

TWO BOYS AND A GIRL SAT AROUND THE SMALL SQUARE table made out of two pieces of pine plank that sat atop a stump. The children had shards of glass wrapped in small rags of leather in their hands. They were shaving axe handles that their father had made the night before. Their father was outside the log cabin splitting ash. The children could hear the pock of the axe smacking into the juicy hardwood and then the long tearing and sucking sound of wood splitting cleanly. Good wood, free of knots, could be split fine enough to make a deck of cards, their father liked to say. Although they had not seen the sun all day, the children knew that it was setting behind the clouds and that their father would soon step inside to continue working. He would row with the drawknife all night long—leaning forward over the work bench, pulling back, scraping wafers of white wood from the axe-hewn pieces—all night until dawn.

A comforting heat emanated from the wood-burning stove. W'is, the gray tomcat, lazed under the stove just below the oven door. His large furry head sat on the floor between his square paws, one slit eye rolled back into the strange world of dreams and the other leisurely monitoring the shadows moving in the cabin.

"I bet you guys don't know why you have your names?" Andy asked his older brother and younger sister. Although his inflection contained an invitation to unravel secrets, Andy did not look up from his work. Andy's lap was draped with an empty burlap bag. Strands of wood as fine and curly as his hair covered the burlap. The sweet moist scent of sap rose from the downy shavings. It was an essence as subtle as the mystery implied in Andy's remark. Grant and Celia looked at each other.

"Ei'oddi! That's stupid," Celia pronounced. "Everybody knows we have to talk. That's why we have names—aye, Grant?"

Andy, keeping his head down, rolled his eyes toward Celia and stated patronizingly, as if he were a store clerk looking over the rim of a pair of reading glasses, "That's not what I meant, Celia. C'mon, now."

Celia glanced at Grant, who had already capitalized on the opportunity to set his axe handle aside and begin rolling a cigarette. Grant had a head like a chopping block. He was thirteen, a year older than Andy. But while Andy was slim, Grant was stout. In spite of his robust stature, though, Grant was unsure of his strength. His disproportionately small hands and small feet made him self-conscious. Grant often marveled at the easy way Andy carried his body. Andy was an acrobat, capable of doing a back flip that ended with his feet squarely landing in the same place they had been.

Grant licked the paper's edge and sealed the cigarette before setting it on the table next to the piece of glass he had been working with. All the while, Grant kept his eyes screened with slitted eyelids and thick lashes. He methodically and sedately whisked the shavings on his leather-draped lap into a pile, which he then packed into a ball. Grant slowly stood up with the ball of fine shavings in his palms. The square patch of leather slid from his lap and dropped to the bare wooden floor. He walked to the wood-burning stove, opened the grate, and tossed the ball of shavings into the fire. The gray tomcat rolled on his back, inviting Grant to scratch his stomach.

"Nai! That takes care of that," Grant asserted. "No more shaving for me tonight."

"Dad'll get you to sand, then," Celia said.

"Don't care," muttered Grant as he slowly walked back to his seat. "Just won't shave no more."

"Mum gave me my name," Andy announced as casually as he could.

This time Andy studied Grant's response. Grant quickly put the cigarette into his mouth and sat down. He searched his shirt pocket for a small box of wooden matches. The box slipped from his fingers several times. Grant could hear the matches jostling inside the box and he felt his fingernail scrape against the striker on the box. Finally he jabbed his hand into the pocket, tearing the corner, and fished out the matches.

Celia's lips tightened. Her brows pinched obstinately, squashing the anguish that momentarily glazed her eyes. She worked so fast with the glass that its edge quickly dulled and she had to pick up another piece from the tin can on the table. The chip of glass was brown and curved—part of a beer bottle.

"Last time Dad got drunk and had his friends over and I came back from the Gagnon's to get my watercolors, I heard him talking and crying," Andy said, "and he talked about Mum and he was sorry for beating her. He said that he was never strong enough to get over his jealousy. Then he said Mum named me after her godfather because he always treated her good. And that's where she is now."

"Where?" Celia pounced, but immediately turned back angrily to her work.

"With her godfather in Maine," Andy answered. "He's got a large family there and Mum's helping them out—"

"But not us!" Celia snapped.

"Ei'oga, Celia! Dad would have killed her," Grant declared, flashing at Celia as he struck a match and lit his cigarette. Even when he was upset, Grant spoke slowly. "I'm happy she's not here. Dad always came back from the logging camps and beat her for nothing, just because that old witch Ginny always talked and made up stuff. *Nisgam nuaduidi* Dad should have beat her up instead."

