

THE BURNING GROUND

CHAPTER ONE: THE MOURNING TIME—THEN

1

Many summers past, during the Season of Dust, a Maidu boy named Shining Eyes fell to the ground, struck down by a vision.

Shining Eyes, who had seen fourteen summers, was preparing to dive for mussels in a nearby stream when he fell unconscious on the bank. Red Arrow, his cousin and best friend, carried him back to Kalkalya, their village, and the people summoned the old shaman. When he lifted the boy's eyelids, the shaman knew that spirits dwelled within him during his trance state.

Shining Eyes did not share his vision, even though he could recall it vividly. A few days passed before the vision struck him down a second time. This time, the old shaman believed that "pains" were responsible for the boy's affliction. He had Shining Eyes taken into the *kum*, the chief's lodge. Next, because he was only a *netdi*, a dreaming shaman, he sent for a colleague from the village of Hokomo, a powerful *yomi*, or sucking shaman, to extract the boy's "pains."

While the old shaman shook his cocoon rattle and blew smoke over the supine body of Shining Eyes, the *yomi* placed his hands on the boy's chest. Muttering a chant, straining mightily, he sucked out the boy's "pains." The effort left him drained.

The two men stared at the "pains" of Shining Eyes—in one hand a small, broken bit of bone, in the other a wriggling worm. Surely he had been freed of what afflicted him.

"Take these," the *yomi* told the chief, "and bury them away from the village."

The leader of the Kalkalya Maidu accepted the objects with disgust. Hurrying outside, he divided the "pains" between two braves and ordered them out of the village. They went in opposite directions, each crossing one of the streams between which Kalkalya stood. Thick forests of pine and oak quickly took them.

The boy recovered quickly and for ten days did all the usual things. But Red Arrow, who knew his friend well, believed that something deep within troubled Shining Eyes.

Then, with the Season of Dust waning and the Mourning Time drawing nearer—the time when the Maidu danced the Weeping Dance for the dead atop the burning ground—the vision struck Shining Eyes down once again.

He fell near the easterly creek. This time the old shaman saw him topple and hurried to join Red Arrow, who knelt at his friend's side.

"Quickly, take him to the..." the *netdi* began, but stopped when the boy sat up.

"There are men in my dream, many men," he said, trancelike. "They wear strange clothes, and hair grows from their faces, and..."

"Yes?" the old shaman asked.

"Their skin...different from us. White; white skin."

"White skin?" Red Arrow shouted. "Never have I heard—"

"Boy, *sbb!*" the shaman snapped. To Shining Eyes: "In your dream, could you see where these men were?"

"Yes, they were...here."

“Here?”

“In our rivers and streams, our forests and hills, all over our land. I saw places known to me.”

This concerned the old shaman. “What were these...white skins doing?”

Shining Eyes’ blank expression became a scowl. “Two things. First, I saw them digging.”

“Digging? For what?”

The boy reached into the stream and scooped up a handful of its gritty floor. “For this.”

“For *sand*?” the shaman exclaimed. “For *rocks*?”

“No, only this.” Shining Eyes stirred the dripping mud and separated many gleaming golden flakes. He also extracted a nugget about the size of an acorn and held it up for the others to see. “And this.”

The *netdi* shook his head. “Of what importance could this be?”

Shining Eyes threw all of it back into the water. “The dream did not reveal that to me.”

“You mentioned two things,” Red Arrow said. “What was the other?”

The boy shuddered. “The white skins were...devouring our people.”

#

No Maidu of Kalkalya, or of any other village for miles around, pretended to understand the dream, but all feared its portent. Shining Eyes soon began dreaming other dreams; good dreams, for the most part. In time, when they laid the old shaman to rest in the burning ground and helped him move on to the Sky Land, Shining Eyes became *yomi* to his people and won respect across the territory of the Maidu. Still, the first dream tormented him all his life.

2

In early summer of 1849 a man named Bear Mason led over twenty miners northeast from Sacramento to the north fork of the Yuba River, in the rugged foothills of California’s Sierra Nevada mountains.

