

CHAPTER 12

13) Explain two events that occur in this chapter.

1) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

CHAPTER 13

14) What is the main reason why Brian can't simply wait for the rescue plane?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

15) Why are Derek's eyes always filled with tears?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

16) How do you think Brian feels when he reads from Derek's notebook?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

17) What other item does Brian find in Derek's briefcase? \_\_\_\_\_

18) How does the cover of this novel help show us where the story will be going? (2 examples)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

19) Make a prediction about what you think will happen in the book?

\_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 14

1) What is the name of The River? \_\_\_\_\_

2) What key location does the river lead to?

\_\_\_\_\_

3) About how far does Brian calculate he and Derek are away from any form of population?

\_\_\_\_\_

4) Why won't Brian leave Derek?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5) Why can't Brian wait for help to come?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6) How does Brian interact with Derek when he makes his decision on what to do?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 15

7) How long does Brian think the journey by river will take? \_\_\_\_\_

8) What became of Brian's hatchet from his first adventure?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9) Why was the hatchet left at home?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10) What type of wood does Brian use for the raft and how does he acquire it?

---

---

11) Why doesn't Brian worry about the logs getting "water logged"?

---

The River By Gary Paulsen chapters 12-14 Write either True or False in the blank before each statement.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Through the day and the night, Brian knelt next to Derek waiting for him to wake up.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Because radio contact was to be made daily, Brian was confident that search planes would be sent soon.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Derek was in a coma.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. It made Brian angry that Derek had reached out for the radio and his briefcase when he should have stayed low.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Except for his breathing and heartbeat, Derek's other bodily functions had stopped working.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Derek seemed to be able to breathe better when Brian rolled him over on his back.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. By the second day, Derek's breathing had steadied and his heart rate was close to normal.

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. Derek choked when Brian attempted to force water down his throat.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. Brian concluded that Derek could not go as long without water as it would take for help to arrive.

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. When Brian began talking to him, tears appeared for an instant in Derek's eyes.

\_\_\_\_\_ 11. Brian's predicament was different this time because he was responsible for the life of another person as well as his own.

\_\_\_\_\_ 12. In his notebook, Derek had written his belief that Brian had been wrong to insist that the gear be left on the plane.

\_\_\_\_\_ 13. Brian found a map of the lake and surrounding area in Derek's briefcase.

\_\_\_\_\_ 14. The river that wound out the southern end of the lake was named the Necktie River.

\_\_\_\_\_ 15. The map indicated that, as it moved southeast, the river led to Brannock Trading Post.

\_\_\_\_\_ 16. Brian was not sure he would find people at the spot on the map where the small circle and the double line were drawn.

\_\_\_\_\_ 17. The river flowed in an almost straight line from the lake to the point where the map indicated the location of the trading post.

\_\_\_\_\_ 18. Brian calculated he would have to travel about twenty-five miles on the river to reach the trading post.

\_\_\_\_\_ 19. If Brian left him behind, Derek would certainly be defenseless against attacks by wild animals.

\_\_\_\_\_ 20. Brian realized he had no choice but to take Derek down the river to the trading post.

He shook his head. Stupid. None of that mattered.

Electrical shock. What did you do when there was electrical shock?

C.P.R.

To get them breathing again, you had to give them C.P.R. — except that Derek was breathing already.

Heart. He should check the heart.

He put his fingers on Derek's wrist, but couldn't find the pulse — but when he checked his own he couldn't find that either. He put his ear to Derek's chest and heard the heart thumping. He tried to time it, but couldn't transpose the number of beats per minute measured on his digital watch into a pulse rate because he couldn't think.

Think.

The lightning came, took the tree, then Derek, the radio, him — and they were all knocked down and out.

There it was — maybe Derek was just knocked out and would come to in a little while.

Somehow he knew that wasn't true. Something in the way Derek looked made the condition look like more than just being knocked out. Yet Brian wanted it to be, wanted it to be so much that he forced himself to believe it.

