

AN UNKNOWN
SHORE

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Jim Yeazel

*For Sue and Audrey,
the twin pillars of my strength and inspiration.*

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While I used many sources for my research, one book is worthy of special mention.

For virtually all of Hector's knowledge of grizzlies and for the character of Hector Chubb himself, William H. Wright's wonderful account:

The Grizzly Bear: The Narrative of a Hunter-Naturalist.
William H. Wright
Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909

DAY 1

SATURDAY

Suddenly there was more. One minute they'd only been two men night fishing on a Minnesota lake. Drifting, talking a little, drinking coffee from a thermos. Then, a tremor. A palpitation deep in the heart of the earth. A shiver of water. A shift of things.

It happened sometimes in that part of state -- a matter of both native geology and the leftover shafts and tunnels from the old iron mine days -- so they didn't think much of it at first. But about an hour later they began to hear sounds. Terrible sounds. First, a shriek that pierced the night high and hard above the trees. Weird but undeniably human. Then the noise of some thing or things crashing through the woods. After that the shriek again corkscrewing up, cracking against the sky.

They waited for more but it had ended, leaving them stunned, feeling that they had been auditory witness to something men were never meant to hear.

Carl Jerome, the man in the bow, asked the other -- Beane-- what he thought but Beane had no real answer.

"Somebody in trouble," he said, unshipping the oars and beginning to row.

"A camper?" Carl was gripping the sides of the little boat, watching the wooded shore where they were headed and talking out into the night.

“Nobody camps this far out.”

“What about a ranger?”

“The national forest is miles from here.” Beane was breathing deeply, trying to draw mental clarity from the cool October air.

By the time the boat dragged the weed bottom and touched shore there was a hard cold knot in his belly. A familiar feeling but one that hadn't been there for a long time.

They hauled the boat up among the dark rocks lumped at the edge of an inlet. Wind gusted in the branches high up. Scraps of cloud drifted against the cold moon. There would be rain before dawn. Beane handed Jerome a flashlight, switched on his own and looked at his old Bulova tank watch. Twelve thirty-three. They needed to move.

Jack pine, birch, aspen. The thick growth made it rough going. Even with Beane picking the way with his light they still tore their faces and hands on thorn bushes and low-hanging branches. Several times movement in the darkness made them stop but it was only shadow shifting in the light. At half a dozen points they were forced to backtrack around swampy ground. The farther they went the smaller they felt.

Beane knew it didn't make sense for anyone who was unfamiliar with that stretch of timber to be in it at night. It was too thick, too swampy and dangerous. And now his sense of direction had become skewed. He no longer had a feel for where the sounds had originated.

Another bog. He stopped, ran his light over the dense growth around them and looked back at Jerome who was bent over, hands on knees, laboring for breath.

His watch said it was nearly one-forty and he was beginning to consider giving the whole thing up when he noticed it. Barely perceptible but there. Woodsmoke. He shifted his head, tried to get a fix on the source. He asked Jerome if he smelled it. Jerome raised his head and shook it no.

Beane decided they'd come too far to turn back so he picked the direction that seemed most likely and moved. The going was a little easier now, the scrub and brush thinner. They walked lightly, ears cocked for sounds. Cold air had penetrated their clothes, chilling their sweat. Beane swallowed often to fight back a rising tide of apprehension.

A few more minutes with the woodsmoke smell growing stronger and Beane's beam broke through a wall of aspens. He signaled Jerome. They switched off their lights and moved closer, to the edge of a clearing. A loon called across the water far behind them.

A campsite. Green canvas tent. A fire burning low.

They crept from cover to the fire where a coffee pot steamed. Beane shifted it off the coals and called out, his voice sounding flat and featureless. No reply. Only the sound of rising wind in the trees. He ducked his head into the tent and ran his light over the inside. Two big rucksacks, two sleeping bags, a lantern.

He ducked back out and looked around the clearing. It felt strange. There was a kind of unresolved expectancy in the air, like the place was stuck in time, in the instant between a known past and...

And what?

There was something else. He recognized it immediately. Very faint but definite, like the woodsmoke before. The smell of something dead, something long dead. Something everyone smelled sometimes -- like when a mouse dies in a wall. Beane had smelled it barely a month ago. A widowed farmer who hadn't been seen in awhile. Beane had found him in a barn under a truck fallen off a jack. Dead at least four days. The same smell was here.

He lit a cigarette and tried to figure why men would leave their camp in the middle of the night, tried to piece it together with the sounds they'd heard out on the lake. Then Carl was talking from twenty feet away. Out toward the rim of the trees, slapping his flashlight against his palm, trying to revive the dying beam.

“Bring your light...goddammit...”

Beane moved to where he was pointing. A red baseball cap on the ground. He arced his light across the terrain beyond. More shapes. A torn blue cloth jacket, a brown leather glove. Scrub growth flattened all around and back to the fringe of the clearing twenty feet away. He signed to Jerome and entered the woods there, following his light along a sort of path between the trees.

The smell grew worse. Death. Decay. Putrefaction. Whatever they were following they were also getting closer to the source of the smell.

But now it wasn't just the smell of old death anymore. Now there was a smell of new death too. A combination that made Beane remember battlefields where the dead had lain unburied for days while the fighting went on, where the stench of rapid decay mingled with the stink of the newly killed. Excrement, the copper-sweet tang of blood, whatever else went into it.

A minute later another open space and neither of them prepared for what they found. Another mass with a lot of red showing, not unlike the color of the ball cap but big. Beane walked to it, not able to see it all in the insufficient beam of his light. When he finally recognized what it was he was almost on top of it.

It was the first scene of absolute violence he had seen in a very long time. As such it took a little while to understand what it was. When he finally did he had to fight the impulse to turn away, to put distance between it and himself. Instead he forced his hand to steady, forced himself to run his flashlight beam over the thing on the ground.

The body of a man. Or what had once been a man. Now a mangled mess of clumped flesh, sundered bone.

