

Caribou Mountain

By Burns Ellison

The next morning when Paul and I crawled out of our tent and saw the tusk of the mammoth roped to one of the pontoons on Crowley's floatplane we weren't surprised. Nor surprised either when Trevis told us we were flying up to Caribou Pass. We'd known that was in the works ever since Josie Sam flew back there after the night's altercation with the two guys in the Chena Bar. During all the time we were at Bascomb's Lake, Trevis had never mentioned them. But we'd both known that he was thinking about them and what they might do to her if they ever found her. And I'd been thinking about them, too, remembering how much the guy's hairy armpits stank when he got me down and was trying to gouge out my eye with his thumb.

As for showing up in Caribou Pass with a ten-foot long, two-hundred pound mammoth tusk, I wondered if what Trevis had in mind was like a Sioux or Cheyenne brave once did when he offered horses to the father of the maiden he was courting. Paul, though, thought it probably had more to do with Trevis's flair for the dramatic and his desire to make the grand gesture than anything else.

"Besides," Paul said, "I don't see how he could be thinking to offer it to her father since she never knew who her father was."

Crowley's cream-white Porter's floatplane was cruising at 4,000 feet. We were flying between 160 and 170 miles an hour and burning 40 gallons of jet fuel per hour. There were the four of us, along with tents and sleeping bags, fishing gear, a box of canned goods, a spare fifty-five-gallon barrel of fuel, two five-gallon cans of oil, a battery-charged pump and fuel hose, and an air pump to remove water from the leaking floats. And of course the mammoth tusk roped to one of the pontoons.

Below, the tundra was like a straw-yellow polygonal mat dotted with ponds and streams with, here and there, up thrust mounds of earth and ice called pingos. Then we were flying over pale green and burnt red ridges splashed with sweeps of white snow. Sun and clouds and sky. Emerald ponds, and ponds sapphire blue, lime green, and lemon yellow. Rivers blue and green, others a glacial gray. Jeweled waters streaming in the sun—I closed my eyes to imprint what I

was seeing. Fiery images danced on the backs of my lids. And as I gazed out the window, coming ever closer, looming up fabulous and white—the Brooks Range.

Flying over a braided, willow-banked river, we spotted a grizzly ambling along a gravel bar.

Crowley circled back. As he made his descent, the grizzly took off, feet churning, kicking up clouds of sand and gravel in its wake. Hump-shouldered, silver-tipped, and immense, it plunged into the river, the water boiling into a white froth. Crowley kept banking down—why didn't he pull back up?

“Crowley—for Christ's sake—“

But of course, it was the weight of that goddamned mammoth tusk! I caught a tilted, wild glimpse of the grizzly rearing up and flailing its huge paws at us—the talons like grappling hooks; and then Crowley had succeeded in leveling the plane off, its dark shadow racing beneath us across the tundra. Balding head shiny with sweat, he stole a glance at Trevis. Seated behind him, I couldn't see the look on Trevis's face, but I didn't need to.

We entered a deep valley between high peaks and heaped white clouds, then swung down over several small lakes and the village of Caribou Pass—a hodgepodge of tents, sod houses, log cabins, and tarpaper-peeling shacks—to land upon the blue waters of the Lost Loon River. Crowley eased the plane into a small inlet, and Trevis jumped ashore to tie the plane down. As Paul and I waded in, a flock of fat-cheeked children converged upon us, jabbering and pointing excitedly at the tusk.

Two guys wearing billed caps, Levi's, and Levi jackets, came to the river's edge. The taller of the two had a ponytail; the other's black hair was cropped short.

“Looks like you've been doing some serious hunting,” the taller guy said.

“Serious digging is more like it,” Trevis said.

“You bring any brews with you?”

“Hell, that's why we stopped here,” Crowley said. “We hoped you boys would have something.”

“Robert, you hear that?” the taller guy said to his companion. “These dudes show up and they don't even bring anything to drink. Man, what is this?” Robert only smiled.

“Well, you sure know how to make a fellow feel welcome,” Crowley observed.

“Hey, man,” the taller guy said, stepping forward to offer his hand. “My name’s Leonard—Leonard John. And this is Robert here, Robert James. Listen, you guys come with us, we always got coffee to drink.”

We tagged along with them over a small rise, Leonard telling us about when he’d lived Outside, hanging out with the hippies in San Francisco and a biker’s gang in Oakland called the Satan’s Brood. “Yeah, they were good people, but then I came back. This is my home.”