Why there? some wondered. “Too many friggin’ people down along the American, is why!” Mason would say. “No room to stand and piss into any fork, much less work a claim. And what I hear, hell of a lot more damn fools is on their way!”

Mason spoke the truth. The forty-niners, as the newspapers called them, now flocked to the gold fields around Coloma, Placerville, Angels Camp, and other burgeoning boom towns. Bear Mason wanted no part of that. He would also tell anyone that asked, “Damn placer gold comes washin’ down from the mountains, so they’s gotta be as much or more up along the Yuba as anywhere else.”

Among the twenty-odd miners that followed him there, the ill-tempered Mason counted just one friend, and only because the simple Albert Lick was “too goddamn dumb to know any better.” Why did they go with him, then? Because they *wanted* to believe his stories of what they would find along the Yuba. As distasteful a companion as he appeared, this man could be their way to quick and easy riches.

On the afternoon they arrived, the miners knew how right they had been.

One day earlier they’d crossed the Yuba River’s south fork, their boots stirring up “color.” The same thing happened toward the end of the day, at the middle fork. Why didn’t they stop at either of those places? they wondered. But Mason had his mind set on the north fork, and no one argued with him.

The horses and mules were still being unloaded when a miner waded into the current from the rock-strewn south bank. The river ran wide here, with a sharp bend where a sand bar protruded. Not far off, a narrow creek twisted down from the north between low hills, one of many that fed the river. Forests of oak and sycamore, trimmed by dense, thorny chaparral, pushed to within yards of both steep, rocky banks. So did digger pines—thin, gray conifers with few needles.

The first pan dipped into the cold water belonged to a Kentuckian named Caleb Morgan. His loud *whoop* brought the others to the river. Grinning, he showed them the pan, which held dust, small flakes, and one pea-sized nugget.

A second and third pan brought similar yields. Then, a man from Buffalo named Edwin Brookmire caught their attention from the sand bar. “Look here!” he cried.

Two nuggets, partly embedded and nearly identical, each weighed about seven ounces. And more placer gold, washed down from the mountains, flecked the bar.

Even before they could absorb this, Albert Lick walked toward the group from about ten yards downriver, where he had gone to piss. He carried in both hands a large rock, which he'd pulled from the north bank, at the water line. Thickly caked in mud, it didn't look like much. Some of the men snickered, but shut up when Mason glared at them. Mason took the rock and plunged it under the water, rinsing off layers of mud.

The rock, a pure gold nugget, had no quartz lines at all. It weighed over six pounds.

"Boys, we're gonna be friggin' rich and long gone 'fore anyone else ever gets up this way!" Mason exclaimed.

A *town*, christened Rainbow's End, sprang up along the Yuba River's north fork, with Bear Mason as its *alcalde*, the mayor. A couple of tents went up, the largest serving as a saloon, meeting hall, and a church, where those inclined could listen to a devout Virginian named William Root read from the Bible. But mostly the men slept under the stars, because they were too busy getting rich to concern themselves with a roof over their heads. During the first month no man earned less than \$150 a day, with occasional "strikes" multiplying that number many times over. And when a claim began to yield less, a miner simply moved farther up- or downriver, or along one of the streams that fed the north fork.

For much of the summer Bear Mason killed only one white man. The justifiable death—by their standards—happened after a heretofore quiet, hardworking man named Peter Tolles suddenly took off with the bulging pokes of two neighbors. They caught him a mile south, brought him back, tried and hung him, Mason serving as both judge and executioner. Such was the law of the camps.

#

Bear Mason had a good reason for why he grew richer than his fellow miners, and it had to do with the Indians that infested the foothills of the Sierra Nevadas. Strange, repulsive heathens they were, many thought, not like the proud Sioux or Cheyenne or Blackfoot. No one cared that they, too, had tribal names, like Miwok, Washo, Maidu, or Yana. The white men called them "Digger" Indians, a disparaging term that had to do with their practice of digging up roots and insects and consuming them.