Derek was breathing evenly — short breaths, but even — and his heart was beating regularly.

He was just knocked out.

Brian would make him comfortable and then wait next to him. Wait for him to come to.

He would wait.

## 12

The rest of that day and through the night, he kneeled next to Derek.

Waiting.

He only moved to get a drink and eat some berries and go to the bathroom, the rest of the time he kneeled next to Derek, putting a piece of wood on the fire now and then to keep it going, waiting. Waiting.

And he knew.

He knew that Derek was not just unconscious, was more seriously hurt than that, and still he did not know what to do.

Or if he could do anything.

The radio was gone. They had made a schedule that said they would check in once a week or so — it was very loose — and that they would call if there was an emergency. Derek had just done the weekly check-in the afternoon before, so they wouldn't think it odd that there were no calls. The bush-plane headquarters said they would keep their radio on around the clock, but not necessarily manned all the time, so even if he had a radio, Brian might not be able to get them right away. Of course, he could call any other airplane and report the emergency.

If he had a radio.

So he could not call for help, and they would not worry for another week or so, when Derek did not call in. There they were, where they sat.

Derek was down, unconscious.

In a coma.

There. *That* word came. He had been afraid of the word *death* before and now this word, *coma*. He'd have to stop that, have to face things better than he was facing them. He knew almost nothing of medical terms or what happened to people with severe shock, and knew less than nothing about comas.

He'd seen movies about people in comas for months and months or years and years and then they would suddenly snap out of it and wonder how long they'd been asleep.

In the night, next to Derek, he tried to will him awake. *Snap awake now and ask how long you've been sleeping. Now. And we'll laugh and talk about how close the lightning came.*

But it did not work.

Derek did not awaken, made no change of any kind. Somewhere just before dawn, when the first light of false dawn was making the western side of the lake come into view, Brian finally accepted it.

Derek was in a coma and was apparently not going to snap out of it. At least not soon.

That left everything, everything on Brian, and for a moment he felt a touch of anger and resentment.

The woods.

The damn woods.

Last time he'd almost died, would have died, except for luck, and now this — this again. All this dumped on him just because he tried to do the right thing, and he didn't even want to do it. Anyway, Derek was so dumb that he raised up and reached out when he should have stayed low and... and... and...

*Listen to me, he thought. If I were talking out loud, I'd be whining.*

*Derek gets hit and I act like I'm the one getting messed up.*

It was this way, he thought. Derek was unconscious and it seemed to be a coma — or something like a coma.

He did not seem to be coming out of it.

The radio did not work and Brian could not call for help.

So, then what?

They might come looking in a week or ten days. Could he stay here with Derek for a week or ten days and wait for them?

Could he *not* stay? What choices did he have?

If he stayed and Derek didn't regain consciousness, how long would he... last? If he didn't get food and water, could he stay alive?

They never talked about that in movies or on television. They never said what they did with people in a coma. Fed them through tubes, probably.

But he couldn't do that.

He had to try to put food and water down Derek's throat, and if he did that he might choke him and kill him.

So he couldn't really do that, either.

"So, then," he said aloud, speaking to and not to Derek at the same time. "What can I do?"

He had kneeled next to Derek almost all night, and when he tried to stand, his knees almost buckled. He rolled sideways and flexed his legs, and while he was rolled to the side he smelled it.

*Oh, yes — I'd forgotten that kind of thing — the bathroom. Derek would, of course, have to go to the bathroom — his body functions would keep going. Or would they? Yes, apparently they would.*

There was that too. To take care of Derek, truly take care of him — he'd never had to do anything like it before, take care of someone.

Himself, sure, but he'd never been really responsible for some other person, and he wondered what to do — what a person did.

The anger had passed, but he felt immense frustration at his helplessness.

It had to be done. He had to clean Derek, take care of him, take care of another human being. Look at it that way, he thought — not Derek, but another person. He had to clean this helpless person — if he kept it detached, maybe he could do it.