We walked along a muddy trail edged with willows, blue lupine, and yellow tundra roses. Overhead the sun still shone, but along both sides of the trail great pyramids of rock rose up into a darkening sky. I breathed in the odors borne on a cooling rain-laced wind, odors of high country, of wild country, so much the same as those I remembered from childhood summers in the Colorado Rockies—or the Bitterroots of Montana only the summer before. We waded across a stream and walked over a narrow wooden bridge above a larger stream, the water flowing clear and cold.

Robert pointed overhead to a pair of bald eagles, flying so low I could distinguish their snowy heads and yellow beaks, their fan-shaped tail feathers and stark black underbellies.

“There’s your welcoming committee,” Leonard said.

But ravens were the birds to welcome us as we kept going. Glossy black, bigger than crows, they were perched on branches of spruce trees and roofs of cabins, hopping about on the ground, swooping overhead. And now and then--I can hear it still—in the midst of all their strident caws and croaks, one raven making this sound like a melodic watery gurgling.

We walked past beds of chest-high purple fireweed swarming with bumblebees, the trail widening as we entered the village. There we walked past cabins and shacks, some with snow machines, others with sled dogs tethered to their stakes. We walked past smokehouses and racks for drying caribou, salmon, and whitefish, past washtubs and clothes lines with shirts and jeans flapping in the wind, past children’s toys strewn about, past traps, oil drums and fuel cans, stacks of logs and firewood, piles of bleached white antlers.

An old man emerged from an outhouse and gave us a wave. A big, sullen-looking boy sat on the front porch of a shack. A large woman with swarthy, pitted features came out from inside it and yelled, “Get rid of that bowl of dirty water! We’re drinking ravens’ droppings!” The boy picked up a bowl and pitched the contents of it off the porch, and then he and the woman watched as we went by.

Then we were traipsing into a large tarpapered shack that was both Robert's home and the village store. Store goods lined the shelves of the front half of the shack. In the rear, separated by a partially open curtain, I saw two beds and a crib on one side, on the other a kitchen counter with a soot-blackened coffeepot on a Coleman stove and a washbasin full of dirty dishes. Standing beneath a Coleman lantern hung from the ceiling, Robert poured us all cups of coffee. A woman with a baby emerged from behind the curtain. More villagers entered the shack, kids peering in through the doorway.

"If you guys come to hunt caribou," Leonard said as he pulled out crates for us to sit on, "you're shit out of luck because they haven't shown up yet?"

Trevis asked him if he knew where he could find a woman from the village named Josie Sam.

"Huh? Didn't you say something about you guys having been in Fairbanks?" Leonard said. "That's where you'll find her."

"No," Robert said, "I think she is around." The woman with the baby tugged at his shoulder and he turned to see what she wanted. Next to her was the large woman with the swarthy, pitted features whom I had seen earlier. Behind me, I heard Paul ask about fishing in the river and somebody saying we were too late for salmon but that we could still catch grayling. Then he asked about the lakes we had flown over. "Oh yeah," somebody said, "they got lots of big pike, you betcha."

Robert turned back to Trevis. "My wife and Edna say she might be at her half brother, Everett Moses's place." He said Everett's cabin was about a mile outside the village but that if Trevis wanted to go there it would be better if somebody went with him

"Yeah, man," Leonard broke in, "Everett was in Vietnam, and he can be pretty weird. Besides, she's probably not there, anyway. Usually when she comes back here, she goes upriver to stay with Titus Moses."

"He's another half brother?"

"No, Titus is like—I think, her grandfather's cousin—"

"No, no, Leonard," Edna said, "you got that all wrong. Titus is the uncle of Josie's mom, Mary."

"Okay, you heard that," Leonard said, giving us an exasperated look. "Edna here's the village authority on everything you want to know."

“Maybe you’d know more about our people’s genealogy, too, if you hadn’t had to go off and be a hippie,” Edna replied. She turned to Robert’s wife. “Can’t you see Leonard with a flower in his hair?” They laughed.

Trevis asked Robert and Leonard how people in the village would feel about our staying over for a night or if that was something we should take up with the chief. Robert said that just then the chief and others were up on Caribou Mountain keeping an eye out for the first members of the herd that was supposed to be coming through.

