

Chapter 8 – Flight

My sleep came fitfully, and only after a long fretful wait. I remember thinking, we are getting too damn careless, too sure of our escape. Especially with full furs. I kept waking up, bothered by nightmares of the drums. Their monotonous pounding was loud in my ears. I dreamt they were beating for my scalp. I tossed and turned, slept a bit more, then awoke again.

The weather had turned cooler, the wind moaned through the trees. I was glad to have carried along my good wool blanket. Even in summer at these high altitudes the nights tend to be chilly. The stars shone sharp and clear through the trees. Promise of a pretty morning with no clouds to hold in the Earth's heat. I could see the faint glow of the campfire embers stirred by the wind in the moonless night. The damn fools left it burning. For a while it flared up bright. Maybe I am too cautious, but I remembered Hugh's words that the forest animals will warn you of the presence of danger if you would but listen. The hunting wolf howled and was answered. An eerie chill ran up my spine, all the way up to the back of my neck. My hair stood on end. It did not sound like any wolf I ever heard before, something about it was different. Try though I might I could not put my finger on it. Maybe he found the entrails of the deer Jake shot.

The others of my party did not stir. Nobody stood guard during the night. They thought us perfectly safe. Even Bill was confident of our chances of escape. I thought that green meat running through them would have them up and down during the night as it did me, but I did not hear anyone moving around. For a long time I lay there listening to the splash of the brook, before the first light showed in the east; watching for as long as I could, until my eyes closed again and I drifted off into fretful sleep.

I awoke with a start. Something, or more likely someone, was prowling around out there in the dark woods. I sat up against the ledge, musket primed and ready, waiting for what, I could not tell. I waited breathlessly but heard no one. Only that one sound. A broken branch or maybe just the wind.

There was nothing to see in the surrounding shadows, no sign of movement among the trees and rocks as I sat hunched up against the chill of the fresh highland dawn.

I heard that same wolf howl, much closer this time. Was he following the trail of the smell of meat? My body would not quit shaking with the cold. And, more to the point, cold fear fast creeping into my heart. Light continued to penetrate the woods, quiet enough to be eerie. The birds not stirring like usual, no blue jays shrilled in the treetops. My four companions, in camp across the brook, did not stir. Wished they would but did not dare call out to them. They wouldn't hear me with the noisy brook between us. I knew how tired they were from our exertions of the past days, especially Toad, the fat one.

I sat there uncomfortably watching the dawn come in, not very alert for trouble. The wind moaned through the trees. The sleep was slow leaving my brain. I felt drowsy. Couldn't shake it out. God, how I longed for a cup of tea.

Just as the first ray of sunlight showed over the eastern mountains, war whoops pierced the air, musket shots rang out and the camp across the brook was full of painted savages, shouting and hollering. Reckon I was too scared to fire anyway, but there was really nothing to shoot at in the shadows. All was bedlam and confusion. The scene before me in the growing light was not pretty at all. My partners struggled to rise from sleep, but their attempts were useless. I could see that. They were finished. Bill I recognized by his size. He was in the grasp of two of the raiders. A third redskin was brandishing a tomahawk in my friend's face. I looked for Toad. He was down, and the Indians were tearing at him with tomahawks and knives. The other two, Toad's workers, were