"E'be." Andy nodded in agreement. "Mum never did nothing wrong. Dad knows that, too. But Ginny gossiped so much Dad had to show people he was still boss."

"He was scared what people would think if he didn't beat Mum?" Celia asked, amazed. Her brows crinkled in revulsion as this terrible insight into masculine nature hit her.

"You shouldn't be listening, Celia!" Grant snarled.

Andy whispered, "You know what else?"

Andy looked as if he were suddenly ill. His jaw hung slack and his lips were dry. He had to swallow before he spoke again. He closed his

eyes and rubbed his forehead with the back of the hand that held the glass flake. A strand of shaving fell loose from his sweaty palm.

"Dad was crying because . . . because he heard," Andy mumbled.

Celia's stomach grew queasy. Grant inhaled and nodded lightly as he blew the smoke out.

"He heard that Mum's getting married," Andy finished.

The door opened and their father stepped in with a bag full of split ash. He emptied the bag in the middle of the room near a square block of wood. The sticks were over thirty-four inches long and about four-by-one inches in thickness. Their father was short and wiry. His hair was cut almost to the skin at the sides and greased back at the top. His face was long, with small cheekbones, thin lips and a prominent nose. His glinting raven eyes were startling in contrast to his pale complexion. He quickly unbuttoned his black woolen jacket and shook it off with a brisk, jerky flurry of arms. He hung the jacket on a nail in the wall near the door and then immediately set to work shaping one of the sticks into the rough mould of an axe handle. He had a contract to provide CNR with axe and pick handles.

"Nabe, Grant, light the other lantern," the man ordered, masterfully manipulating the axe. "And hang it from that beam. Open the damper and the vents on the stove, Celia, and don't put any more wood in the fire. Andy, get the whetting stone. I left it outside. Bring the other axe in, too, and sharpen it."

A glaze of perspiration gleamed on the man's high forehead. Several strings of curly hair shook free from the waxy and flattened hairstyle and grazed the man's thick brows. He tossed the rough-cut to one side and picked up another stick, set it on the square block and started shaping it. Grant pumped the pressure into a gas lamp. Andy stepped outside and returned with a whetstone and an axe. And the cool air that followed Andy into the cabin made *Wi'sis*, the gray tom, lean his head over his forepaws and growl. Celia made a few adjustments on the

stove and then gathered all the axe handles they had shaved and placed them on a rack behind the stove.

"It's starting to freeze, Dad," Andy said.

"E'be. Winter's going to be early this year," the man replied.

"Did something blow off the clothesline?" Andy asked, sweeping his disheveled curly locks back into place. "I saw something white out there near the woods."

Grant got up from the table to look out the window. He said, "I hope it's not the dress shirts Paul Cagnon let me borrow."

Grant peered out. W'isis left his niche under the oven door and issued another low growl as he slowly ambled forward. Darkness had already begun to smoke the sky. "Where is it?" Grant asked.

Andy placed the axe on the table and stood beside Grant.

"There," Andy answered, touching the glass with his right index finger. "Don't you see it?"

"Where? What're you pointing at?" Grant asked.

"There. Near the split pine. Just to the right of it."

"Is it small?"

"N'isjam! You don't see it? You growing blind, Grant."

Celia walked over to the window.

"You say it's near the pine that was struck by lightning?" she asked.

"Yeah," replied Andy, exasperation beginning to creep into his voice. "It's sorta fluttering a bit."

"Maybe it's too dark," Celia said.

"Oh, c'mon!" Andy cried. "Maybe you need glasses."

"E'ojja, he's just pulling our legs!" Grant told Celia and he walked back to the table.

"I'm not!"

"Well, I don't see nothing either," Celia said.

Their father stopped his work and looked at Celia and Andy. W'isis stopped, whipped his tail and snarled.

"I'll go and bring it in," Andy said.

"Wait a second, son," the man said. "Let me have a look first."

The father walked to the window. He placed a hand on Celia's shoulder and gently pushed her aside.

"What does it look like, son?"

"Well, don't you see it either, Dad?"

"Tell me what you see, son."

Andy stared at his father, pinching his brows, and then he looked out the window again.

"Well, it's right there, near the trunk of the blasted pine," Andy started. "It looks white. It flutters a bit. I think it's a blanket caught on the bushes."