“You dudes want to camp here—no problem,” Leonard said. “You’re our guests, me and Robert’s. I’ll show you where you can stay, then take you to where Everett lives.”

On our way back to the river, he said it was probably just as well we hadn’t brought along any alcohol.

“Yeah, some of the elders, along with the chief and the priest, decided they wanted to make this a dry village. Of course every time somebody comes back from Fairbanks, man, you know he’s bringing something back with him. So if now,” he said, giving me a conspiratorial grin, “you brought any weed, any smokes, we might be able to work something out.”

After we had gotten our backpacks from the plane, Leonard led us to a place where we could camp and then he and Trevis started out for Everett’s cabin. Paul and I began to put up our tent while Crowley sat down next to a tree with his maps.

“You asked about the fishing,” he said. “Well, I was talking to this one jasper back there who said if we wanted to catch ourselves some lake trout, and he said big ones, we should go either to Wolverine Lake or Porcupine Lake. Here, I’ll show you where they are.”

He came over with one of his maps, and we stopped what we were doing to have a look. Wolverine Lake was about thirty miles north of where we were, and Porcupine Lake another dozen miles or so northeast of it.

“Now, you never know what the hell you can believe when these people tell you something,” Crowley said, “but I think we should try at least one of these lakes while we’re here.”

I asked him if he’d said anything about this to Trevis. He shook his head. “Boys, just between you and me and the doorknob, this is something we might want to do on our own. All Trevis seems to care about is tracking down his girl friend. Shit, I never thought I’d see it, but

he's turned into a goddamned klooch man—but hey, boys,” he added, “don't get me wrong. I like that Indian pussy as much as the next man, but Jesus Christ, not as a steady diet.”

Crowley then said he had to get something from his plane. Paul and I watched him go off in his tilted forward half-shuffle.

“You realize, don't you, that he almost got us killed back there,” I said, referring to when Crowley had tried to “buzz the griz.”

“Ah, Crowley...” Paul said, shaking his head. “To know him is to love him.”

We finished putting up our tent, and then we started putting up the one Trevis and Crowley were sharing, noticing that Crowley didn't come back until we were done with it. Informing us that he was going to take himself “a siesta,” he immediately crawled into it. That was fine with us. Given what we had in mind, we didn't want Crowley hanging around, anyway. I took the coffeepot down to the river to get some water while Paul unpacked our Coleman stove. When I came back he offered up one of his meticulously-rolled joints that we passed back and forth while waiting for the water to boil. Paul was more of an old hand at this than I was, and I didn't try to keep up with him when he took his practiced long deep drags; nonetheless, I could tell almost at once that I was feeling the effects of the pot. I was dumping some Folgers into the coffeepot when, glancing up, I saw a tall, bearded guy wearing glasses and a beret coming down the trail toward us. I told Paul to hide the joint.

Don Cleary was his name, and as we quickly found out, he was the Episcopalian priest in Caribou Pass, and yes, he'd be delighted to join us for a cup of coffee. He said he and his wife Marion—who'd had to fly back to the states the week before to be with her father in Madison, Wisconsin, who was dying of cancer—had been here in Caribou Pass for four years now.

“Marian and I love it here,” he said. “But we both have our concerns about Vietnam, and we've been struggling with the question of whether this is where God wants us to be.”

“Well, if you're talking about being over there instead,” Paul said, “frankly, that's one question I haven't had to struggle with.”

“And I hope I didn't make it sound as though you should be,” Don said. “Actually, Marion and I have been wondering if we shouldn't be somewhere on a campus, like Madison, for example, where we could be offering spiritual guidance and counseling to draft resisters--“

“Well, you’d certainly be placing yourselves at the epicenter of things if you went there,” Paul replied (prone to pontificate, he was even more so when high). “As I assume you must know, Madison is a hotbed of student protest.”

“Yeah, from what I hear, it’s like, uh, a real tinderbox there,” I said, wondering if that was the right choice of word.

Then somehow the conversation had jumped to the big forest fire near Fairbanks that crews were still trying to put out. Yeah, that was another tinderbox I was tempted to add, but then I thought better of it. Saying he wanted us to call him Don, he said he didn’t mean to be going on as he had, but that what with Marion being away—“Say, you fellows wouldn’t mind if I helped myself to some more coffee, would you?”