Using a defense mechanism developed long ago he began a detached mental inventory of what lay before him, simply recording images without processing the human significance of what he was seeing. The man was on his back. It had been hard to tell at first but Beane could see it now. His arms were thrown wide and his clothes

were in tatters. The torso was smashed, flattened, a glossy bag of entrails pressure-forced between splintered ribs. Arm and leg bones white. Meat and muscle shorn away. Skull crushed so savagely that the brain had exploded through ruptured bone and scalp. Bloody ragged holes where eyes had been. Skin and flesh of face torn away, exposing muscle and lipless grinning teeth. Body resting in a congealing stew of blood, clotted flesh and gristle.

Carl turned abruptly to the weeds and was sick.

Beane turned away finally himself to check the clearing, to try to make sense of what had happened and account somehow for the man's condition. When he couldn't he tried to locate the stink of dead animal he'd been smelling. He knew it didn't come from the man on the ground. He hadn't been dead long enough and things didn't smell like that unless they'd been dead for days.

No, the odor was in the air but strangely untethered to anything specific. Beane was missing something in the dark but knew he couldn't worry about it now. He needed to get back to town.

He turned to Carl who, since he'd stopped being sick, had been standing with his back to the mess on the ground, hugging himself, staring at the woods and shivering.

"Time to go," Beane said pushing the other man along with a hand.



Back at the camp Carl found a stick and worked at cleaning the vomit off his boots while Beane looked the place over a second time, sliding his light over the damp ground, hunting for clues.

After awhile he ducked into the tent and reemerged with one of the rucksacks. Carl had finished with the stick and was digging in his pockets. Beane took the pack to the fire and threw on an armful of wood.

"Al?" Carl was smoking now, nervously playing his gaze over the surrounding fringe of dark trees.

Beane found he had no cigarettes and told Carl to hand one over. Carl reacted automatically, held out his pack and realized he had forgotten what he wanted to ask.

Beane lit up, squatted by the fire and looked at the rucksack. A big canvas job. Army surplus. He opened it, rummaged around and whistled.

Carl squatted beside him to see and Beane held the pack open for him. Inside, an old nickel-plated long-barreled Smith and Wesson .38 with a walnut grip and several packs of currency bundled with paper strips lettered "Bank of Fargo - \$5000". Beane took a pack out, riffled through it. All hundreds. He put it back in the bag, dropped it on the ground and pulled something from his pocket. "I found this in the other sack."

"Other sack?"

Beane paused, thinking about something. "Yeah, camping stuff -- food, matches, a compass." He held the object up. "And this." A worn brown leather billfold. He flipped it open, removed a driver's license and angled it so he could see it in the firelight. "Starting to make some sense," he said.

"You know him?"

"Maybe." He shuffled through the other items in the wallet. "Couple days ago I got a batch of wanted notices from the FBI. Post office stuff. Two were for a couple of guys. Jim Alban and Cal something, wanted for a big robbery over in Fargo." He held up the wallet. "This appears to be Alban's billfold."

"Bank robbers?"

"Armored car." He gestured vaguely with the wallet. "Four days ago these two guys and at least one other knocked over a Brinks truck carrying a big payroll. They killed a guard then disappeared." He pushed the wallet into his jacket pocket and looked down at the rucksack. "Took a lot of money, a lot more than is here." He tossed his cigarette butt into the flames, asked Carl for another. "Question is: where're the others?"

"Maybe they split up."

"Maybe. But there's two rucksacks, two sleeping bags, two coffee cups..." He looked around. "And one guy didn't haul all this gear."

"You think he's out there somewhere?" Carl looked like he might be sick again.

"Possible. But we can't tell anything by tramping around more in the dark. I'll call Ham Sedley and the FBI when we get back."

"Ham Sedley?" The lenses of Carl's glasses flickered orange with reflected firelight.

"The sheriff. It's his jurisdiction out here not mine." Beane realized he didn't like the taste of Carl's cigarettes and snapped the smoking butt into the fire. He took the rucksack and went back into the tent. Carl watched his light stain the green canvas from the inside. When he came back out he kicked the fire apart and poured coffee on the coals, releasing a hissing column of steam into the night. Carl turned and gestured back at the trees. "What about him?"

"Nothing we can do with him tonight," Beane said. "Sedley and the feds need to see him like he is anyway."

Carl nodded bleakly.

A last look around and Beane found himself again puzzling over the smell of decay near the dead man. Likely just something he missed in the dark but still troubling. Finally he was finished. "Let's get out of here," he said. "This place makes me sick."



In his office Beane poured coffee from the wheezing electric percolator on the filing cabinet. He took the mug to the window and watched rain spatter the glass.

Carl sat slumped down in an old swivel chair, feet flat on the plank floor. Beane turned and regarded him briefly then pushed aside a pile of papers and set his mug on the blotter next to the FBI flyers of Jim Alban and Calvin Borges. On the peeling green wall behind Carl hung a tool company calendar with a curvy blonde in red high heels and coveralls several sizes too small. She straddled a giant wrench,

gripping it with both hands, riding it, head tossed back, eyes half-closed and cherry lips parted in some kind of tool-rodeo orgasm. Beane located the date: October 13, 1951.

He had spoken with the Minneapolis FBI office and was waiting for a call back from Shattuck County sheriff Hamilton Sedley. Carl appeared to be entranced by some thought.

“FBI plane’ll be at the cabin in two hours,” Beane said just to say something.

Carl came out of his trance. “Al?”

“Yeah?”

“You know the guy I told you about? The one talking to my classes?”

“Yeah.”

“I think he might be able to help us.”

“Help us how?”

“He knows animals,” Carl said. “Big animals. He’s been hunting them for sixty years.”

Beane thought about saying something nasty about Carl’s idea but resisted the impulse. “You think he might know what did this?”

Carl nodded. “Probably. Or maybe what didn’t do it.”

It wasn’t a bad idea exactly. Beane just didn’t like that it was coming from Carl. He pushed the phone across. “Give him a call.”

Carl nodded again, picked up the receiver and dialed the number in Severton. Beane turned back to the window to watch the rain. He didn’t listen to the conversation. He was thinking about Carl’s wife, about the past. He stayed there for a while letting his mind drift around until he heard Carl cradle the receiver. He turned back to look at the gray lusterless eyes behind the glasses. “Well?”