Discounting Mason and the simple Albert Lick, who didn't understand too many things, not a single man at Rainbow's End had the slightest use for a Digger. Their attitudes toward them ranged from the grudging tolerance—and attempts at conversion—of Root and his Bible-toting friends, to the intense hatred of Sam Beale, an Oregonian who'd fought in the recent, bloody Cayuse war.

But Mason, who also hated Indians and had killed more of them than Beale and the others combined, acknowledged their usefulness. He'd lived among them, eaten their food, bartered cheap trinkets for valuable furs and hides, bedded squaws. After a month on the Yuba's north fork he managed to win over a few Diggers from a village not too far away using guile, whiskey, and white man's clothes. Two squaws became frequent visitors to the camp, which pleased most of the miners, while Mason put the braves to work on his claim, and his poke grew. Still, as August of 1849 neared its final days, only a couple of other miners had taken advantage of the cheap labor.

There were incidents, of course: a young Digger, drunk, managed to get hold of a gun and blow his brains out. Another accidentally set foot on Sam Beale's claim and was beaten soundly. A whore called Janie scarred the face of a miner who treated her badly. And one brave was killed in self-defense after he attacked Edwin Brookmire. No one knew what had provoked him.

Somehow, though, they coexisted, and Mason, benefiting the most, dreamed about pink-skinned women, good whiskey and other pleasures that would occupy the rest of his life.

3

The Season of Seeds approached, and with it came the *usbtu*, the Mourning Time, when the Maidu danced the Weeping Dance.

Red Arrow, the chief, thought about the three who had been laid to rest in the burning ground since the last *usbtu*. In the Season of Snow it had been Old Wife, his first squaw, who had been with him since early manhood, and for whom his heart still grieved. Then, recently, the two young braves who had died in the village of the white skins. *Three* people. Not that many Kalkalya Maidu had died in all the *five* years previously.

Things were different now.

Standing in front of his *kum*, Red Arrow watched the old shaman conversing with four young men. Shining Eyes' back was bent, and he walked with difficulty from an injury sustained on a hunt many summers ago. But the intensity of his piercing gaze was no different than it had been in his youth. The young men in his presence fidgeted; Red Arrow did not have to hear the words to know what they discussed.

The oldest, a son of Shining Eyes, had seen twenty-two summers. He'd once worn a different name, Deer Hunter, for no one brought more deer to the village than him during the hunts. But now he wished to be called Lazy Jim, a name that the white skins had given him. His two friends were Scarface John and Captain George, while the fourth, at sixteen little more than a boy, was Lazy Jim's brother. He had not yet been to the village of the white skins so they still called him Swift Water, a name proudly given him by Shining Eyes in his fifth summer, when he could already negotiate the racing currents of the streams and rivers in a square-ended dugout canoe.

Today, Shining Eyes feared, this would all change.

"I wish you would not go to the white skins' village," the old shaman said.

Lazy Jim smiled. "You say the same thing each time, Father."

The *yomi* shrugged. "I am afraid for the boy."

"But you gave me your permission last night," Swift Water said, "so it is done."

Shining Eyes raised both hands and exclaimed, "Do not any of you recall the dream?"

Scarface John and Captain George glanced smugly at each other but were chastened by a cold glare from Lazy Jim. The shaman's ancient dream had, in recent years, been the source of both awe and ridicule among not only the Kalkalya Maidu but those of other villages.

"Father, your dream foretold the coming of the white skins," Lazy Jim said in a patient tone. "But see! Have they devoured us? They are not monsters, they are our friends."

The debate always ended this way. Shining Eyes sighed. "You will bring me more of their tobacco?"

"Of course, Father."

The young man started to walk away, but Shining Eyes grabbed his arm. "You still have it with you?" he asked.

Lazy Jim reached into his deerskin mantle, withdrew a gleaming white fetish on a sturdy string and held it out in his hand. This piece of bone, two inches long, had been carved in the shape of a leaping salmon.

"Of course, Father," the young man said.

Shining Eyes took the fetish and hung it around his son's neck. "Wear it," he said, "wear it all the time," and Lazy Jim nodded.

The young men started from the village. As he watched them go, Shining Eyes was joined by his oldest son's squaw, who had just emerged from her *hubo*. Cloud Woman, dressed in overlapping shredded bark aprons, carried her infant daughter on a cradleboard.