Don obviously wanted to talk to somebody, but I was having trouble following what he was saying because I kept thinking about Josie Sam and wondering if Trevis had found her. It was different when Trevis and Paul and I were at Bascomb’s Lake, where it was only the three of us but now--

--I realized Don must have just asked me something because he seemed to be staring at me. What? Could he tell I was stoned? I glanced at Paul. He and Don had apparently gone back to talking about Vietnam because Paul was saying he’d have to agree. “Oh no, there’s no escaping Vietnam, not even up here.”

Then Don was asking what brought us to Caribou Pass, and Paul said something about not having seen this part of the Brooks Range before, and that when we’d had the chance to catch a ride here with a pilot friend we’d thought we should make the most of it.

“Oh, I can understand about that,” Don said. “So, if I might ask, what kind of work do you fellows do?”

Paul told him we were working as biologists on a wildlife project outside Fairbanks, and of course Don wanted to hear all about that. But then did he, really? I was beginning to have the sense that he was desperate for somebody to talk to, and I wondered if there might be something more going on about why his wife Marian wasn’t here than what he had told us

Then I found myself wondering why Paul hadn’t said anything to him about Josie Sam. Being the village priest, Don probably knew her—might even know where she was. But then maybe Paul was thinking it wouldn’t be such a good idea to mention her; after all, if Don knew

anything about the kind of life she lived when she was in Fairbanks, what would that tell him about us if we said we knew her?

Besides, Josie had already told us about her half brother, Charlie Moses, being kicked out of the village for smuggling in drugs; and according to what Leonard had said, Don was probably one of those responsible for that. Remembering Josie's stories about her great-grandfather the shaman and all the conflicts he'd had with priests. I didn't think she'd like it that we were even talking to this guy. And who knows, maybe Don had tried to put the moves on her, and that was the real reason why his precious Marian wasn't here.

I stared across the river at the stands of spruce, and at the steep rock formations that reared above them into the misting dark sky. Mosquitoes starting to bite, I went to our tent to get one of our army surplus bottles of Jungle Juice. Rubbing it on my face and arms, I watched the two of them talking, Paul stroking his goatee, Don running his fingers through his beard.

But I wasn't in the least interested in what they were taking about because I couldn't stop thinking about Josie Sam and wondering if Trevis had found her, and if, even now, they were off somewhere making love. I imagined her baring her breasts for him, and Trevis fondling them and kissing them--then telling myself this was ridiculous, that it wasn't as if I was the one she was sleeping with, I decided to hell with it, I'd go for a walk.

I started along the trail upriver, discovering that if I kept moving the mosquitoes weren't all that bad. Ducking to protect my eyes, I made my way through thickets of willow and alder. The trail began to climb, and then I was walking over a twenty-foot bluff that dropped precipitously to where the river's deep-running channel swerved and sliced into the bank. Shafts of the evening's sun broke through the clouds, flashing on the blue green waters. Off to my right was a marsh with tundra ponds and pockets of spruce. One of the villagers in Robert's store said he had seen a grizzly and her cub somewhere along the river. I was hoping to see them, or their tracks--or some indication of their presence, a pile of shit, ripped up stumps or gouged out chunks of tundra. And just then I felt as I always did in places where there were big bears, the sense of things heightened and the need to pay attention. In other words, put her out of mind--stop thinking about her!

I came to where a stream entered the river. Stepping over rocks to cross it, I was sorry I hadn't brought my spinning outfit with me. There had to be fish in here, grayling, perhaps Arctic

char, using those boulders and the deep water around them as hiding places from which they could dart out and seize a lure.

A cool breeze had come up—enough of one to fend off mosquitoes. I sat on a stump and watched the light and water dance before my eyes, not wanting just then to be anywhere other than where I was.

When I came to the fork in the trail, I knew from what I'd overheard Robert and Leonard tell Trevis that the trail to the right, away from the river, should be the one to Everett Moses's cabin. The ground softened and turned to bog, and then I was following fresh human tracks going in both directions that I figured were Trevis's and Leonard's. Then I came upon the deep, splayfooted tracks of a moose. They also looked fresh, and I couldn't resist it—I left the trail and followed them until they disappeared into a marsh that in turn gave way to a large pond, the other side of which was obscured by low-lying banks of white mist. A beaver swam along the near shore, carrying stems and leaves in its mouth. I stood there, thinking that if only I concentrated hard enough I could will the moose to appear from out of the mist—perhaps rear up from the pond, water streaming down its flanks, pond weed dangling from its huge glistening rack of antlers.