“He’s driving over. Should get here about the same time as the FBI. I gave him directions to the cabin.”

Beane leaned back and listened to the rain on the window, the tinny humming of the electric wall clock.

“Must be a far cry from what you’re used to in Burden,” Carl said.

Beane leaned forward again, picked a pencil off the desk and toyed with it. “I’m curious, Carl...”

“About what?”

“About what you make of this.”

Carl made a face. “Make of it?”

“What we heard and saw.”

“I don’t make anything of it.”

“Nothing?”

Carl shook his head. “Nothing.”

Beane didn’t believe him but didn’t press it. “Must have been a bear,” he said using the pencil to doodle a mustache on Jim Alban’s face. “Had to have been.”

“A bear...” Carl was frowning.

“I’ll grant the first noise didn’t sound very bear-like but what do I know?”

Carl leaned forward, picked a book of matches off the desk and lit a cigarette.

Beane tossed the pencil down. He was tired, growing sullen. “A grizzly.”

“A grizzly?” Carl sank back and exhaled a drift of blue smoke. “This isn’t the Rockies, Al. There haven’t been any grizzlies this far east in sixty years.” He picked a piece of tobacco off his tongue and brushed a hand in front of his face to wave away the smoke. “Anyway, didn’t you say the cry was human?”

“Probably Alban or Borges when the bear got him.” Beane found himself thinking about the bottle of rye he kept in the lower right drawer of his desk. He pushed the thought away.

“You really think there were two of them?”

“Had to have been.” Beane rose. “He’s out there somewhere either dead or run off.” He got the percolator and added coffee to their cups. “But I’m still waiting for you to answer my question.”

Carl glanced down, frowning, and flicked ash off his pant-leg. “Hector will know.” Hector Chubb was the friend he’d called. “Anyway, didn’t you just say that we’d need to wait for daylight -- ”

Beane's anger flared. "I'm just asking for your fucking opinion, Carl."

Carl pursed his lips and sucked on his cigarette, looking like he was about to say something when the phone rang. Beane let it ring a couple of times then picked it up. It was Sedley.

"Hello, chief," Sedley's voice was thick, fuzzy with sleep. "Deputy said you had something?"

"Yeah. I was out fishing on Skashewa tonight. We heard something in the woods and went to have a look and found a dead guy. Probably a wild animal kill." A kind of a huffing grunt on the other end of the line but no comment. "Turns out the victim was one of the guys wanted for that Fargo Brinks deal last week."

"Don't say?" Sedley sounded like he was making an effort to be interested.

"Yeah. We found a sizeable amount of cash in a rucksack--"

"Who's 'we'?"

"Me and a friend."

Muffled sounds like Sedley had covered the transmitter with his hand.

"Hello?"

"Yeah, I'm here. What's the plan?"

"FBI's on the way for their end but Skashewa's your bailiwick, sheriff."

"Uh-huh."

Beane didn't know Sedley all that well but he always seemed like a stickler for protocol. Now instead of sounding interested he seemed put out. More muffled sounds, some of it like Sedley talking to someone.

"I figured you'd want to be there when the FBI shows up."

"Uh-huh," Sedley said again. There was a long pause then what might have been a sigh. "Okay, Beane. When do they get there?"

Beane told him and gave directions to his cabin. Sedley rang off.

Beane ran a hand over his chin, wondered about Sedley's attitude and decided it didn't matter. Right now he wanted to get out of the

office, out into the air again. That and get away from the bottle in the drawer. He stood up and put on his jacket.

"Where are you going?" Carl asked dully.

"To take a turn around town," Beane said. He didn't want company but he also didn't know what to do with Carl. "You want to come?"

Carl nodded and followed Beane outside. The rain had lightened into a drizzle -- a chilly gray mist with an oily feel to it. It was too early for much to be stirring in town but a milk truck went by -- transmission whining, big tires hissing on the wet pavement. The driver smiled and waved like it was an ordinary day. He had no way of knowing how wrong he was.



Two hours later Beane was at the little dock by his cabin with Carl, Dr. Hugh Skelton and Sheriff Sedley, a skinny hollow-chested sixty year-old with a seamed smoker's face and wearing a big cream-colored Stetson and a black rain slicker.

Nobody said much while they waited for the FBI men, just small talk. After that was exhausted they fell silent and stared at the gray waters of the lake. After awhile they heard a vehicle approaching up the gravel lane behind the cabin. An ancient blue Dodge half-ton pick-up, an old man at the wheel. He had a dog and a woman with him.

The old man and the dog Beane had never seen before. The woman he had.

Even as she stepped out and walked around the front of the truck to kiss Carl, Beane found it hard to credit his eyes. Helen. Carl's wife.

Beane had known her well once. Or thought he had. Once.

"Hello, Helen," he said, his words toneless. "Didn't expect to see you here."

"I didn't expect to be here, Alvin," she answered with a quick smile. "But then I ran into Hector at the hardware store and..." She turned to Carl. "Thanks for leaving me in the dark, Carl."

Carl was blushing. "I was going to call you later," he said. "Anyway I'm not sure you should be here."

She smiled indulgently and slipped an arm around his waist. "Maybe not but I am here." She was lean, long-legged. She wore black corduroy pants, a green jacket. Her big clear green eyes were set a little too wide and her nose was a shade too long, and the Louise Brooks cut of her mahogany hair was a little severe for the angles of her face. But to Beane she still looked look like water in the desert.

He was mulling this over while Sedley watched him. Up till now the sheriff had kept mostly to himself. Standing alone, big hat pushed back, chain-smoking and looking bored. Now, seeing the woman's appearance kick Beane's feet out from under him the way she had, his expression shifted a little. Now it included mild amusement to go with the boredom.

Meanwhile the driver of the pickup was out with the dog -- a sad-looking, droop-eared red hound running back and forth with his nose to the ground. The old man peeled a battered campaign hat from his head, stretched and yawned, then started humping around after the delighted dog. Chasing it, slapping it on the rump with the hat.