Why would it be so hard anyway?

He unfastened Derek's pants and the smell grew stronger.

"Oh, God."

He fought the nausea down, controlled it, turned Derek over and held his breath and used grass to clean him. Then he pulled the pants up and put him on his side again.

Parents — how did parents do it? It was horrible — how could they do it? He used sticks to carry it and the grass to the hole they had dug for a bathroom and covered it with dirt, then went down to the lake and washed his hands again and again until he could hold them to his face and not smell anything. When they were clean and he could breathe normally without choking, he went back to Derek.

Comfort — he could do what he could to make Derek more comfortable. Brian moved him and rearranged the pine boughs to make a softer bed.

Then he pulled Derek onto his back on the new boughs, but was alarmed when Derek seemed to begin to choke or breathe strangely, and he put him back on his side.

So, nothing.

Nothing he could do, not really.

It was full light now, warm, with the sun drying the rain off the grass. A warm summer morning with birds singing, Brian thought, looking across the mirrored surface of the lake — a beautiful summer morning with birds singing and fish jumping on the lake and everything perfect, except for this one thing. This one little thing.

Derek was in a coma.

## 13

Somewhere, Brian thought, somewhere he'd heard something about comas. He must have. Something more than he could remember. But it had to be in his mind, in his thinking, and if it was there he must be able to get it out.

He spent the morning trying to remember what he knew, but nothing came.

It was like being asleep, except that you didn't wake up, he thought. Everything kept working, but you couldn't eat or drink.

He had been moving from the lake to the shelter with a birch-bark cone full of water when it hit him.

They could wait all week, wait nine or ten days for the plane to come — or he could. He knew that people had gone that long without food. Derek would lose some weight, but he wouldn't starve to death in that time.

But Brian was sure Derek could not go that long without water. Two, three days, maybe four, then he would be in trouble. Somewhere he'd heard or read or seen that the human body couldn't go that long without water.

And it had already been one day, going on two days.

He could try getting Derek to drink. If he could get water in him he would last. His breathing had steadied still more and his heart rate was close to normal. Brian had finally settled enough to measure it and calculate that it was running about sixty-five

beats per minute. He remembered something about the rate supposing to be seventy-two, so Derek was low, but it was still working all right.

Brian made a small spoonlike holder out of birch bark. With this he dipped water from the cone, which he had propped next to Derek's head, and he put a small bit of water into the unconscious man's mouth.

The effect was immediate and explosive.

*"Charrsst!"*

Derek choked instantly, and reflex action took over and he coughed, spraying water and spit in Brian's face. The choking continued and Brian frantically pulled Derek's head over to the side, held his face down and pounded on his back — all he knew to do.

It seemed to last forever and Brian was terrified that he had killed Derek. One mistake, one thing wrong, and he was choking to death.

But finally the water cleared from Derek's throat and the coughing stopped, though his breathing was still ragged.

"So, you can't drink." Brian settled Derek's head back onto the rolled-up jacket. "That doesn't make all this any easier."

At first he felt strange, talking to Derek when there was no indication that he could be heard. Then he remembered his mother reading a story in a paper and telling him about a girl that had been in a coma for months — please, he thought, dear God, don't let Derek be under that long — and when she recovered she said that while she was in the coma she could hear people talking. She could hear and understand, but could not answer, and he thought Derek might be the same.

"Derek?" He leaned close to Derek's face. "Can you hear me?"

There was no sign.

"Can you move your eyelids? If you hear me, move your eyelids."

Nothing. The eyes were half open, filled with tears that came constantly. Apparently the body was trying to keep them from drying out, because Derek could not blink.

He sat up, then stood and looked at the sky. *I can't do this*, he thought. *I can't do this alone. I just can't....*

He looked down at Derek again, shook his head. "I don't know what to do."

And he realized then that he was wrong — it wasn't like last time. He wasn't alone.