being tied to trees. They were hollering my name loudly to come and save them. What was I to do? I sat hunched up, frozen by the scene before me. Unable to move. It took me a while to realize that the raiders had missed me in the dark. I watched horrified as that one Indian executed his dire threat against poor Bill. Right on his head. A frightening, chilling sight. My boon companion was down, Indians were jumping all over him with knives and tomahawks. One leaped up waving a bloody scalp. They must soon discover that our furs be divided into five bundles, and so they must be missing one of their intended victims. They would be looking. If I hesitated a moment longer they would be at me. All I could accomplish by staying put would be to share the fate of my comrades. I grabbed up powder horn, "possibles" sack and journal pouch, threw down my blanket and took off running through the forest fast as I could. Behind me, Joe cried out in anguish. His screams drove me. Hard to imagine what the fiends could do to make a man cry out that way. I hauled ass down the brook, stumbling and slipping along with terrible visions and chilling war whoops ringing in my ears. Fear drove me like the wind. I had no wish to join my comrades. Ran until I thought my lungs would burst, putting as much distance as possible between me and that bloody place. When my mind began to un-numb from the shock, I clumb out of the rocky water-course, stepping on stones to hide my tracks. Then I headed west, due west, away from the sun, stopping for nothing. I was sure they must be right behind me. Trying to be both fast and quiet in the woods is hard for a white man, especially when he is so damn scared. I didn't try, just kept going. The June forest was thick with new leafy growth, green and blooming. Made it difficult to see very far ahead. The sun was not yet high enough to penetrate the deep glades through which I fled. It was hard going, the shadows made it spooky. At one point I became entangled in a huge thorn patch which tore my hands awful. My face was ripped up and my worn buckskins near to destroyed before I got out.

I went west all that day, driven by the sure knowledge the Indians must be right behind me. Kept trying to grab distance, hardly dared stop to catch my breath, determined to delay my end as long as possible. I was soaked with sweat, hair completely disheveled; branches slapping my already stinging face. Small twigs stuck in my eyes. There was no way to tell if the Indians were following or not, for I couldn't bring myself to stop long enough to check.

A winter blow-down blocked my way. Huge trees knocked down by severe winter winds lay in thick tangle all about, allowing no way through. Torn out tree roots tripped me up. Before I got by this wide hilltop mess, I was near to panic again. Fighting off that deadly urge, it came to me that blind flight driven by fear would cost me my life as readily as the Indians. Only slowly did I realize that I needed to keep my wits about me, to keep from becoming hopelessly lost. Easy enough to say, but I must admit that in practice I did not do so well. A damn hard thing to do. Moving safely through these woods requires good sense. I am afraid that day I showed little. My brain was numb with fear, I was confused by the strange forests and the remembers of what I had witnessed. There were demons in every afternoon shadow. For the longest time I was sure the savages were close behind, ready to grab me if I so much as slowed down. I kept on until my brain and legs joined forces with overworked lungs to stop me.

By sunset of that worst possible of days, I was completely exhausted. No sign of pursuit had I seen. This lad was completely lost in the vast, trackless forest. I found myself atop the open ledges of a rocky hillside. Scrub oak and large granite boulders intermingled with patches of blueberries. Green, unfortunately. The sides of the mountain fell away sharply to west and south. Much too steep to scramble down. In the last light of day my route seemed blocked. I would be forced to go back north. Towards my pursuers!

I walked around, studying the slopes for a way down. A partridge flushed out of a tree with

loud drumming right by my ear. The sudden, startling noise of his wings as he took to flight scared the hell out of me. My heart about gave out. It was a minute before I realized just how foolish I was being. In the meantime, another bird flew off, then another. A large crow was roosting in the trees; it struck me that this was the place to spend the night. Not even Indians could sneak past this many birds without alarming them. I made my bed on a grassy spot under an overhanging rock ledge. Here I would spend the night regardless of who might be chasing me.

I slept fitfully, the wind blowing in my hair. Before morning a storm came up. At first the rain fell softly, not too bad in my exposed bed. Then it came down harder and harder. In short order I was soaked through, cold and miserable. I could not possibly have picked a worse spot. The wind whipped the rain in on top of me and the water dripped in off the ledge. I tried to burrow deeper into the granite, which did not budge. The rain came down so hard I had to get up and move under the cover of a large pine tree, which was better. Not by much. There I sat, thinking sad, lonely thoughts, wishing the rain would stop and the dawn come.

The summer storm passed on quickly, having done its work. Yet sleep would not come. In my mind's eye there was the picture of poor Bill, my friend and partner, tomahawked by those savage bastards. And Toad, his brains and blood splattered all over. With them were lost our furs. The path to a quick fortune had turned to ruin and death.