The others watched this for a while before Carl motioned at him. "Everyone this is an old colleague and friend, Hector Chubb." At the sound of his name the old man stopped chasing the dog, put the hat back on and came over. He had a gap-toothed grin, a creased face and ears that stuck out like flaps on a cardboard box. He wore gray pants tucked into tall laced boots, a red mackinaw overslung with a bandolier of big rifle shells and a green bandanna around his neck. "Hector, this is Alvin Beane, Doc Skelton, Sheriff Sedley." Chubb held out a rough right hand missing the ring finger at the middle knuckle. "Happy to know you," he said. "And this is Oscar," he added, roughing the ears of the dog pushing at his knees.

"Hector's a guide I met in Montana," Carl said. "He's been visiting me and talking to my classes about native animals." Helen nudged him hard with her hip. "Oh, and this is my wife...Helen."

As Helen shook hands Beane removed himself to the end of the dock to watch for the FBI plane. Her unexpected arrival with Carl's sourdough sidekick had killed the last of his desire to be social. The rain that had been falling on and off since dawn had stopped again. Cold clouds sagged overhead and a heavy mist crawled across the water into the trees.

Beane smoked and thought about how he'd finally been getting comfortable in a life without certain elements that had once seemed like necessities -- those elements being Helen and the bottle mostly -- and now how irritated it made him to suddenly see her there standing on his dock. He flicked his cigarette butt into the lake, jammed his hands in his jacket pockets and spent the next ten minutes feeling aggrieved.

Finally the drone of a plane approached from the south. It descended abruptly from the heavy clouds and passed overhead, lumbering inland over its big floats, engine roaring. It turned somewhere beyond the tree tops to swing back out over the lake and dropped down quickly, silver water sheeting up as it touched. It swept through a wide turn far out then taxied toward the dock, the engine-note settling back into a huffing clatter as the pilot throttled back. He cut the motor fifty feet out and his passenger climbed down onto a float and tossed a line to Beane as the prop finished chuffing over. Beane lashed it to a post while the pilot and passenger debarked with a duffle of gear.

The men introduced themselves as Special Agents Teague and Halberg then moved their gear into the waiting boats: Beane's aluminum ten-footer and a sixteen-foot Crestliner from his neighbor across the lake. Within five minutes they were sliding through the heavy gray water, motors growling. They reached the inlet quickly, unloaded their gear and moved into the wet woods.

Beane led the way. They went mostly in silence except for Sedley and Teague who spent a long time muttering together, about what Beane couldn't hear. After awhile they moved up close, Teague

beside him and Sedley a little behind. "On the phone you said you only found part of the money," Teague said.

"That's right," Beane replied.

"How much of a part?"

"I don't know.

"You didn't count it?"

"No."

Teague grunted in wonder. "Weren't you curious?"

"Not especially."

"Then how do you know it's not all there?"

Beane looked sideways at him. "Call it an educated guess."

"An educated guess?"

Beane stopped walking, told the others to take a breather and turned to the FBI man and Sedley. "I looked in the rucksack and saw a few bundles of hundreds. I don't know how many exactly but not \$240,000 worth."

"What do you suppose happened to the rest of it?" It was Sedley. He was looking at the wet end of a big toothpick he'd removed from the corner of his mouth.

"I have no idea."

"None?" Teague asked quickly.

"You want me to guess?"

"Sure. Another educated guess."

"Okay. These two come here -- Alban and the other one. They run afoul of a big bear and either both of them die and we missed the second one in the dark or only one gets killed and the other takes the money -- a third rucksack, say -- and gets out."

Teague frowned. "Just tramps off into the woods at midnight with a killer bear on the loose? Why not take all of the money?"

Beane ignored the questions. "Or maybe they split it up before they ever got here. There was at least one other guy involved, right?"

"So the witnesses said."

"Pretty uneven split." Sedley interjected. There was a smoldering cigarette bobbing on his lower lip along with the toothpick now.

"Aren't we getting ahead of ourselves?" Beane said. "Maybe we should look things over --"

"Sure, chief Beane. Just curious." Teague said giving a quick smile. "Even if you're not."

Beane waited for him to say something else. When he didn't he told the others it was time to move and walked away.

It took another half hour of hard hiking to reach the campsite. The place was sodden from the morning rain. The tent sagging heavily on its poles, the fire a cold black muck.

Teague immediately went into the tent for the rucksacks. After he verified that most of the money was missing he joined Halberg to look around. Hector Chubb walked the ground while Oscar trotted back and forth, nose to the wet earth.

After a few minutes Beane pointed to the woods on the other side of the clearing. "Body's this way."

The others followed. Beane pointed out the cap, jacket and glove then led them into the trees. Light rain pattered the upper branches again. The atmosphere was congested, the air thick with grey mist. Oscar darted back and forth, panting and snuffling at the dark bed of pine needles. Beane turned and saw Carl, Helen beside him, and decided to ask a question he should have asked back at the dock. "Carl, are you sure you want your wife to see this?"

Helen's eyes narrowed. She snapped, "I'm a big girl, Alvin."

Beane thought about saying something glib but didn't.

"I've discussed it with her already," Carl said stiffly. "It's her decision."



When they reached the place the smell of old death wasn't nearly so strong any more. In fact Beane couldn't be sure now if he smelled it at all or if it was just present in his mind. It didn't seem to matter anyway. The scene was even worse then he remembered it. Like a bad dream.

The body was drained of blood. The viscera like twisted sausage casings in a butcher's window. It smelled of blood and excrement. Insects moved over the petrified flesh, the hard white bone.

Beane watched the others to see how they took it. At first Teague just looked, his face hard and blank. Then he took off his hat and began talking to no one in particular, something about bodies he'd seen during the war. No one was listening. Doc Skelton just stood with his mouth open a little and a damp unlit cigarette stuck to his lower lip. Hector squatted and quieted Oscar while he looked and ran a hand over his chin. Sedley's face was slack and pale. Helen had both hands over her mouth, her eyes not quite as big as Beane thought they would be.