There was Derek. Maybe if he talked to him, spoke aloud to him — maybe it might help.

"Here it is," Brian said, squatting again, moving a stick in the dirt. "There's no way anybody will come for at least a week, and maybe longer. Maybe ten days. I don't think you can... I don't think it would be good to go that long without water. I can't get you to drink because I think you'll choke. So."

"So." He repeated, shrugging, drawing a big zero in the dirt. "I don't know what to do."

He threw the stick down in exasperation. It hit the ground harder than he meant, then bounced and skipped into Derek's briefcase.

Brian saw it as if for the first time. He'd forgotten about it in the crisis and went to it. "What have you got in here?"

It was not locked and he opened it with the two sliding thumb releases on either end of the handle edge.

Inside, there were spiral notebooks. They weren't anything special — the kind with ruled lines and the twisted wire holding the edge — and each of them was numbered.

He opened number one.

"Arrived," he read aloud. "Brian demanded that we leave all the gear in the plane or it would ruin the whole experiment."

*Oh, yes, Brian thought—I did that. Oh, God, I did that, didn't I? I stuck my little foot down and dug in and got stubborn and set all this up. What was there? Food and shelter and a gun and all the things I didn't think we'd need that would make this easier.*

"I admire his ethics." He finished reading the first day. He put the notebook down. "You do, eh? Admire me — the guy who made us lose all that gear?"

He felt like he was prying and decided not to read any more of the notebooks. He started to close the briefcase and saw that there was a folding accordion-style section that collapsed back into the lid.

There was something in the section and he pulled out a folded paper. When he opened it he saw that it was the map.

The same map they had looked at with Brian's mother. He saw the lake, saw where they had circled it with her, showing where they would be, how... how *located* it looked. How easy to see and find and locate.

Derek had had two copies of the map and he'd left one with Brian's mother. "So you can always tell right where we are."

Brian remembered sitting there, his mother smiling. All her questions answered, all her doubts gone.

And now look at them.

Derek had brought the other map and kept it when Brian dug his heels in and told him to send everything but the radio back and in some relief Brian had spread the map gratefully on the back of the briefcase — thinking it would help — but now he shook his head and started to fold it. What difference did it make if he knew where they were? It wouldn't help them.

Then he looked at the lake again, saw how it lay in the wide, flat greenness — how there were many lakes around it.

And he saw the river.

## 14

He had noticed it before, of course — when they went over the map in his house and when they had first landed. But in the largeness of the country shown on the map, the massive forest the map showed, the river was a small thing, and he had negated it.

It wound out the bottom of the lake, the southern end, and headed southeast down into the lakes below and was lost, and he had not followed it except to note the name.

The Necktie River.

"Isn't that a funny name," his mother had said, and Derek had laughed.

“There are lakes named Eunice, or Bootsock — there are so many lakes and rivers, the original mapmakers just made up names as they went. The person drawing the map was probably wearing a tie and thought it would make a good name. Many of them aren’t named at all — just numbered.”

The Necktie River, Brian saw, led south and down and drew his eyes away from the lake.

The map was laid out in square five-thousand-meter grids — five-kilometer squares — and he saw that in some places the river wound back almost on itself inside the same five thousand square meters. But in other places it ran straight for a considerable distance and he followed it, through smaller lakes and what he thought must be swamps, through the darker green portions that meant heavier forest.

It kept going south to the edge of the map, where it was folded, and he unfolded the next section and spread it in the sun. He did not know why the river drew him, pulled at him.

Then, halfway through the second page, he saw it. The river had grown all along, gotten wider so that it made a respectable blue cut across the map and where it made a large bend, cutting back nearly straight east, there was a small circle drawn and the words:

Brannock Trading Post.

Leading away from Brannock’s Post there was a double line heading down and to the southwest. When he found the symbol for the double line on the map’s legend he saw that it stood for an improved gravel road.

There would be people there.