"Does it glow? Is it brighter than everything else?" his father asked.

Andy was surprised. "Yes!" he said. "Strange, isn't it?"

Celia strained to see over her father's shoulder. Grant got up from his chair and walked back to the window. He stood between his father and Andy. "I still don't see a thing," Grant murmured, shaking his large head from side to side and drawing his lips tightly in.

"Bana, N'isjam, I can't see at all," Celia complained.

"Celia, put some fresh wood in the fire," her father said.

"You said you didn't want no more wood in the stove," Celia complained.

"Andy, I'm going to walk with you out to where that thing is and I don't want you to get scared."

"Why should I be scared?" Andy asked, alarmed.

"We can't see what you're seeing," his father answered, "but I know what it is. When you get close to it, it will try to frighten you. You mustn't run away."

"But it just looks like a blanket."

"Is Andy getting sick?" Celia asked.

"Bring the axe, Grant," the man ordered. "We're going outside."

"What's going on, Dad?" Grant asked as he put his coat on.

"Somebody is calling for Andy's help. Somebody we know is in trouble and Andy has to help," the man answered. He lifted his black woolen jacket from the nail in the wall and put it on. There was a troubled expression on his face, and his brows twitched uncontrollably. His complexion became paler and his jet black eyes glittered.

"What do I have to do?" Andy asked, and his question was a whisper and his eyes didn't want to know.

His father walked to the door, opened it and then yelled over the cold air rushing in, "You have to embrace it!"

Balls of shavings blew in circles over the planked floor. Wind arched his back and hissed, spitting saliva toward the open door, before retreating under the stove again.

"But what is it anyway?" Grant shouted.

"Amalegne'ji" his father answered. "That is the Micmac name for it! Amalegne'ji! It is a spirit!"

His father stepped outside. Grant followed him. Andy glanced out the window again. Whatever it was that he was seeing didn't look like a spirit to him. It was just some clothing stuck to a bush. And just because it glowed somewhat didn't really matter. A white bucket at the edge of the field glowed as much. Or was that only when the moon was full?

"You see it—don'tcha, Celia?" Andy asked his sister, who had returned to the window and was intently peering out.

"I'm trying real hard," she answered, brushing aside the long brown strands of hair that kept blowing across her face. "I never seen a spirit before. Why can't I see it, too? Is it wearing chains?"

Andy turned away in disgust. He didn't bother to put his jacket on. He glanced at the blazing lantern and walked straight out the door, oblivious to the frosty air. The image of the lantern followed him out the door as a splotch of violet superimposed on the blackness he stum-

bled into. For a few seconds he was blinded and then he could make out his father and Grant waiting for him. Grant looked terrified. His small bulging eyes stared at his father, as if looking at anything else would drain his lingering courage. Andy, after stepping outside, sensed a difference that he could not quite distinguish at first and for a moment he smiled foolishly at his father. Then it hit him. He felt that he was in another world—a world that resembled the ordinary world but was thick with the attendance of supernatural whispers and unsettling caresses. The wind was blowing, making the dry branches click together and the waves lunge against the rocks to spray the grassy bank. And the wind had a sheen to it. Andy could see its innumerable tentacles curling or rushing or stretching up to the treetops.

His father spoke but Andy didn't hear him. His father walked up to him and rasped into his right ear. "I know where it is," his father said. "I can see the bushes shaking. Go over to it. I will be close behind you. Do not run away when you get close to it. It will look at you. It has a terrifying face. No matter how scary it is, you have to put your arms around it. You have to embrace it. Nothing will happen to you."

Andy walked toward the apparition. His father followed behind him. Grant remained close to the door of the house. Celia's head darkened one corner of the window. As Andy got closer to the image, it became more distinct. The figure was just a bit over five feet tall, the same height as he. It was hunching slightly, its back to him.

"Son," Andy heard his father shout behind him, "Amalegne'ji will turn its face to look at you once you get close to it! You can't look away from it! Just don't run away! Don't get scared! Embrace it, no matter how you feel! Somebody close to you needs your help—remember that!"

Andy was so numbed that his fear felt unfamiliar, yet a part of him was indifferent and curious to see what the spirit looked like. The last few steps were a blur to him. He no longer felt his legs and his

motor skills functioned on their own. When he got to within arm's length of it, the spirit spun its head around and Andy felt an attack of nausea surging in his guts.