He gave them some time then moved to Skelton and gave him a nudge. The doctor came out of his reverie and went to work examining the man, trying to avoid the slough of tissue and congealed body fluids still unabsorbed by the wet earth. Hector scanned the ground carefully then disappeared with Oscar. Teague and Halberg spent some time walking around jotting in notebooks. Then Halberg went off to check the surrounding woods and Teague went to speak with Sedley in low tones.

After awhile Teague and Sedley came to stand by Beane. "I'm guessing we're not going to find another body," Teague said, tapping his pen against his notebook. "Likely they had a falling out back at the camp and then the other killed this one, took the rest of the money and left a few thousand behind in his hurry."

Beane looked at him. "You must be joking. You think another person did this?"

"Maybe. Maybe he wanted to make it look like an animal did it."

"What for? They're in the middle of nowhere. Why not just put a bullet in him and leave?"

"Maybe he botched it. This fellow put up a fight. That was the commotion you heard."

"No it wasn't. What we heard was not the sound of men fighting over a sack of money."

"You don't know that." Teague gestured with his chin. "Woods and water at night. Sound does funny things."

Beane looked at Sedley who was engrossed in the study of the end of his toothpick again.

Carl was suddenly there. He looked agitated. "You people need to find out what did this."

"We were just discussing it," Teague said.

"No. I heard what you said about another man doing this. That's ridiculous. You need to find what made those sounds. That cry. That's what did this."

Skelton spat suddenly and stood up from his examination. "Looks like some kind of goddamned agricultural accident. Worse." He wiped his fat hands on a piece of heavy cloth. "I need to get him back to look him over properly."

"Let me get him printed first." Teague squatted and rummaged in his duffle and came out with a fingerprint kit. He inked the tips of the dead man's fingers and pressed them on blank squares on a white card. "We might need dental impressions too, Skelton," he said over his shoulder.

Skelton grunted, found his cigarettes and lit up.

Teague stood up and faced Carl, holding the fingerprint card carefully between his fingers. He looked like he was about to respond to Carl's 'ridiculous' comment but was stopped by the sound of Oscar baying off in the trees.

Beane moved quickly toward the sound. He found Hector squatting not far off with an arm around Oscar's neck. The animal was huffing at the foot of a small maple. "Oscar's acting like something went up this tree," he said. Beane frowned and Hector made a face.

"The trail must go somewhere else," Beane said.

"Doesn't," Hector said. "Ends right here."

Hector let go of Oscar who began running laps around the maple with his nose to the ground, intermittently lifting his head to flash anxious glances at his master.

Beane went back and helped Skelton get the body on a stretcher and covered with a canvas sheet. It was tough work prying him out of the muck.

During most of this time Sedley had been off to the side, chain smoking and watching the movements of the other men. He hadn't said much and didn't seem interested in taking the lead even though he had jurisdiction. Maybe he was just deferring to the FBI man but Beane found his behavior puzzling.

Hector returned from the woods with Oscar. Halberg came in a moment later from the opposite direction. "Made a 360-degree sweep," he said to Teague. "Nothing out there."

"You sure?" Carl asked. Halberg gave him a cold look.

"If Halberg says there's nothing there, there's nothing there," Teague said.

Carl turned to Hector who shook his head.

When they were ready they moved back to the camp where Halberg and Teague went to work inspecting the site and gathering what they needed to take back. At one point a question arose over how a certain piece of evidence should be handled. Sedley simply shrugged at Teague and turned away to light another cigarette.

After awhile Teague came and stood by Beane. He looked up at the tops of the trees smoking in the mist. "I'll be damned how they made it this far with every lawman in the country looking for them."

"What the hell were they doing over here at all?" Beane asked. "Why didn't they just make a run north to Canada?"

"Usually guys like these -- smart guys or guys who think they're smart -- will head in an unexpected direction to throw off pursuit."

"But why here? It's the middle of nowhere."

"Maybe they figured nobody'd look for them out in the boonies. Or maybe they were meeting somebody from around here, someone they knew." Teague looked like he was getting ideas. "We'll look into it."

Beane didn't really care about it one way or the other. He wanted to get back. He asked Teague if he had what he needed.

"Think so." He slung the rucksacks over his shoulder. "Sure would like to know what happened to the rest of the money."

Beane ignored him, made sure everyone was ready to move then led them back.



Later Beane stood with the others on the dock and watched the clouds smother the lights of the FBI plane, listened till silence swallowed the thrum of its motor. Sedley was the first to go after perfunctory words with Skelton about forwarding his autopsy report to the sheriff. Then the others loaded the dead man into Skelton's ambulance and he went too, followed by Carl and Helen with Hector in his truck. Beane ran the Crestliner back to his neighbor across the lake, retrieved his jeep and came back to get a few things from his cabin.

When he was ready to leave he took a long last look at the trees in the distance where the cold empty camp lay. He wondered a little more about the sound they'd heard, about where the other man had gone, about the smell. There were no answers, of course. Not yet anyway. Maybe they'd come later. Maybe not. When he finally decided they wouldn't come from him standing there wondering he got in his jeep and drove back to Burden.



Two hours later he was in his office waiting for Skelton to finish his postmortem. Carl and Helen were over at the Stoops boarding house where they'd taken a room. Hector had gone with Skelton at the doctor's request and Oscar had been left with Beane. The dog was sleeping by the radiator next to the filing cabinet.

Beane wanted to be alone anyway. He needed to think, to try to make sense of a few things. He wasn't making much progress and had

just poured a third cup of coffee when the phone rang. Skelton calling to say he was on his way over. He didn't sound any too keen and didn't look it either when he entered a few minutes later and dropped heavily into the swivel chair in front of Beane's desk, his bulging belly straining the buttons of his shirt. Hector went to scratch the ears of Oscar who woke and slapped the floor with his tail.

Beane poured coffee for them and asked Skelton what he had. The doctor lit a Pall Mall, nostrilled two jets of smoke into the air and shrugged, resting his coffee mug on his belly. "Not much. Looks like it was massive, sudden pressure that killed him." He paused, then added, "He was crushed."

"Crushed."