Right there, on the map, at Brannock’s Trading Post there would be people. They wouldn’t have a road or name the place or make it a dot on the map unless there were people there. A trading post would have people.

Which, Brian thought, doesn’t mean a thing.

He wasn’t at Brannock’s Trading Post. He was here.

Yet he couldn’t take his eyes off the spot on the map. It was there, on the same map — just there. And he refolded the map so it would show the lake where they were and the trading post at the same time. He used his fingers to make a divider and measured it straight down, but it didn’t mean anything.

Then he remembered that the grids stood for five kilometers each, and when he counted the numbers of grids between the lake and Brannock's he came up with about sixteen squares.

"So how far is that?" he said to Derek. "Five times sixteen — maybe eighty, eighty-five kilometers."

But that was straight — in a straight line southeast.

The river was nowhere near straight, looping back and forth and actually flowing slightly north back along itself at one point.

He started counting, measuring the river as it turned through each five-kilometer square, marking each ten kilometers in the dirt with a line through it, then the next set of ten. It was involved and took him some time, but finally he was done.

He counted them.

"One hundred and fifty kilometers," he said. "One point six kilometers to a mile. Just under a hundred miles."

He looked at Derek, who did not move, who made no sign.

"There are people just under a hundred miles from here."

But what good did that do?

"Here it is — I could leave you and try to follow the river out and bring help back."

Which, he thought, sounded insane. There were animals. They would come, and if they thought Derek was dead.... He was defenseless. They might attack him. Even eat him. Even small things — ants, bugs.

"I can't leave you."

Brian looked at the map again. It was there, the answer was there. Brannock's Trading Post was the answer and the river was the answer, but he didn't see how.

He couldn't leave Derek.

He couldn't leave Derek....

What if he took Derek with him?

He said it aloud. "What if we went out together?"

On the face of it, it sounded like madness. Haul a man in a coma nearly a hundred miles out of the wilderness on a river.

You could say that, Brian thought, but there was a lot of difference between saying it and doing it.

How could he?

The river. If he had a boat... or a raft.

If he made a raft and put Derek on the raft, there might be a way he could make the run and take Derek out, get him to the trading post and to help.

And even as he said it he knew it was crazy. A hundred miles on a wilderness river with a raft, hauling a grown man who would be nothing but dead weight, was impossible.

He would have dropped it, except that he looked up from the map and saw the truth then; looked up and saw Derek with his eyes half open and not seeing, awake but not truly living, the minutes of his life moving past and Brian knew that he really didn't have any choice.

If he stayed Derek would die of thirst in two, perhaps three days. Well before the week or ten days that would pass before the pilot came looking to see what happened.

If he stayed, Derek would die.

If he made the run, took Derek down the river, at least there was a chance.

He had no choice.

## 15

Time was everything now — once the decision was made, time was vital. But Brian took a minute to scan the map once more and do some mental calculating, and it didn't come up too terrible.

Say it was a hundred miles by river.

When they'd landed they'd come down next to where the river left the lake, and Brian had watched the current as it flowed away. It seemed to move about as fast as a person walked — maybe three miles an hour. Of course, that didn't mean that it

would continue to flow at that speed, but it would probably be about the same.

If he could get into the current and move with it and stay with it, a hundred miles would take thirty-five or forty hours.

He studied it closer on the map and noted that it grew wider as it flowed and that in some places it moved through hilly country — there were contour lines on the map close together, which meant steeper hills. Here the current might even be a little faster.

A day and a half, he thought. Then he said it aloud for Derek. “A day and a half. A long day and a half, but if we keep moving, stay in the river and don’t stop, we should make the trading post in a day and a half. Maybe two days.” And that, he thought without saying, is a lot better than seven or eight.

A lot better than dying.

There were two places where the river ran into lakes and out the other end, and many smaller ponds and what might be swamps where the river moved through a center of a small body of water. They would slow him down.

He could not judge how much, but none of them were large, and if he stayed on the edge and used a pole he should be able to keep moving well enough not to lose too much time.