"One day he will not walk back from the white skins' village," she said in a quiet voice.

Shining Eyes glanced at his son's wife. "Why do you say that?"

"In a dream I saw him on the burning ground, but his feet did not touch, and he wept."

The old shaman looked at her sternly then relented. "He will be all right."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Go now, tend to the child."

Cloud Woman walked toward one of the streams. Shining Eyes went inside his *hubo* so that no one would see him trembling.

He could not tell Cloud Woman that he'd had the same dream.

Rainbow's End had grown. Swift Water, having seen the camp only once from afar, felt excitement as he walked through it. Being mid-morning already, most of the miners worked at their diggings. The horses and mules, tethered nearby and grazing on bunch grass, fascinated the boy.

But Swift Water reserved most of his awe for the *Bear Man*, the giant white skin who had already become a legend in Kalkalya. The stories he had heard about this bearded monster! A fifty-pound rock the Bear Man

lifted from the bed of the river had become a boulder, then a hill. Swift Water felt some fear but held it inside, lest the others taunt him.

They walked downriver along the south bank, a quarter-mile from Rainbow's End to the Bear Man's new diggings. Other miners, working their claims, ignored the passing Indians for the most part. Some glared at them and said strange words.

They gave Sam Beale's claim a wide berth, Lazy Jim practically dragging his brother through some thorny manzanita. The dour man brandished a pickax until they had passed.

When the Indians approached they saw Mason kneeling over, swirling water and gravel out of a wash pan. Grinning, he rose to his full height of six-and-a-half feet. Swift Water would later tell the children of Kalkalya that the Bear Man's bulk hid the sky. Truly, this white skin monster was all that he'd heard.

"Well lookit, if it ain't all them stinkin' filthy idjit bastards!" Mason exclaimed, but with such an endearing grin that the Maidu couldn't help but grin back and nod. "Thought you lazy sons of bucks would never show." He gestured toward Swift Water. "Who's the kid?"

Still grinning, Lazy Jim clapped his brother on the shoulder and said, "Work good, boss. Work good! Ho-kay?"

"Yeah, and I bet you're gonna want more pay, you friggin' heathen. Huh?"

Lazy Jim didn't understand but nodded anyway. Mason led them down the bank, where Albert Lick worked. Albert waved and smiled at the Indians. The Bear Man scooped some things up in his arms and made a show of putting them on the ground: a tattered blanket, a flannel shirt, and a pint of rotgut whiskey.

Now it became Lazy Jim's turn to play the game. He tapped the whiskey bottle with a finger and cast a resolute look at the big miner. Mason, meeting the Indian's gaze, reached behind him into a sack and withdrew an identical bottle, which he set down by the first. Captain George and Scarface John nodded in admiration.

But Lazy Jim was not done. Crossing his arms and shaking his head he told Mason, "Want t'bacco. No t'bacco, no work."

Now the big man scowled at the Indian. The others tensed. Then, Mason shrugged in defeat, reached into his shirt and withdrew a small pouch, which he tossed down.

Lazy Jim had *won*; for the items before them, he and the others would work a couple of days for the white skin and dig up a thousand dollars or more of gold.

The negotiations impressed Swift Water. To stand up like that before this monster! He had always admired his brother but now would forever look up to him in awe.

"Beat me again, you ignorant bastards," Mason said wryly. "Okay, git to work..." He pointed at Swift Water again. "Wait a minute—we gotta have a name for him."

A name! Swift Water had been waiting for this. Nodding vigorously Lazy Jim said, "Name, boss, ho-kay?"

"Hey Albert, c'mere," Mason called. "Tell me what we oughta call this buck."

Albert climbed onto the bank and studied Swift Water carefully. "Charley, I guess," he said in a thick voice, each syllable drawn out. "We oughta call him Little Charley."

The name met with smiles and nods from the Maidu. Lazy Jim repeated it a few times, mangling it badly. None could have been more proud than the boy on the verge of manhood. He nodded at Albert, who held up a hand.