"He's a mess, Al."

"So..."

"Well there's three things really." He held up his free hand, the one not steadying his coffee, and flicked fingers up as he made his points. "First, there's the massive pressure. Second, the way the flesh was partially stripped from the bone on his arms and legs. You saw it. Third, the flesh from his face. It looks chewed off. Gnawed. Skull has marks of it too." He stopped talking abruptly as the door opened and Helen and Carl came in. They took seats on the scarred wooden bench against the wall.

Beane continued. "Okay, so this thing -- this animal -- kills the guy and crushes him. Then it tears him up, maybe feeds on him."

"No."

"What do you mean 'no'? You just said --"

"I didn't say he was crushed first. If I had to guess I'd say the biting came first. Then the flesh was stripped from his arms and legs..." He raised an eyebrow. "...while he was alive. Then he died and was crushed or was crushed and then died."

"Christ." Beane glanced at Hector. The old hunter was impassive.

"I had a sense of it out in the woods. That's why I asked Hector here to come and look. He knows how these animals act and I wanted him to see."

Skelton took a drink of coffee, made a face and leaned forward to set the cup on the desk. "Jesus, Al, you drain this from your crankcase?"

Beane slid open a drawer, extracted his fifth of rye and a glass and slid them across. "Hector?"

Hector shrugged. "Could be bear work."

Carl spoke up. "You're talking about a grizzly, Hector. There's not another animal in North America that could do that to a man. A huge grizzly."

Hector coughed, swabbed his nose and eyes with his big bandana and gestured at the bottle. "Mind if I have a short one, chief?" Beane nodded but Hector was already clomping over. He splashed whiskey in his coffee cup, took a big swallow and smacked his lips.

They waited for him to say something but he just stood there wearing a faraway gaze, running his tongue over his lips.

"Is anyone going to tell me about this bear?" Beane asked finally.

Hector readjusted his eyes and looked at him. "Bear big enough to smash a man flat like that? Carl's right. Have to be a big grizzly." He shook his head. "Animal of fifteen or sixteen hunnert pounds."

Skelton muttered and shifted his weight in his chair, making it creak.

"Right," Carl said tearing cellophane from a fresh pack of cigarettes. "It strains belief." He kept an eye on Beane as he tapped out a smoke.

"'Strains' ain't the word." Hector had moved back over by Oscar who was asleep again. He took off his hat and laid it on the filing cabinet. The gray backlight from the window on his bony, pruned head and big ears gave him a gnomish look. He mopped his scalp with another of his bandanas. "Grizzly Adams had a bear. Samson. People swore he was a fifteen hunnert pounder." He drank back some whiskey and grunted. "A hunnert years ago, before they was extincted, they say the Sierra Nevada grizzlies got that big." He shrugged. "Not sayin' it isn't so but that's polar bear size. A big polar bear."

It occurred to Beane that there had been a lot of shrugging going on lately. "So how big do grizzlies get?" he asked.

“Seen a real big one in Yellowstone before the First War. Maybe eleven or twelve hunnert pounds.”

Now Carl was shaking his head. He took a long drag on his cigarette. “There are significant problems with all this,” he said, his face curtained in blue smoke. “For one thing it’s been over a hundred years since grizzlies lived this far east.”

“And big bears leave plenty tracks.” Hector pulled flame from a wood match into the bowl of his briar, sucking loudly. Oscar lifted his head and looked up at him with sad, adoring eyes.

“Right,” Carl continued. “No tracks, no scent...”

Beane thought about the odor of old death from the night before then reminded Carl that Oscar had smelled something. At the mention of his name, the dog’s tail began to thump weakly again. Hector dropped to his haunches and rubbed the beast’s ears.

“Maybe...” Carl said.

Beane was losing patience. “Maybe you should make your point, Carl.”

“All right.” Carl leaned forward. “A bear’s claw is strong enough to tear a man open but there’s too much else that doesn’t add up. Like, for instance, the lack of fur. Did you find any on the body, Doctor Skelton?”

Skelton shook his head and leaned forward for the rye, his chair creaking again.

“And what about the bite marks? Hector?”

Hector ran a hand over his chin. “Hard to say. Could be bear teeth but like the doc said he’s awful torn up.”

Beane’s exasperation was showing. “Well, what do you think?”

Hector sucked a lungful of smoke and unplugged his pipe from his mouth. “Wellsir, Carl’s right, a lot of it don’t add up. Like why it attacked this fellow at all. In all my years I only know’d a grizzly to kill a man unprovoked one time.” He folded skinny arms across his chest. “If this fellow was minding his business I don’t see it.” He stopped and moved his mouth like he was chewing something tough then went on. “And there’s other questions too.”

“Such as?”

“Like where’d the other fellow go?”

“No way to tell is there?” Beane said. “Hell, we don’t even know if there was two of them when the bear attacked.”

“Oh, they was two of ‘em all right,” Hector puffed a little on his briar. “Two of ‘em in camp. Two of ‘em running in the same direction. It only gets confused after where that ballcap and the other things was found.” He scratched his chin some more. “But there’s no bear sign anywhere.” He bent and roughed Oscar’s ears again. “And poor Oscar’s as confused as me.” He stood back up. “Look, chief, what you got here is probably a crazy rogue bear. Big as a barn and mean as two hells. What he’s doin’ way over here and why he killed this fellow I can’t say. But I don’t know what else could of killed him.” He shook his head and his eyes got their faraway look again. “Seen a big black once. Acted just like a roach back. Tearin’ up cattle night after night until we caught him in the act. Don’t know who was more surprised when I shot him, me or him.” He came back to himself. “Course a black’d never be big enough to do this.”

Beane turned back to Skelton. “So what’s your official conclusion, doctor?”

“Well in lieu of more information it’ll have to be death by bear attack.” He looked from Carl to Hector.

“In lieu of more information,” Carl repeated woodenly.

Skelton polished off his whiskey, hauled his bulk out of a grateful chair and made for the door. “Well, I’ve got patients to see. Live ones.”

When Skelton had gone Beane turned back to Carl. “What’s wrong with you, Carl?”