Time.

He was sitting, reading, looking at the map, and there wasn’t time for it.

He needed to build a raft.

He checked Derek one more time, made certain his breathing was regular and that his heart was beating steadily and then moved off down the side of the lake, looking for wood.

The problem was not wood so much as the lack of a tool. When he’d made the raft before to go out to the plane he’d had his hatchet, and he missed it terribly now. After he’d been rescued and gone home, his mother had put the hatchet in a glass case in the living room, where she kept the china handed down by her grandmother. He’d looked at it as he’d left the house, but they had decided that having a hatchet might not be realistic.

“Lots of people carry a knife of some kind,” Derek had said. “But how many have a hatchet on their belt?”

So all he had was a knife — well, two knives, actually. He had Derek's knife as well. He'd almost forgotten that.

But even two knives wouldn't help him cut through logs.

There was wood all over the place. Wind storms over the years had knocked down pines and spruce trees and many of them were the right diameter to use for making a raft — six or eight inches and straight. But they were for the most part too long, or still connected to the root structure, which made them impossible to use.

But Brian moved along the lake, up from the shore and back, and finally he found a stand of large poplars where beavers had been working.

He knew almost nothing of beavers except that they lived in the water, chewed trees down, and looked cute when he saw them swimming in the water. Except for pictures he'd never seen one on dry land, but he'd seen how they took trees down and this stand of poplars was a good example. In a hundred-yard circle there wasn't a tree standing.

There were pointed stumps everywhere, with tooth marks on them, and dropped trees fallen across each other so thickly that it looked like giants had started to play pick-up-sticks and walked away before finishing the game.

The beavers had been working at the grove for some time — probably years — and they had not only dropped the trees, many of them the right diameter, but they had cut the limbs off and dragged them down pathways to the lake and cut some of the tree trunks in sections between eight and ten or twelve feet long, apparently to make them easier to move.

It's like I hired them, Brian thought, looking at all the fallen poplars — just to cut them down for me.

The older trees, which had been cut down the year or two before, were well dried out, and when Brian rolled and skidded them down to the lake he found that they floated well. Four of them side by side held him up easily when he used his arms to hold them together and crawled on top of them. He got wet, but they held him.

Of course, Derek was a lot heavier and the two of them together heavier still, but eight or ten of them should do it. And there were many the right size and length. He had only to select the ones he wanted.

He worked hard for a solid half hour, then ran to check on Derek. He was still the same, and Brian jogged back to the beavers' woodyard.

He picked eight logs, each running close to eight inches thick and roughly eight feet long. He selected the driest ones he could find, going by feel. He'd learned that from firewood. The drier, the lighter.

The wood was soft, felt soft to the point of his knife, and he thought that might mean they would waterlog, but then he decided it wouldn't matter. It would take weeks, or at least days, to soak into an eight-inch log, and he wouldn't need the logs that long.

One way or the other, he thought, while dragging the first log down to the lake.

The beavers had left clear sliding trails where they had dragged branches down to the lake, and Brian used one of them, the main trail, to pull the logs down. The last four feet to the water were fairly steep and the mud was slick from the recent rain and the logs pretty much made their own way to the lake, pushing him ahead down into the water.

He had a plan — or as much of a plan as he could have for what he was going to try to do. He couldn't move Derek very far by mere strength — he had to weigh close to a hundred and eighty pounds, compared to Brian's one-forty. Brian couldn't carry him and could only drag him a short distance.

So he had to bring the raft to just below the shelter — bring the raft to Derek — and that meant building it here and working it up the side of the lake to Derek.

It took him less than an hour to get all the logs down to the water, and when he lay them side by side and lined the ends together he was pleased to see that they made a usable-looking raft. The ends weren't quite even, but close, and they were pointed, the way the beavers had chewed them off. It gave them a streamlined look.

Like something out of *Huckleberry Finn*, he thought.