I shivered in the wind, my teeth would not stop chattering. Seemed as though the sun would never come up. Finally it did, and found me alternately dozing and watching my backtrack. My piece soaked clean through, I was sure it would not fire. It must be cleaned and the powder replaced before it rotted the inside of the barrel.

I set out to catch a partridge with a stick, but they were too wary. Gave up and cleaned the rifle, reloaded her.

Hungry as a bear, I clumb down off the mountain in daylight. Not so much a feat as it looked in the dark. Better than going back north. Once down I turned back south and east, to try and find the Hudson, if indeed that was the Hudson we found day before yesterday. The rest of that day I walked forests of massive pine trees that may never before have witnessed the footprint of a passing white man. There was little sign of game. The sun stayed hidden behind rain clouds. There was no sign of pursuit. Completely lost. No idea in what direction lay the Hudson River and safety. How I wished I was home in my father's tavern in Albany!

I walked the length of downed trees, hopping from one dead log to another, and rock to rock, my feet never touching the ground. Tried to leave no trace of my passing. The path I followed, a wandering one in the rain, led through groves of huge evergreen trees, the species more often unknown to me. Evidence of forest fires. Best to avoid the areas where the fires seemed most recent, which was not always possible. I wondered if the Indians ever came this far out from the main routes. The middle of nowhere. Overhead stretched a canopy of green almost too thick for the sun to penetrate if it would come out. I spent considerable time watching my backtrack, though there has been neither sight nor sound of pursuit.

One could never be sure of being safe from those devils. May be that they miscounted the number of our party or more likely they were just satisfied with what they had already achieved and declined further pursuit for just one more scalp. Would their lust for savagery and plunder ever be sated? I doubted it. The more I thought about it, the more convinced I became that they would be looking for the missing victim. I decided to keep moving fast, as if they were right on my heels.

Turned my nose a little more to the south and moved on once again fast as the rough forest floor allowed. The hole in my empty stomach gnawing at me, harder to ignore. After a while I came to a small mountain lake nestled among rock ledges and huge boulders. Sat there studying

the surroundings. The pond looked deep. A small deer showed herself along the brushy shore of the far side, taking a drink. Peaceful at her ease. I relaxed a little. Probably no danger over there, I thought to myself, watching from where I lay hidden in a small grove of spruce. All 'round me open ledge; bare, smoothed-out rock, boulders big as a cabin. I sat there watching half an hour or more, until she moved on. I thought about trying a shot but declined. Too far. I dared not shoot my gun and alert someone to my presence. When the doe left, I walked around the left side of the pond. Somehow missed the outlet. All day I searched, trying to find my way to the Hudson. No luck. My bed that night was an extra layer of soggy pine needles in an aromatically scented grove of pine, along the side of one of the interminable mountains. This one on the lateral of its bigger brother looked like a saddle or hump.

I got doused again before morning. Tiny streams ran down off rocky guts, carved out of the mountains by water action over a million years, I suppose. The side of these ravines too sheer to climb, up or down. Under the slopes, bogs lay in the flat bottoms between the humps. By this time I had no idea in the world where I had come to, nor the way home. The only thing I could tell for sure was south. And then only when the sun was out. Not too often. That day I passed through the most consistently rugged country imaginable. Mile after mile of rough walking, ravines to cross, steep ledges to be negotiated, mountainsides so rocky as to be dangerous.

For three more days I fought it out with those inhospitable mountains, wandering a land of old beaver dams. Untended for years. Abandoned remnants of another time. The beaver is gone from this country, trapped out long ago.

This whole time I walked through miles and miles of pine, barren of game, almost a desert. In the few places where beech or oak grew, there was a little sign of turkey and deer. Tried to clean my gun once again, but when I had it all apart in the open on a flat rock, the skies opened up and the rain came in torrents. Put it all back together, dried as best I could. No point in reloading. Resumed my trek. From here the country took on a still wilder aspect, if that be possible. The farther into it I wandered, the worse it got. My progress was slow, watching behind me for Indians.