Carl smiled stiffly. “Wrong?”

“You look like you need a tooth pulled.”

Carl waved away his question and asked one of his own. “Never mind me. What are you going to do?”

Beane glanced at his Bulova and wondered what Ham Sedley was going to do. “Maybe see about killing a bear,” he said, shifting his look back to the old hunter. “Hector?”

Hector clomped back to the bottle on the desk and poured more whiskey. “Chances are you’ll never find him.” He snorkelled some of the liquor then worked his mouth over with his bandana. “Still, if we can find him he could probably use killin’.” He refilled his pipe, fired a sulfur match with his thumbnail and pulled flame into the tobacco.

Helen finally spoke. “Is that realistic? Or even possible?”

Hector removed his pipe from his mouth, chuckled and jabbed the stem at the rifle cases propped in the corner. “There’s Mr. Realistic and Mr. Possible against that wall over there.”

“We’d appreciate your help,” Beane said.

“Be glad to help out, chief. Is there someplace I can stow my gear and wash up?”

“Leave your stuff here for now. There’s a sink through that door.” Beane indicated the small bathroom at the rear of the office. “Should be soap and towels.”

Hector left and Beane looked at the bottle on his desk, then at Helen who was sitting on the bench with her feet together, hands on knees, watching him. He was suddenly testy and snapped at Carl. “Why don’t you get whatever’s eating you off your chest, Carl?”

Carl looked unsettled briefly then the look faded. “Alright. I will.” He sat forward. “Something out there gutted a man like a squirrel and — ”

The office door opened suddenly. Gabe Malloy, Beane’s predecessor as police chief, came in, glanced at the others briefly, then went to stand in front of the desk. Beane sighed, thinking his office was beginning to resemble the set of a second-rate play. He introduced Gabe around. He shook hands with Carl, grunted at Helen then turned back to Beane. “What the hell is going on, Beane? I heard there’s been a killing.”

Beane didn’t reply.

“Well, why wasn’t I...why wasn’t the council informed?”

Beane moved his head a little but still didn’t say anything.

“I’m waiting.” Gabe had his hands on his hips.

“I wasn’t aware I was required to inform you or the council,” Beane said.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means what it means,” Beane said. “Look, Gabe, I’m engaged in official police business — ”

“Official police business?” Gabe looked at the others with something like contempt. His voice was too loud.

“I’ll be giving a statement to Sam Hasenyager later, Gabe. You can read about it in tomorrow’s Journal along with everyone else.”

“Now just a minute. I deserve — ”

“You deserve what everybody else in this town deserves. A full days work from me. So why don’t you clear out and let me get on with it.” There was a low nastiness in Beane’s voice that made the others look at him instead of Gabe.

Gabe’s face went red and he shot a glance at Helen. Then he looked down at his hands, flexed them several times, turned and stalked out, slamming the door after him.

“What was that all about?” Helen asked.

“Gabe’s never gotten over having to give up this fabulous office to me,” Beane said turning back to Carl. “Go on with what you were saying, Carl.”

Carl drank some of his coffee. “I was saying that I don’t like it.”

Beane picked up a pencil and tapped the eraser against his desk blotter. “There’s a lot not to like. What specifically don’t you like?”

“The lack of physical evidence.”

Beane sat back, tested the strength of the pencil with his thumbs. “Where are you going with this, Carl?”

“Going?”

“Yeah. What’s your point?”

Carl looked at his wife uncomfortably. “I don’t have a point. You asked me and I’m just trying to grapple with--”

Beane was about to say that he wasn’t in the mood to grapple with it but Helen said it first. “I don’t think Alvin is interested in being puzzled, Carl. He doesn’t want to sit and muse over what’s troubling

about the situation. He's a man of action." She smiled. "Am I right, Alvin?"

Neither man appreciated her comments much. Beane hid it better. "That's about it," he said.

"You asked for my opinion," Carl said glumly.

Beane ran a hand through his hair and wished that he was somewhere else or, more precisely, that everyone else was. He also realized he was thinking about the bottle again.

For a while they all sat listening to the humming of the wall clock but to Beane that was even worse than hearing the others talk so he got up and went to the gun rack, took a Springfield '03 down, checked its oiling and action and laid it across the desk. The killing may not have been in his jurisdiction but that didn't mean he had to sit around twiddling his thumbs. Helen was right about that.

He heard a rasping cough by the filing cabinet and turned and saw that Hector was back, leaning there smoking his pipe. "What do you think about looking for our bear, Hector?"

"I'm your man, chief," Hector replied, smiling and rubbing one of his oversized ears.

"I'm coming too," Carl said.

Beane resisted the urge to glance again at Helen. "Fine with me."

"Know how to use a rifle, Carl?" Hector asked.

Carl nodded at the Springfield. "Learned on one of those."

"Little on the light side but it'll do for tonight." Hector retrieved his canvas gun cases and bandolier from the corner. He laid them on the desk and unzipped one of the cases, pausing to look at Beane. "How about you, chief?"

Beane had turned back to the gun rack and took down a second Springfield. "I can shoot," he said over his shoulder.

"Any good?"

"Usually hit what I aim at."

Hector was smiling crookedly but still hadn't pulled the rifle from its case. "Where did you serve?"

"North Africa, Sicily, points north. Met Carl in Naples."

"You with Mark Clark?"

"We were."

"My nephew was with Mark Clark. Happen to know him? Nestor Chubb?"

Carl shook his head. "It was a big army," Beane said.

The old man's smile faded a little. "Too bad."

"He get through it okay?"

"Nestor? No. Got himself killed somewhere I can never remember the name of."

"War uses up your luck in a hurry," Beane said.

Hector mumbled something while running his hand over his mouth. Then he smiled and slid the rifle free. It was old, big-bore, single-shot. Light shimmered across its oiled surfaces. Weathered walnut and old steel.

He handed it over to Beane who took it and sighted down the octagonal barrel. "What is it?"

Hector's smile got bigger. "A Ballard. Chambered for .40-.70 Sharps cartridges." He tapped one of the long shells in the bandolier. "Stops most anything that needs stoppin'."