"Friend." Albert tapped his chest then did the same to Swift Water. "Friend."

The boy understood, and he mimicked the white skin's action. "Friend."

Albert reached in the pocket of his overalls and pulled out a grimy red bandanna, which he handed to Little Charley. His brother already wore a yellow bandanna around his forehead. Grinning, the boy tied it in the same way.

"Awright, enough makin' nice," the Bear Man muttered. "Let's put 'em to work."

All that day they dug for gold, extracting many ounces of dust, flakes, and nuggets. Little Charley impressed the Bear Man by learning the pan and cradle quickly, and he did his share. In the afternoon Albert fed them rations of hard biscuits and beans, and half a cup of whiskey each.

Little Charley wondered what the white skins wanted with the shiny sand and rocks. He and his people knew of many places—other rivers and streams, ravines and hillsides—where so much more of it could be

gathered with hardly any effort at all. It meant nothing to the Maidu, who treasured the shells of haliotis and dentalia, the obsidian stone, the glass beads and the flint from the sacred mine to the west. But Red Arrow and Shining Eyes had ordered Lazy Jim and the others to tell the white skins nothing of this, and although not understanding why, they had obeyed their elders.

That night, in Kalkalya, Cloud Woman and Shining Eyes offered thanks to Earthmaker, the creator, that their vision had not become reality. While Lazy Jim made love to his squaw, Little Charley held the rapt attention of the youngsters with his tales of the Bear Man, already grown way out of proportion even in the relatively short distance from the river to the lodges of his people.

5

During a week of work along the river, Little Charley saw all the faces of Bear Mason. As often in a surly mood as not, all the Maidu found it best to stay out of his way. One afternoon, being displeased with the efforts of Scarface John, he'd shoved him into the river. Other miners laughed at this. Little Charley knew that in their world no Hokomo or Tsuka or any other Maidu could do such a thing to a brave of Kalkalya and not expect retribution. But not here, in the world of the white skins. Scarface John had grinned dumbly and returned to work.

Another time, Little Charley dug out a fist-sized nugget. The Bear Man had smiled and rewarded him with a worn shirt and an extra ration of whiskey. Little Charley kept the shirt but gave the whiskey to the others for, unlike them, he did not like the strong, evil-smelling water.

The Bear Man's temper extended to his own kind, Little Charley saw. Poor Albert, whom all the Indians liked, often found himself at the end of the big man's boot. Late one day, after he'd been sipping the strong water for hours, a conversation with Caleb Morgan had ended with him throttling the man. Another time, a loud argument between the Bear Man and a burly miner named Louis Hobart had resulted in the latter being whipped like a dog.

But in spite of this, and a few encounters with other white skins, the Maidu that dug for the shiny metal seemed satisfied with their lot. They brought new things back to their people, and wore new names and clothes, and were praised for their courage.

As the Season of Seeds came to the land, Little Charley tasted the strong water and thought he might become used to it.

6

Cloud Woman had dreamt the dream again.

It had not come for days, perhaps because the *ushtu*, the Mourning Time, was to begin tonight, and like all her people she carried death in her thoughts. Whatever the case, it troubled her. She wondered if Shining Eyes had dreamt a dream like hers but dared not ask. He was a *yomi*, a sucking shaman, and despite being the wife of his son she held him in awe.

Although early in the morning, her husband had already left their *hubo*. Of late, Lazy Jim and the others had departed at dawn for the village of the white skins. And upon returning in the evening, they brought back more strange and wondrous things. Cloud Woman loved the small mirror and hair brush her husband had earned for her.

If only he didn't behave so...*differently* after drinking the evil-smelling water.

The baby stirred. Cloud Woman suckled her from full breasts then carried her to the stream and bathed her gently. The morning being mild, Cloud Woman wrapped her lightly in a rabbit skin before putting her on the cradleboard.

With the dream still troubling her, Cloud Woman walked to the burning ground, two hundred yards northwest of the village, across one of the streams and up a gentle incline on a plateau. From its edge it extended to the base of some granite hills. Prominent among these hills stood a large outcrop, which at a certain time of day cast its shadow across the cemetery of the Kalkalya Maidu. At other times its silhouette could be seen on the hills. Even the youngest child could identify its shape as that of an eagle.