Amalgne'j appeared to have no face at first. But Andy quickly realized that this impression was due to the fact that its lips and eyelids were sewn shut. No sooner had Andy comprehended this bizarre feature when the seams that sealed the eyelids burst open, revealing two enormous eyes that pulsed and squirmed and were coated with a slimy film that reminded Andy of washed-up jellyfish going bad and turning yellowish gray. The eyes were like two yolks broken open from eggs that had matured and there was the color of blood and milky yellow in them. The pupils were mere specks of scarlet from which red veins discharged, cracked and wriggled. And the eyes were larger than a man's palms.

Andy recoiled from the unrelenting, piercing eyes, but even though he quickly snapped his head to his left, the eyes followed him and he felt as if he were impaled to his very core by their penetrating scrutiny. He shut his eyes and almost doubled over but the huge sickening eyes of the creature followed him behind his cupped hands and sealed eyelids. He wheeled around and yelled "Father! Father!" and flailed with his arms and still he could not escape the eyes. His fear escalated into panic and he was about to begin swinging wildly at the maddening eyes when he heard his father shouting, "It will disappear the very moment you embrace it, son! Do not run away! Do not strike it! Embrace it! Turn around and embrace it!" Andy reached out with his open arms trembling and stepped forward and he felt the wind streaming down his open collar and puffing out the back of his shirt. "Turn around! Turn around!" his father yelled.

Andy tried to yell, "I want to embrace the damned thing and be done with it but where is it?" He could not utter even a word, however, because his breathing came in fast, short gasps. He turned stiffly, making a perfect about-face, his back straight and his arms extended as if

he were holding a boulder. With strained, bent legs, he staggered toward the fiend. He noticed that its head was once again joined with its body, and so, fearing that this opportunity to end his nightmare might mysteriously slip away from him, he lunged at the horror and threw his arms around it. He thought he heard the cat scream. Perhaps it was the wind. The thing he clung to shook violently for a moment and then its strength expired with a brisk wind that blasted through Andy's ribcage. Something moaned in the woods. A second later it moaned again and the moan was fainter, coming from deeper in the forest.

"Well done, son!" Andy heard his father yell. It took him a while to realize that his eyes were sealed shut. The darkness was never so welcome. He kept his eyes closed. He kept his head bowed. He did not dare to peep out from the corners of his eyes. Then he felt his father shaking him by his shoulders.

"Get up, son. You have to chop off this bush now."

Andy opened his eyes. He realized that he was hugging a willow bush. The wind had subsided. He was drenched in sweat and the muscles of his arms ached. Painfully he stretched his fingers out of their fistled curls. Slowly he straightened up and took in a robust chestful of the damp night air.

"Grant, bring the axe over here!" his father yelled.

Grant walked over from the house with the axe, and his father seized the axe from him and gave it to Andy. Grant stared at Andy. "Nisgam muduid, you better put my coat on or you'll get sick," Grant said, taking his coat off and handing it to Andy.

"Well, you go back in the house, then, and make sure there's a good fire going in the stove," the father ordered Grant.

"Okay," murmured Grant, giving Andy one last looking over before walking back to the house. Andy stood still for a minute, his arms hanging limply at his sides, the head of the axe resting on the ground and its handle held loosely in his fingers.

"What happened here, Dad?" he finally asked.

His father wiped his lips with his fingers, stretching the sides of his mouth, and then scratched the stubble under his jaw. "I'll tell you what I know when you get back inside," his father said. "Make sure you chop that bush off right down to the ground. Then bring it inside."

Andy watched his father's back as he walked to the cabin. He saw his father unbutton his jacket, pull out a package of cigarettes from his shirt pocket, light one and then walk on, hunched and thoughtful, blowing out shapeless clouds of smoke and not the perfect rings he exhaled when he was relaxing.

Andy chopped the bush down and dragged it into the cabin. It was warm and very dry inside. Celia stared at him from the far end of the table. Grant had his right side to him, pumping the gas lantern that was on the table. His father was smoking and pacing the floor.

"Chop it up and throw all the pieces into the fire," his father told him.

Andy walked over to the square block and began to chop up the bush. He removed Grant's coat and hung it next to their father's jacket and then continued chopping the bush into small pieces. When he was done, he opened the door of the stove and threw the pieces of the willow bush into the blaze. W'is'is raced out from under the stove and jumped onto Celia's lap. To Andy's surprise the fine willow sticks were not immediately consumed. They sat untouched over the flaming logs for a minute like thin rods of metal and then suddenly blackened and crumpled into ashes.