"Must be fifty years old," Beane said.

"Nearer to seventy," Hector said taking the rifle back.

"What's in the other case?"

"Too much rifle for the woods," Hector chuckled. He put the Ballard back in its case, laced his fingers, cracked his knuckles and unzipped the other case. He paused a little for effect, shifting his eyes around the room to make sure he had everyone's attention, then slid the rifle out. It too was long, weathered, well-oiled. But with a bigger muzzle than Beane had ever seen on a rifle. "Bet you've never seen one of these before," Hector said proudly, handing it over. Beane hefted it to his shoulder. It was heavy, almost unbelievably heavy. But balanced, shootable. "That's a Winchester .45-100," Hector said grinning even more. "The kind of gun that kills at both ends." He took a giant cartridge from his bandolier. "I load these myself. A hunnert grains of powder and six hunnert of lead."

Beane flipped up the tall rear sight and drew a bead on the straining bosom of the calendar blonde. “What needs a gun this big in Montana?”

“Oh I don’t use it much anymore,” Hector said. “Big animals is all thinned out and I soured on the killing anyway.” Beane handed the rifle back and the old hunter replaced it in his case. “Used to take parties out after the First War. Rich folks. Lotta doctors. Back then there was plenty elk, sheep, bear.” He ran a rough hand over his bald scalp. “Always wondered why doctors liked killin’ so much.”

Helen had been watching from beside her husband looking pee-vish. “Well I think I’ll just mosey back to the boarding house and leave you gentlemen to your big guns,” she said. She took her jacket and left. Carl made a face.

Beane asked Hector what he thought the chances were of the bear returning.

“Hard to say. Roach back isn’t easy to figure even when he ain’t crazy.” He repacked his briar. “Might come back to the scene.” He thumbed life into another match and pulled flame into the tobacco. “Just remember a grizzly’s smarter than a dog and curious as a housecat.”

“Why would it attack a man?”

“Well, he can be a terror when he feels cornered but cornering a grizzly is no easy thing to do.” He puffed his pipe and shook his head. “Who knows?”

“Maybe he needed food.”

“Not likely. He’d have to be half-starved to attack a man for food and those woods are full of things bears gorge on this time of year. Berries, pine nuts, insect nests.” He shrugged. “Anyway, it don’t have the look of a food kill.”

“What about the sound we heard?” Carl was looking morose again.

“Sound?” Hector scratched at the base of his big right ear with the stem of his pipe. “Well, bears do their share of growlin’ and sometimes they yowl -- ”

“It wasn’t like that.” Carl struggled to describe what they heard, his jaw tight. “It was shrill, high-pitched. Like a child almost. Human but not human.”

Hector looked at Beane. “Well I’ve heard bear sows howling. Would of sworn it was a man crazy with pain. But that doesn’t sound like what you’re describing...”

Beane looked at his watch. “It’s getting late. Why don’t you tell us what we need to know.”

Hector’s eyebrows went up. “Well... big and strong as a grizzly is you only need one bullet to kill him provided you put it in the right place.”

“Where?”

“Shoulder. Dead center to cut the upper vessels of the heart and break down the bone.” He gestured at the bottle with his pipe. “You mind?”

“Help yourself.”

They waited while he had a drink. “Next best is a head shot. Base of the ear.” He hankied his lips. “But wherever you put it, make it good because unlike most animals a roach back’ll charge toward gunfire. And when he does he comes fast as a deer.”

“Why do you keep calling it a ‘roach back’?” Beane asked.

“Old-timer name. Grizzly’s got a hump on his back they call a roach. Fellows back in the earlies had a lot of names for him. Smut Face, Mocassin Joe. Carl here has his own name for him. What was it, professor?”

“Ursus arctos horribilis,” Carl said and Hector chuckled a little crazily.

Beane looked at his watch again. “What else?”

Hector frowned. “There’s a lot of things you should know. A life-time of things maybe. But what you need to know is a bear’s not a bad creature by nature. When a grizzly starts killin’ humans -- and I’ve heard of it happening -- dollars to doughnuts it’s the human’s fault.” He paused and shrugged. “Still, I guess this one’s got to be killed. But I’ll tell you again, this animal is smart and strong. I once seen a

DeSoto after the idiot drivin' it decided to goose a big grizzly blocking a road. Needed a tow truck for the car and damn near needed a straightjacket for the driver. So respect this animal." He was jabbing at them with his pipe stem. "And no matter what, do not run from him. Worst thing you can do. Stand your ground even if he comes for you. If he does take a swipe at you and you're alive afterward, play dead. I mean it. Curl up and don't move. It's your best chance." The old face relaxed and his grin returned. "Anyway, just follow my lead and we'll do alright." He finished with a wink.

"Okay," Beane said. "It's almost four now. I need to take care of a few things here and get a couple hours sleep. Carl, why don't we meet back here at 8:00. Hector, you're welcome to sleep in the lock-up if you're tired. It's presently unoccupied. Or there's Mrs. Stoops where Carl and Helen are staying."

"I don't like boarding houses much..."

"Maybe you'd like to stay at my cabin. We could set you up on the way out."

The old man's face brightened. "Sounds fine. Maybe I'll take a turn around town in the meantime, grab a bite to eat. Any place you'd recommend?"

"Dolly's. Just up the street. Should have a roast beef and gravy blue-plate today. Make sure you try the pie."

"Sounds ideal." Hector got his hat from the top of the filing cabinet.

Beane made a sign of the cross in the air over their heads and told them they were both deputized. Carl didn't seem amused. "I've got one more question for Hector," he said, squaring up to face the old hunter. "Tell me the truth. It's been eating at me."

"I'll do my best."

"Do you really believe that a bear killed those men?"

Hector looked down at the floor for a moment, holding his old campaign hat in front of his chest, fingering the brim. "No, I don't," he said looking back up. "Not from what I seen nor from what I feel

in here." He let go of the hat with his right hand and tapped his belly with the knuckle of his missing finger.

"All I wanted to know," Carl said and walked out the door.

Hector followed him out and Beane closed the door behind them.