Bird Singer, the caretaker, was gone from his lean-to at the moment, which relieved Cloud Woman. The man disturbed her, a feeling shared by most of the tribe, including those as important as the chief and the shaman. None found it easy to be reminded of death day after day.

Vaguely aware that she trembled, Cloud Woman stepped onto the burning ground. No plants grew from the dark earth. The outlines of three graves, two newly dug, stood prominent. It had been a busy year for Bird Singer.

But no time was busier than now. A brush enclosure surrounding nearly all of the burning ground and standing as tall as an adult male awaited the two nights of the *ushtu*. A narrow entrance faced west, another east. Within the enclosure were wood and tinder—never enough, it seemed to Cloud Woman, to burn through the second night, though somehow it always did.

Cloud Woman suddenly became aware that there were no sounds of birds or other animals on or near the burning ground. Had it always been that way? she wondered.

On her back, the infant began to cry.

She looked up at the stone eagle that loomed over the cemetery of the Kalkalya Maidu.

Turning against a sudden chill, Cloud Woman hurried back to the village.

7

Bear Mason was in a foul mood. Albert Lick could not recall one as bad within his short span of memory. It partly had to do with the gallon jug of rotgut, the powerful Forty Rod whiskey, which Mason had drained the night before.

Then there was Janie, who had left the Bear Man's bed the first time he passed out—he had been mean to her—and had not returned. She'd stroll back into camp in a day or two; she always did.

But on that September morning it was little consolation for Mason, whose head pounded with the beat of hammers on an anvil, his mouth as gritty as the bottom of a gold cradle.

The four Diggers were hard at work under Albert's benign supervision when the bleary-eyed *alcalde* staggered toward his claim. So far the yield had been average, though that morning it would not have mattered if they had found the Mother Lode. Scarface John, panning along the south bank, first felt his wrath.

"Useless lazy bastard!" the Bear Man exclaimed, shoving the Indian headlong into the river and stunning him.

When Captain George, nearby, stood up to see what had happened, Mason rammed the barrel of his pistol against the side of his head. The Indian went down like a felled oak.

Little Charley stood next in line.

"Friggin' heathen!" Mason bellowed.

Lazy Jim, chipping rocks from the north bank with a pickax, saw his friends fall. He could not let the same thing—or even worse—happen to his brother. The handle of the ax held tightly, he hurried across the sand bar.

"No, don't hurt the boy!" he cried out in the Maidu tongue.

Mason looked up and saw the Indian coming. Even in his state, both bullets that he fired tore into Lazy Jim's head. He toppled off the bar into a slow current, which began carrying him downriver.

Little Charley jumped into the water and dragged his brother to the bank. Captain George and Scarface John, shaking off their blows, joined him. As the boy trembled in horror, Captain George put an ear to his friend's chest then looked up solemnly.

"His heart has gone away," he said.

Little Charley opened his mouth to cry out then remembered who and what he was. Glaring at the subdued Mason he told the others, "We must take him back to the village."

The boy peeled off the flannel shirt given him by Mason and hurled it to the ground. Scarface John held up a pint of whiskey and shattered it on some rocks. Other miners, who had gathered around, watched in silence as the Indians lifted the body, carried it across the river and disappeared into the forest.

Mason felt many eyes upon him. "Wasn't my fault," he muttered. "An accident, that's what it was. I thought the bastard..."

They turned without a word and started back to their diggings, every one of them putting their weapons close at hand.

#

Shining Eyes trembled even before the others returned to the village with his son's body. He knelt outside the *kum* when they approached, and the first wails of the squaws rose in the torpid air.

"Lay him before me," he told the others.

Upon seeing her dead husband, Cloud Woman clamped a hand over her mouth. When she pulled it away, her mourning wail first joined then drowned those of the other squaws. The eerie ululation could be heard well over a mile away, in Rainbow's End. It further jangled the already overwrought nerves of the miners.