I came to a land of high rocky cliffs, the ledges barren of life except for an occasional white birch or stunted pine clinging to life out there exposed to the constant blowing wind. Brave little things, growing out of small crevasses. I set snares for rabbits with pieces of rawhide. Checked them just at dusk and was delighted to find I had caught two small ones, barely enough to keep me from starving. I came to a land where the brooks began to run west and south, just fine with me. "Must be getting near the Hudson," I had hopes that a few more days might see me in Saratoga. Had no idea how wrong a fellow could be.

No matter how I tried, I could not keep my powder dry. It rained on and off for three days. I cleaned my piece so many times that in exasperation, I gave up and left it unloaded. My only food a few more skinny, big-footed rabbits I caught in snares. Most nights on the exposed slopes, the weather was too cold and windy to sit still for long without a fire. The first two nights I did not dare light one so I about froze. Between the rain and the wind, I reckoned to catch my death of cold. I regretted having thrown away my blanket. Without any gear, those nights were so cold that I was forced to walk to keep warm.

By keeping track of the "Celestial Hunter" whenever the skies allowed, it was possible to find my way south at night. Slow going, but I could not sit huddled under a tree shivering in the cold. Lucky that when it was not raining the days were warm enough to dry out my clothes though the sun could not touch the dampness in my soul.

I quickly learned to avoid the lowlands as much as possible, the tiny flats under the mountain slopes. Water collects in these places, the bogs are numerous and considerable in extent. A man

might end up swimming before he got across if the runoff is dammed by an old beaver colony. The swampy ground makes navigation hard. A couple of times I got fooled. The swamp would not appear wide until I got into the middle of it, then I would find myself struggling through a wet, stinking boneyard, the scrawny cedar trees growing so close together that the sun be not visible through the branches. All sense of direction would be lost. Then the heat and the bugs would gang up to assail my senses. I felt great relief whenever I found my way out of one of those places.

The worst experience may have been the bugs. Black flies by scores landed on my exposed parts. The few places on my body left unbitten were savagely attacked by hordes of mosquitoes, coming to the banquet of fresh meat. Longjaws had me swollen terrible. To prevent their worst abuse, I tried to keep all parts covered with mud. This served to keep the devils at bay to some small extent, but they were continually at my neck and around the holes in my clothes, buzzing away furiously down inside my loose hunting shirt and up my pants legs.

Somehow I missed the Hudson. With no real idea where the river rises, it was like searching for a damn small pin in a mighty large haystack. With no idea where in the hell it might be, I pushed on south, bent back a little east. Though, to tell the truth, maybe a little too far east. By the afternoon of what I reckoned was my fourth day of wandering, it began to look as though I was down out of the worst of the mountains, for the land appeared to be flattening out some. Crossed a small creek flowing south. There were small fish under the banks and behind rocks. Using my steel fishhooks and grubs I dug for bait, I took a number of the plump little seven-inch trout. They are beautiful. Hungry as I was, I stopped to admire their bright colors, sparkling in the sun. Their dark backs spotted with brilliant speckles of red, white, orange and blue; the bright red-slashed bellies colorful as a June sunset.

After this stop for fishing, I clumb a woody ridge where I could see my backtrack, and sat there watching. Couldn't help but notice that up here the mosquitoes were not that bad, the north wind kept them at bay. From my vantage point I could see the high peaks to the north. The late afternoon sun reflected off snow-capped tops, shining against the backdrop of blue sky. Only then did I realize that the tops of the highest mountains were still snow-covered, clear into summer. I had not walked any snow country, how much higher must I have clumb before I did? At best I could not have been more than halfway up those incredible slopes at any time. Then it dawned on me that we had never reached those high mountains. There is another range out there, on the west slopes of that, a way out there is where the Hudson rises. We were way too far east. Not even close to the Hudson. I realized we hadn't even reached the eastern slopes of that range, and from where I now stood, there was a whole other range out there. My only hope was to search out the East Branch, forget about finding the main river.