Except that nothing held them together yet. Brian stood next to them in knee-deep water and studied the problem.

He had no rope, no string, and yet he had to have a way to hold the logs in a flat platform to keep them solid enough to carry Derek and him.

He had his clothing. His jacket — the same type windbreaker he'd had when he first had to survive after the plane crash — and he had Derek's jacket as well, though Brian wanted to keep that for cover for Derek.

But even cutting the jackets in strips might not make enough roping to tie all the logs together. He cast around, half looking for vines or grasses he could weave into a rope.

But again the beavers helped him. They had also cut smaller sticks — limbs and the tops of the trees — some of them five or six feet long and two or three inches in diameter.

They provided his answer. He made cross-pieces with them, put one on top and one on the bottom and sandwiched the raft body logs in place. Then he cut strips from his jacket and tied the two cross-pieces together at the ends so that they were pulled together and held the logs firmly in place. By using his knife to notch the cross-pieces to take the material, he made sure the cloth tie-downs didn't slip off.

He put four of these cross members down the length of the raft, tying them in place as tight as he could get them, and when he was done the raft was stout enough for him to stand on, jump on, walk back and forth on.

It was about eight feet long, five and a half feet wide, and floated well out of the water, and had not taken him more than two hours to build.

He had gone back twice to check on Derek while working and now that it was finished he cut a long pole for pushing the raft and used his knife to carve a crude paddle, then moved back to the camp before bringing the raft.

He was not hungry — still felt too nervous for hunger — but knew he should eat before they started or he would be too weak. So he ate nuts and some berries they had stored in a birch-bark cone, ate everything he could find in the shelter — they wouldn't need it on the run — and examined Derek closely one more time while he ate.

This whole thing, he knew, was crazy and had only a small chance of working. He knew that, understood that. If there was one thing he understood about working in an emergency — surviving — it was that there was a large measure of luck involved.

And if there was the slightest, tiniest change in Derek, any indication at all that he was coming out of it, Brian would call the trip off and hope for the best.

So he studied Derek, worked at it as hard as he could. He looked into the unconscious man's eyes and saw nothing, just the glazed look that was there before. He carefully measured his breathing and his heartbeat and found them to be the same — exactly — as they had been since he'd started to keep track of them.

He yelled into Derek's ear, looking for some reaction in the eyes, and there was no sign of any kind that he could hear, or that he could react to hearing.

Finally, he tried pain. He used the tip of his knife to poke Derek's hand, again watching the man's eyes and there was, simply, nothing — even when he poked hard enough to draw a small drop of blood.

No sign of any kind of life or knowledge except the breathing and the heartbeat.

Then he waited a few minutes and did it all again, working steadily, carefully, and it was the same. He had to be certain, absolutely certain that there was no choice.

And he was.

He stood and looked across the lake and felt strangely old. It was his decision to make and yet another man could die because of what he decided. He had never been in this position, and it frightened him. Even when he was in danger, even when he had to fight just to live, his decisions only affected him — never another person.

And now Derek lay there and Brian looked down to where he'd pulled the raft to the shore by the shelter and opened his mouth and said:

"We go." It came out as a whisper.

Right or wrong, they had to do it — Brian had to do it. *Please, God*, he thought — and did not finish it. Just that — please, God. He turned to face Derek and coughed and said it again, loud and clear.

"We go."

## 16

It proved to be almost impossible to start.

Brian took the briefcase down to the raft, and decided to take a weapon — he left the bow but took two lances he had made. One fish spear with twin tines held open with a small stick that he had made to show Derek that you could use a spear as well as a bow to take small fish. The other was a straight spear with a fire-hardened point that he had decided to use if necessary on a moose.

"Did it really attack you?" Derek had asked, when he told of his time near the L-shaped lake and the moose attack. "Really come at you?"

"And stayed with it," Brian said. "I couldn't do anything — it just kept coming back, pushing me down underwater until I pretended to be dead. Next time I'm going to fight back."