"It takes a strong fire," his father said.

Andy shut the door of the stove and returned to his seat next to the table.

"Now you two didn't see anything and you would like for Andy to tell you what he saw," his father said, eyeing Celia and Grant. "Hand me that chair, Grant. Thanks. I'm going to tell you what happened to me when I was a young man so you'll understand what happened to-

night. I'll take Andy a long time for him to say what he saw because it's so hard to describe these things. Before I begin, I think we should all have some tea. Celia, bring out the cups and, Grant, you pour it out. I think the pot's too heavy and hot for her. Oh yeah, and don't forget to turn the damper a bit. We don't need a blazing fire now. Look at that, huh! *Mé'gaduu*. The stovepipe's just glowing red! Boys, it's hot in here. *Mog'ua*, don't open the door, Andy. Not for a while anyway. A little sweat is good for us. Fire cleanses. Thank you, Celia. Okay, that's good enough, Grant."

Their father drank a mouthful of black steaming tea. Grant, after pouring tea into all the cups, set the teapot on the part of the stove farthest from the fire. Their father stared at the floor, collecting his thoughts, and the children sat perfectly still, waiting. The delicious flavor of willow bark permeated the room. Their father lit another cigarette and then told his story, pausing for a drag every so often. From the very start, his voice was heavy and reluctant and his eyes stared out over his listeners' heads, glancing at them only occasionally.

"I was thirteen when I started working in the woods," he said. "I learned from your grandfather, my father. When I turned fifteen, I was already very smart with the axe. I went to work. There was a logging camp in the Miramichi. I found work there. I thought I was going to work as a logger but they made me a cook's assistant instead. Well, that was okay. Got to eat real good food and the lumberjacks liked my cooking. I didn't like it at first, though. The guy in charge of the mess hall had me peel all the potatoes. I did that for one week and I was ready to quit. I knew how to use the axe and I could cut as many cords as the next guy, I figured. When I threatened to leave, Dutchie—that was the head cook's name—a short man but almost as wide as he was tall, and I don't mean fat either, but just plain big-boned and husky—well, this Dutchie come up to me and put his big hairy hand on my shoulder and asked me if I could cook. And I told him, sure I could. I cooked a few dishes that I knew and the guys enjoyed it but Dutchie

taught me quite a bit more about cooking than I knew. I got to be good friends with Dutchie. He didn't live in camp. He had his house across the river. I went to visit him all the time.

"Now Dutchie had a wife and a daughter. The girl was eleven. She had long dark hair and big round eyes. She really got to like me. Every time I paid Dutchie and his family a visit, I would bring along some present for the girl. She was like my baby sister. She even started calling me Uncle Jimmy. She was a very special person. She could tell stories just like an adult. Both Dutchie and his wife would listen to her when she told her stories. *E'be*. I can still see them sitting in that cozy living room they had. It was funny—Dutchie's wife was taller than him. Their daughter talked about things I never had, like going to school and talking to teachers and learning to read and write. I was young and sometimes I walked back to the camp thinking about learning all that stuff. I'd tell myself that I still could do it 'cause I wasn't old. *Nisgam*, I had crazy daydreams but I liked it. Seemed like a whole new world was just an arm's reach away.

"Winter times I could walk across the frozen river instead of going the long way around and using the bridge. I wanted to pay Dutchie and his family a visit but a storm blew over. I heard that his daughter was sick. I bought some things for her—you know, sweets and stuff—but I couldn't take it to her. I had to wait for the storm to blow over. And it stormed for about five days straight, I think. The last day of the storm wasn't freezing cold. It was a wet snowfall. Perfect for making snowballs. Bad for snowshoeing. When the storm was over, I waited all day for this wet snow to freeze over so I could walk over it. By nightfall I figured the crust was hard enough. I started walking across the wide river straight toward Dutchie's house. I hadn't seen Dutchie all week. Another fellow took over for him. The same guy that had set me to work peeling potatoes when I first started there. I missed Dutchie. It was a dark night. The frozen crust held me up pretty good.