Nobody showed along the trail, I felt safer than at any time so far in my flight. Except how in the hell do I get out? I had crossed a number of large streams but they did not seem to go the way I needed to go. Many flowed north. I thought of Bill and the others, dead and unburied up there somewhere. Somber of mind, I left my perch and headed south, through more unknown country.

Gradually the pine forest gave way to patches of hardwood. The land I walked held as much white birch as I had ever seen in one place. Beautiful white-barked trees growing in clumps of three or four long slender trunks, often reaching one hundred feet or more in the air. I cannot help but be amazed by this tree, which does not grow much below Saratoga. Night came on me in one of the cedar wetlands. I found a patch of dry ground and tried to sleep. Never was a campsite more poorly chosen by man!

Nighttime in the summer swamp is an unending clamor, noisier than Albany on a Saturday night. Bullfrogs and tree frogs, owls and peepers, the hum of longjaws buzzing at my ear. Whip-

poorwills, a bear carrying on. Then the howl of a wolf in the distance. That one made my hair stand on end. After the last time, I listened carefully to try and tell if it really was a wolf. The yipping coyote catches a bigfoot rabbit that cries like a baby. A pair of coons fighting for a meal sounds like a whole army carrying on. Each one adds its song of life and death to the concert.

The mosquitoes got so bad they drove me out. I could not stay and submit to their incessant attacks. They might drive me crazy when nothing else could. I splashed through muck-bottomed, ankle-deep waters. Moving until my feet hit dry ground above the swamp-line. My arms and legs ripped by sharp branches that were impossible to see in the dark. I sat down and was nearly overcome with grief. Helpless. How could I ever get out of this terrible country? Here in the wind I managed to sleep a while, but awoke ravenously hungry. Catching a few rabbits is fine, but what I wanted was venison. By that time I was hungry enough to risk a shot. I sat waiting impatiently for the sun to come up, resolved to clean the rifle once more and hope there might be enough dry powder for a few shots. The cost of the black powder I carried had been advanced to me by Toad's father against the expected profits of the trip. Supposedly the stuff was top grade, from the best manufacturer of black powder in the world, a company in Spain.

"Reckon I'll be forced to pay back Toad's father the money he advanced me, for signing that paper saying we owe him. Bill and I both signed it. Damn." At a spot in the sun, hidden among rocks and out of most of the wind, I poured the last of the powder onto the remains of my shirt. It did not look so good to me. Most of it was damp and caked together. I separated a little which did not seem bad, broke up the clumps to dry. Trying to protect the grains from the wind and still allow them to dry was a chore. A portion of the best blew away. I was unsure if any of it would ignite, more likely to rot the gun barrel. But I sure felt naked without it. Fussed with the stuff a long time and managed to retain enough good charge for two or maybe three full shots. Then with the inside of my horn dried out best I could manage, I replaced the good powder and said a prayer for luck.

A short rest and a drink of water, then using the tattered remains of one sleeve of my hunting shirt for patches, I dried and cleaned my rifle in the growing heat of the sun on the rocks. This task consumed most of the morning. Cleaning a gun is a smelly job but must be done frequently and properly or the gun will soon be pitted and useless. I knew that if my new gun was ruined Father would whip me.

When I was ready to move out again, I debated loading up, but after a check of the clouds for rain, I decided not to. I reckoned to skirt this on the uphill side. "To hell with an unloaded gun, I thought to myself. "It can't rain again." Charged it up good before I went any farther. Not at all sure the powder and flints would spark. Might even be dangerous to try. But if she did, that first shot would be a hard one. I walked on until a noise from a stand of tiny pine trees ahead drew me up short. Enough noise to sound like a man, maybe more than one. My fears returned at once! Nobody here would be friendly. Could Bill or one of the others have escaped? Did I dream the whole massacre? I didn't dare move, instead remained partly exposed behind a large rock. Stood silently watching. Nothing more did I hear for the longest time, listen though I might. Then I heard movement in the trees. Branches snapping. Limbs moving back and forth. Sure as blazes something was in there. And the sun in my eyes so's I couldn't see much. Sweat ran down my brow and into my eyes, stinging. I got ready for action, expecting my end was near. I rechecked the priming, hoping it would fire. The thought struck hard that I was not out of trouble yet. I had to fight down the bile rising in my constricted throat. Face to face again with the terror I had striven so hard to drive out over the last days.

