvey reached into his pocket but found nothing. His head whirled in alarm toward Claire. "I don't have any!"

"Shells?" Claire asked.

"I don't have any!" Harvey repeated, his tone more terrified than the first time. It was hard to hear him over the screams of the bear in the distance.

Claire remembered the shells. "Can we make it to the cars?" she said as she stood and took several steps along the path. The boy jumped up and followed her, not more than an inch between her body and his image.

She stopped. She took a step to her left and he followed. She stepped backward and he followed. The boy's eyes were riveted to her feet and he repeated their every movement.

Claire looked up at Harvey desperately. He said what she was thinking. "If we go that way, we'll only bring it down on us."

"The other campsite." Claire said.

"What can we do there?"

"I don't know," she said. "But we're not staying here."

They hurried along the path, the boy almost stuck to Claire's side, and never looking up from her feet. The screams of the bear were actually getting louder, more of a roar, and Harvey and Claire could detect less pain and more anger.

Once in the campsite they went to the fire. The boy seemed afraid to be too close, so Claire stood ten feet away.

"The water!" Harvey said suddenly. "We can swim for it."

But as he spoke the bear's screams were louder and louder and the crashing in the forest made it clear that it was very close.

"It's too late," Claire said, pointing to the end of the clearing, one hundred yards away. The bear had emerged from the trees but was cautiously moving from side to side, its left shoulder shattered and bleeding.

"Harvey, make him think you can use the gun again. Aim it at him."

"What's the point," he said, dropping to his knees in front of the fire.

Claire shook her fist. "Don't give up! Don't be that way now Harvey! You've got to do something. Remember everything you said about love... Your brother is stuck to me and there are no options left. Use it like a club, anything you can!"

But Harvey stood up and swung the gun by the barrel and it flew fifty yards toward the bear. He had thrown away their last option. He held his hands out in front of him as he spoke. "I can't do it. I don't have what it takes." His mind tried to recapture that moment of Claire in front of the fire, her beauty, his desire. But his thought didn't find that scene and he sank to the ground. The bear pushed a small tree over and Harvey backed up so that he was right next to the fire.

The bear turned and lowered its head, growling. It knew it had them beaten.

Harvey was backed up as far as he could go to the fire. He could feel the heat on his back and arms. If he backed up any farther his hair would catch fire.

He looked at Claire who was looking at him. Her face was pale and her eyes were puzzled and one arm was held out in an attempt to shield the boy from the creature that was ready to destroy them.

Their attention went back to the bear which had stood upright and screamed again into the night. It ended its cry and dropped to its three good legs and charged.

Harvey and Claire were only ten feet apart, but it was clear that the bear was charging Claire and the boy.

In the short seconds that Harvey had to think while the bear closed in, he had two thoughts:

The first was to run for the lake, but he didn't.

The second thought he had, he did.

Harvey reached behind him into the fire and put his hand around the first log. As the bear was making its final lunge to strike, he pulled his hand forward and jumped between the bear and Claire. The flame was a two-foot extension of his arm, the skin melting and fusing to the burning log. He swung.

The flame and heat startled the bear and it swerved around Claire and the boy. It stopped immediately, still enraged and ready to kill, but it hesitated as it turned around, confused at the flame that had unexpectedly appeared.

Harvey took three steps and lunged. The end of the log jabbed the bear under its chin and Harvey kept pushing it into its chest until the bear screamed in terror and swung its claw. It snapped the log in half, but the bear's fur was on fire. Harvey still held the remaining ember and began sweeping it at any portion of the bear that he could reach. The bear was covered in flames and screamed in agony, twisting and jumping.

Harvey shook the log loose from his hand and retreated slowly toward Claire, still watching the bear; the flames growing larger, swarming over its body. The bear's attempts to escape the flames became less and less active.

Suddenly the bear reared, and sensing its doom, lunged toward Claire. Harvey held her arm so she wouldn't move too quickly, and just as the bear appeared ready to fall on them, he pushed her and both fell out of the way. The bear fell face down and now its form was hard to distinguish amidst all the flames.

The clearing was even brighter with the huge fire. The bear's skin crackled and the odour of burning hair and flesh overwhelmed the night air.

Claire suddenly shook one of Harvey's hands from her arm. His burnt hand was so hot that it was burning her arm as well. And she looked all around her.

"Your brother isn't here!"

Harvey also looked around them, but more calmly, as though it was expected. "We finally got away from him. We finally beat it."

It was not an eloquent statement, what Harvey said. But it was true. It was beaten.

They walked slowly back to the campsite. After packing everything into the cars, Claire went to douse the campfire.

"Let it burn," Harvey said. "You built it, you made it happen." He touched the side of Claire's face with his good hand. "I want a copy of that picture I took after you built it. I've never seen anyone looking so beautiful, anyone looking so courageous at the same time."

“You only had to ask,” she said. “Are you ready to go? You need to get to a hospital for that hand.”

Harvey kissed her and held her. Then he said, “Would you mind if you went ahead? I’m going to stay here for just a few minutes.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’m sure.”

She knew it’s what he needed. Harvey released her and walked her to her car. As he opened her door, he said “I’ll be there soon.”

Claire left.

Harvey stood at the shore. Across the lake he could see the other campfire that they had left. It wasn’t as large anymore and was gradually dying out.

He could smell the burnt body of the bear, even on this side of the lake. It was distinct and sweet. He took deep, deep breaths.

The lake was calm, covered as always by the tablecloth of moonlight. He watched the area where before he had seen his brother paddling his canoe, but he knew he wouldn’t see them again.

But in the middle of the lake he clearly saw some ripples, and that was fine.

A final reminder:

Just barely I see the flames reflect: one on her cheek, another on her brow. Locked to her beauty by the frame and locked in my memory now.

She is still, even if this is a photograph, anyone can tell that she is still. Her hair is tossed about, like the wheatfields in a wind at dusk.

It's her eyes that really hold you. The resolve, the courage. They never really could look at me, and they don't look at the camera. Fixed on an image, something I can't know: maybe the fire, maybe a sneaker, maybe a dream. What were you thinking; what are you thinking?