Suddenly three large birds exploded from the marsh with strident bugle-like cries. Patches of red on their heads, long-necked with gangly long legs and great flapping wings—three sandhill cranes swooping over the pond, their cries sounding after them.

The cabin was sunk back in the trees, its logs caulked with moss and tundra. A broken-down sled was propped up against one side of the cabin, along with snowshoes and two or three rusted old traps. Two huskies were tied to their stakes off to the other side of the cabin. They watched me suspiciously. I knocked on the cabin door, and both dogs started yelping. Looking up at the dark anvil-shaped clouds overhead, I knocked again and waited. I was about to give it up when I heard sounds from inside, scrapings and shuffling of feet. The door opened, and a man wearing dark glasses, fatigue pants, and a dirty T-shirt with a peace sign on it stood before me. He was a tall, emaciated-looking Indian with a wispy mustache, the beginnings of a scraggly beard, and long, ropy black hair growing down below his shoulders

“Everett Moses?”

“Man, how come you guys keep coming around bugging me?”

Struggling to make myself heard over the yelping of his dogs, I told him I was looking for Josie Sam, that I was a friend of hers.

“Shut up!” he yelled at his dogs. Then he turned back to me. “You’re a friend of hers, hunh?”

I nodded.

“No shit, and here I thought you come all the way out here to see me. I was gonna say come on in, I’m just heating up a can of stew, and, hell, I can’t eat it all. But fuck it, if you’re looking for her, she’s not here.”

I asked if he knew where she was.

“Fuck if I know. I’m not my sister’s keeper. And if I did know, why should I tell you? For all I know, you might be some bad ass fucker she came up here to get away from. Hey, wait a minute,” he cried, giving me a big grin, exposing his broken-off, rotting teeth. “Are you the guy she brained with a pool cue?”

I told him that was somebody else.

“Oh, so you’re one of the good guys—is that what you’re telling me?”

I said it probably wouldn’t make any difference what I told him, that he wouldn’t believe me.

“You about got that right. Look, I know who you are, and I knew who your friend was, too, when he and Leonard came by.”

“So you talked to them?”

“No, I didn’t wanta talk to them. I just let ‘em bang on the door until they left.”

I felt drops of rain, and was sorry I had come here. I said if he could tell me where Josie Sam was that I would appreciate it, and then I’d be on my way and he wouldn’t have to talk to me anymore either.

“She’s gone to see Titus Moses.”

I thanked him, and turned to leave.

“Hey, man,” he said, grabbing my arm, “didn’t I just tell you I was fixing something to eat? Hey, I don’t want you going off and telling my sister what an asshole I was.”

Thunder rolled over the peaks above, and more drops of rain began coming down. I had to lower my head when I entered his cabin. He had a candle burning on his kitchen counter, but it was still dark enough inside that it took a moment before I could see anything. The floor

was littered with crumpled-up cans and spilled sacks of garbage. There were clothes thrown about, old newspapers and girly magazines; there were stacks of firewood, a slop bucket, and a garbage can containing what I assumed was drinking water.

Everett nodded toward a table and a stool. I sat down on the stool and took my shoes off while he stood over a barrel-shaped stove, stirring his pot of stew. Behind the stove were cardboard boxes and crates and a sagging old mattress with caribou hides piled on it. Across the room from where I sat was a bunk bed with an army blanket on it.

Everett gave me a bowl of stew with some pilot crackers, then sat on his bunk and lit himself a cigarette. I asked him if he wasn't eating. He said he'd eat later when he was hungry. I helped myself to one of the crackers, and then tried the stew.

"Sorry I can't offer you anything fancier."

I told him the stew was good and made an effort to spoon some more of it down. He sat there, legs crossed, shoulders hunched forward, smoking his cigarette. He seemed to be watching me, but I couldn't tell because of his dark glasses. Both windows in the cabin were boarded shut and I wondered how he could see anything.

"Here, let me give you something to help wash that shit down." Everett reached under his bunk and brought out a coffee cup, a can of Coca-Cola, and a bottle of rum. "Get yourself a cup," he said, nodding toward the counter. I got one and he poured some rum into it, then some Coke. "Peace, man," he said, and we both drank.

He was right in that the rum did help to wash down the stew. But I wished that he would take off his glasses, it would have been easier to talk to him. I told him I'd heard that the caribou were late coming through this year. He didn't say anything. What I'd said just hung there. I had another drink.