You can believe I was scared right to death, praying for my powder to burn. Didn't move, didn't dare steady the gun across the rock for a better shot, just waited for whoever to come out. Through

a small opening in the brush there appeared a patch of buckskin. No feathers did I see. I waited a long time, a very long time. He quit moving, as though he had got wind of me. I did not think from the amount of noise it could be an Indian, but could not be sure. The noise might be a ruse to get someone in behind me. I kept one eye peeled on my backtrack. My patience and nerves about done in, from out of the trees stepped a young moose. A large yearling calf, uncertain whether to freeze or fly. My stomach growled for meat. With the sights behind the animal's shoulder, I could not miss. But must debate the wisdom of a shot. This caused me to hesitate until the moose began to move away, step by step. I watched, uncertain until he was one step from disappearing. That was too much for me. I touched off the trigger and waited, holding the gun on target. There was a delay which seemed to last forever, but in truth could only have been a moment. Kerblam! The gun bucked against my shoulder. I could not see through the smoke. When I could, the moose was down. I would have meat! I sat watching the animal a few minutes, my stomach quivering with the excitement. It would not stop, nor could I make it. My nerves had a mind of their own. Reloaded my rifle, hoping nobody heard the shot. When I felt it was safe, I rose from my hiding place and approached the animal. Leaned my rifle against a tree and proceeded to operate on him with my knife. Though he was too heavy to lift, I determined to retain enough of the skin to cover my gun. Partway through the work, and so engrossed in that bloody task that I did not hear Momma in the brush. Before I could react, out she came. Actually charged is the better word, straight at me. Bent on mayhem. I could not get to my rifle. The only escape from those flying hooves was to shimmy up a tree, a thin spruce barely strong enough to hold up my weight. For a long time I sat there, helpless while she tried to lick her calf back to life and alternately charged my tree, stomping her front feet on the ground. I spent an extremely uncomfortable half hour swaying back and forth in that puny tree. My rifle in plain sight, but useless. A sitting duck if anybody came along to investigate that shot.

The cow gave up and moved off into the brush. I immediately scrambled down from my perch, watching to ensure she did not come back, then resumed my work. I gutted the animal, left it to strain the blood while I took a walk. For an hour I circled the kill at a distance, searching for sign. Only when I was sure there was nobody sniffing around, I returned and began a small fire among the rocks. Soon the aroma of steaks cooking drove me nearly wild. The meat was not long-cooked before this young hoss was into it. In my famished state those half-cooked steaks were delicious. I tried not to eat too fast and make myself sick. Fresh venison can be more troublesome to the system. After eating my fill, and drinking in a small spring, I resumed the skinning work. When finished I placed the meat over the smoky coals and left it covered over with the skin for the night. Took a rest. The strong south wind kept most of the mosquitoes at bay. First thing in the morning I packed the cooked meat into my shirt. Sadly left most of it behind, no way for me to carry so much. It would spoil within a day in the June heat. I pushed on, wondering what this day might bring, afraid to find out. Pine forests without much underbrush for miles and miles. Huge trees that blotted out the sun. The only game, squirrels and birds, mostly jays. The forest floor littered with moss-covered logs. Not much underbrush. After a walk of two or so hours, I came to a stream that looked to flow west and south. It might go to the unknown East Branch of the Hudson. I followed it until before me there appeared another of those cedar bogs. I turned, crossed the brook, and began to climb once again. From a distance I followed this tiny stream, until I came to where there had recently been a forest fire. Charred stumps and burned logs on the blackened ground. Walking through the fire-scorched land took hours. What a mess were my clothes and self when I finally got out of there. Found the creek again. Blocked up by an old beaver dam. No sign of new workings. I continued on my way until the high ground petered out. To the east a sheer ledge running

ahead of me for a quarter mile, one that could only be descended with great difficulty and with the risk of exposure. I followed a small finger of the ridge that ran off down into the bog. Right at the dam was the only way to cross the brook. It was a huge affair which had the entire lowland soaked with water. My feet got wet, but those dams are impressively built. I walked across with ease. Must have been some colony to build this. So many years later it still held water, though there are places where the water had worked holes through it.