"Now I got to about halfway across the river when I noticed

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something white and shiny, sorta flapping in the breeze a good ways ahead of me. I didn't know what it was. It was right in my way, so I kept on walking toward it. When I got close to it, I thought it was a man wrapped in a white blanket. Of course, I became concerned for the poor fellow. Maybe he was lost and freezing. That's what I thought when I seen that blanket. But it wasn't a blanket. It glowed. I didn't think nothing of it, though. You know, when something strange comes up to you, the first thing you try to do is make it into something you know. That's what your mind does, see. Even if something isn't quite right—if your mind thinks it has figured it all out, well, then it'll just ignore all the little things that aren't right. So there I was, thinking I could help some guy who was lost and freezing in the middle of the river. I even figured that it would be shorter to take him back to camp than to go the rest of the way to Dutchie's house.

"So I walked right up to the guy. He looked like he was crouching a bit. That only made me more sure that he was shivering. 'Hey, are you okay?' I said and I reached out for him. Then he turned his head around so fast that I almost choked on my heart. He wasn't a human! He was the scariest-looking spirit I had ever seen! Its mouth and eyes were sewn shut. Then its eyes flew open, and the busted seams fluttered around like so many twisted eyelashes. *Nisgam muduid*, and the eyes! It had eyes the size of saucers. Big yellow eyes that glowed. They beat like hearts! They looked shiny and sickening. Red veins ran all over them. The pupils looked like blood clots in the centers of those slimy eyes! And they stared right into my soul! Stared with hard, angry eyes! I was so shocked that I didn't even think what I was doing. I just punched the creature's head. I just reacted. Then I took off back to camp and I didn't even look back once."

The man paused to drink more tea and light another cigarette. Again he studied the floor for a long time, then he raised his head and looked past his young listeners. His gleaming black eyes looked pained. He squinted, shielding his eyes from his children.

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"I knew what it was. Right after I had swung at it, I knew what it was," he confessed. "But I took a shot at it without even pausing to think—so I haven't changed, humph! Yes, yes, yes . . . I prayed all night but it didn't help. How could it? I was sick to my stomach, knowing I would find out something horrible the next day. I had heard stories about the spirit called Amalegne'j, the Sheeted One. When I finally fell asleep, it was very late, so I woke up late and I had to rush to the mess hall and get to work. It wasn't long before word got to us at the camp that Dutchie's daughter had died. I walked away from camp. I walked out to middle of the river. There was a snowman standing there with half of its head on its shoulders and the other half on the snow beside it. I cried. I cried. I cried and I swore that if I ever had a daughter that I would name her Celia. That was Dutchie's daughter's name—Celia. Amalegne'j appeared to me because Celia needed my help and she felt I was the one who loved her and was brave enough to save her. But I got too scared."

The man paused again.

Celia's eyes were wide with revelation. She whispered, "Love needs courage, then."

"But why are its eyes sewn shut, Dad?" Andy asked.

"Amalegne'j, the Sheeted One, is one name by which it is called," the man replied. "The other name for it is Eli'sasid, the Sewn One. Many of our people still prepare the corpses. The only way they can close the mouth and eyes is by sewing them shut."

"Brrrr!" Celia shuddered.

"When you were born," their father continued, looking at Celia, his voice now detached and matter-of-fact, "I kept my promise to that girl and I named you Celia. As for what Andy's done tonight, I have only to say that we'll probably never find out who of our loved ones he saved. Our people are scattered all over Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Maine at this time of year and we won't be getting together again till early summer. Now light that lantern, Grant, and hang it up on that

beam. I need more light here if I'm going to see what I'm doing. And then I want all of you to start sanding the pieces you've shaved so far."

Grant struck a wooden match, stuck it inside the glass of the gas lantern and turned two valves. The gas leaked out in a hiss and then a ball of blue fire swelled inside the glass before the flames gathered into the mantle and became a white, blinding ball of light. The incessant snoring of two gas lanterns brought a lull to the cabin. The sandpaper scraping the hardwood was barely audible. Only their father shaping another rough-cut with the axe and the sparks popping in the stove could be heard.

"Who do you think it was?" Andy finally asked, and for a moment he wasn't sure if he had only thought the question. The breathing of the gas lanterns hushed everything else. Neither Grant nor Celia responded. They had their heads bowed and their hands intently worked smoothness into the wood.

Andy's father paused from his work. He let the head of the axe rest on the square block, then he turned his head while still bent over and looked at Andy and said, "I don't know, son. You did the right thing . . . Maybe it was your mother." Then he went back to work, shaping the hard white stick of ash.