"I don't hunt anymore, and I don't shoot things anymore, either," he said.

I heard a distant howl, followed by the much closer and frenzied cries of his dogs. Finally they quieted down, and I wondered if the howl had come from a wolf.

"Were you in Nam?"

I shook my head.

"Yeah, man, I used to go on fifty-mile hunts for sheep, and, you know, I thought nothing of going up Caribou Mountain and coming back with one hundred pounds of caribou meat on my back. Then I went from that to hunting and killing gooks."

I didn't say anything.

"So how well you know my sister?"

"It's like I told you, I'm just a friend."

"What? You mean you're not fucking her?"

"No."

"I bet, though, you'd like to, wouldn't you?"

I didn't say anything to that either, feeling more and more that I shouldn't have come here.

"The other guy—that big guy you're with, he's fucking her, isn't he?"

"You'll have to ask him," I said.

Everett sprang to his feet. "No, man," he said, jabbing his finger at me. "I don't have to fucking do anything. Those days are done. Nobody's ever telling me again what I have to do. You got that?" He stared at me for an instant, then again gave me a big grin, exposing his bad teeth. "Hey, man, I bet people here warned you about me, didn't they. Yeah, 'watch out for that Everett, he's bad news.' Is that what they said? Yeah, I bet you're sitting there thinking, shit, I should've listened to what people told me, this fucker belongs in a psych ward. Yeah, man, when I was in Nam I killed gooks, and when I first got back here, when I'd get drunk, I'd get real crazy. Yeah," he said, shaking his cup at me, "this booze is like a predator. It gets you by the throat, and man, that's all she wrote. The trick is to stay on top of it."

He walked over and opened the door. "Goddamn," he said, peering outside, "I hate the fucking rain." He closed the door. "Here, give me your cup." He took it back to where he'd left his bottle and poured more rum into it. After he'd given it back to me, he sat back down on his bunk and poured what was left of the bottle into his cup.

"Man, all it did over there was rain," he said. "And you know how I got through it? Yeah, man, I don't mean just the rain but all the fucking shit. One night we got caught in the rain with grenades and rocket launchers, machine-gun fire—I mean shit coming in from everywhere, blowing up all around us, a fucking shit storm. And I had my face in the mud in a rice paddy—I'd taken a hit and I was holding onto myself, and I was crying and screaming but I couldn't even hear myself. Then a medic found me and gave me shots of morphine, and I closed my eyes, and it was like a dream. I dreamed myself back here, and I was on Caribou Mountain, and I wasn't there anymore—I was here. And I could see all these caribou and there were so many of them,

and they were all around me. And that was how I got through the night until they came and took me away in a chopper. And I know, you think this is all bullshit. But now when all that comes back on me, and I start to get crazy, I just remind myself that's part of the dream, too, and that I can do just like I did before, I can dream myself out of it..."

And that was when I found myself remembering the last lines of the poem that Trevis had recited the night before, sitting cross-legged by the campfire, eyes closed, chanting the words:

That's the way I dream it, that's the way I know,
Must of gone a-huntin' years and years ago,
For I've seen the mammoths—'t isn't you that could—
Moving like cathedrals through a dreadful wood.

And at that moment I would have given anything to be able to make Everett Moses an offering of what Trevis had insisted on bringing with us, the tusk of the mammoth that was still roped to one of the pontoons on Crowley's floatplane.

"Hey, man," he said, "I hope when you see Josie you don't go telling her what an asshole I was."

I started to say something but he cut me off.

"--Aw, fuck it, I don't give a shit what you tell her. Yeah, man, fuck it, I don't care...No, that's not true," he said. "Look, man, if you're really her friend like you say you are, you look after her. You hear what I say? 'Cause, man, she's all I got left, she's the only person I can talk to. Yeah, I worry about her. I just wish she'd stay the fuck out of Fairbanks, that's all."

I promised him that I would look after her, but I don't know if he even heard me. I waited to see if he might have anything more to say, and then after putting my shoes back on I got up and opened the door. It was dark outside and it had stopped raining. Overhead I could hear the cries of cranes flying through the night.

I glanced back as I closed the door. He was still sitting there--one knee crossed over the other, shoulders hunched forward, dark glasses still focused on me. But I doubted that he saw me at all. Probably he was somewhere off in a dream, back on Caribou Mountain.