That day the weather turned foul again, rain about to fall. The wind shifted to the east and turned raw and cold, the air changed. It got heavy with rain, thick and damp. I wrapped my gun and powder horn in the moose skin and started to build a shelter of bark and branches but got wet anyway. The rain came heavily while I struggled.

About the time I crawled in and got a little settled, the downpour stopped. I built a fire in a tiny hole, as much to revive my spirits, which were sunk pretty low, as to keep warm. I was completely lost, despondent of ever finding my way out. Which way should I go from here, how do I keep in a straight line? For a long time I sat thinking of Bill, my partner and friend, dead up there on the mountain.

I ate a portion of the meat, took a nap and was awakened shortly after by the rain starting again. While I huddled there, downcast over my bleak prospects, the rain came harder. This time it came inside. The running water put out my fire and washed me out. The bark shelter held the water in better than out. After a most miserable hour, the rain did stop.

I needed sun and warmth to dry me out but the day stayed cool and blustery, Old Sol stayed wrapped in thick cloud. While it was raining, the bugs stayed away, but once the rain stopped, they returned, determined to make up for lost time.

Staying in one place was no good, the bugs swarmed terrible. The consarned infernalness of these little bastards cannot be overstated. They must be met to be truly appreciated, so ferocious and constant are they. I have heard stories of men going crazy in the mountains from their constant buzzing and harsh sting. One might believe every story that has ever been told about blackflies. It is impossible to overstate their peskiness.

Soon I was underway once again without the meat, which had begun to smell a little high. Flies were getting into it. I cut off one piece that did not appear too bad, ate that, left the rest in the shelter for the foxes and mice. All that day I walked what I thought was south. My path led me a meandering way until in late afternoon I came out on the side of a craggy peak. The last couple of days I had been watching the sky, wondering if the vultures or ravens were following me. This day I spotted a pair of turkey vultures circling high overhead and wondered some more.

I crawled out onto an open ledge behind some rocks and short juniper bushes where I might view the country without being seen and reckon what to do next. A series of ridges lay before me, running east and west, athwart my intended path. From my vantage point they appeared to fall away gradually to the south, in parallel lines in such a way that each one in its turn must be ascended and the bogs lying between would have to be negotiated. The countryside continuously covered with tree carpet except on open ledges and the bogs lying between. Looked mostly like another thousand miles of nothing to me. A sinking feeling came over me there. I would never get out. About ready to quit and give up, but there wasn't even any way to do that, that I could see. After a few minutes of despair, I decided I was still not ready to quit, despite the helplessness of my predicament. Started off through the woods again. After that the forest began to change. Some hardwoods began to appear. I ascended the first ridge, found it covered with oak and beech. Plenty of acorns and beechnuts for deer to feed on. Deer spoor was evident in the leaves. Squirrels chattered noisily at my passing. The land rocky, as is all this North Country, but here it was mostly

small stones, with few boulders of any size. I walked through hardwood groves, stepping from rock to rock, my feet never touching the ground for long distances. My trail would certainly be hard to find, even for a damn Indian.

I snuck up on a turkey and was about to shoot him for supper, when another one startled me, getting up close by. Then another dozen or so flew up, one or two at a time, distracting my aim. I tried to follow them but could not. Walked on. A little later I saw two good young bucks together. They might be twins, for they were of the same size and horn growth. Both fork-horns, new in the velvet, pawing the ground in mock combat with each other. Soon enough it would be the real thing for them in their quest for does. I tried to position myself for a shot but they took off before I dared try. I would only get one chance and had little faith in my ability to hit one.

“Rather have a turkey, anyway,” I told myself.

I looked up to the height of ground above me, wondered what might lay beyond.