Lazy Jim's body was washed and wrapped in a fine bear skin. They tattooed his forehead with two parallel, vertical lines, and a horizontal line splitting them in half from his forehead to the bridge of his nose. The men carried him to the burning ground, Cloud Woman and the squaws still wailing as they walked behind. Bird Singer began digging the grave, and other braves joined him. The caretaker muttered to himself as he worked. To die on the first day of the *usbtu*! Not in the memory of the oldest man or woman in Kalkalya had this ever happened.

Finally the grave was done. The old shaman gazed upon the face of his son one last time. His eyes fell upon the salmon fetish, still around Lazy Jim's neck. Such a powerful charm, yet it did nothing against the killing sticks of the white skins. Shining Eyes put a hand on the bone.

"Perhaps it will serve you better in the Sky Land, my son," he said softly.

The old shaman knelt by his son and sucked out the name that the white skins had given him. It emerged as a tiny worm. Lazy Jim, once again Deer Hunter, was laid to rest, the grave filled in. The Kalkalya Maidu drifted back to the village to prepare for the *usbtu*. Soon only three remained: Cloud Woman, Little Charley, and Shell Woman, who was Shining Eyes' Young Wife and mother to both Deer Hunter and Little Charley. The women had already cut their hair and smeared it with pitch; now they prostrated themselves across the grave, weeping and wailing. Little Charley watched them for a few moments longer then returned to his *hubo*.

Before the start of the *usbtu*, Little Charley went to his father. Upon the boy's request, Shining Eyes also sucked out the name given him by the white skins. This one emerged as a small bit of splintered wood. Once more he was Swift Water, the name, he vowed, with which he would die.

#

After sunset the fifty-odd Kalkalya Maidu walked to the burning ground. The first night of the Mourning Time was the shortest. The people went to the graves of dead kin and knelt atop them. There, they wept openly, uttered personal remembrances, and sprinkled acorn meal atop the dark earth. This done, they would return to the village.

But that night was like no other before it. Not only had one of them died that same day, but two others within a moon. The mothers and wives of these three were inconsolable, and their grief spread like the white skins' cholera. People shrieked, pummeled their bodies, whipped their heads around. The sound that rose from the burning ground of the Kalkalya Maidu was that of lost, terrified wind spirits seeking escape from a dark, haunted canyon.

Still, tradition had to be maintained, and at the height of the moon Bird Singer managed to point nearly everyone back to the village. The brush walls of the enclosure had been trampled, which happened every year, though not as badly as this. He would repair everything in the morning.

Deer Hunter's family remained on the burning ground, his wife and mother still sprawled on the grave, exhausted but weeping. They would not leave of their own accord. Shining Eyes finally picked up the frail Shell Woman and carried her off. Swift Water did the same with the wife of his brother.

Shortly after, the burning ground fell silent.

8

When Bear Mason emerged from his tent he saw Zack Prevost pacing the edge of the forest across the north fork, shotgun held ready. Snarling, he hurried to Sam Beale's diggings.

“What the hell’s he on watch for?” he snapped. “I didn’t say nothin’ about needin’ no damn guard!”

“You weren’t up to making any kind of decision yesterday,” Beale said. “Me ’n the boys thought it would be a good idea.”

“Aw, that’s horseshit! Ain’t nothin’ gonna happen.”

“Oh no? What about last night?”

Mason knew what Beale meant: the goddamn caterwauling that kept the weary camp awake and on edge till after midnight.

“Noise, just friggin’ noise,” he muttered. “All their squaws do it when one dies. But if you wanna give up workin’ time, hell, I don’t care.”

“We’re taking two-hour shifts; got you down for one this afternoon.”

“Me?”

This enraged Mason. *No one* told him what to do. He could’ve whipped Beale easy; but he knew the Oregonian had the support of all the miners, especially since it was he, Mason, who caused the problem by shooting the Indian.

“Yeah, okay, but nothin’ will happen. These Diggers is all cowardly bastards.”

“Let’s hope you’re right,” Beale said.

Two hours away from his claim, and only dumb Albert to work it while he was gone! Mason’s already foul mood turned darker as he stormed along the bank.

9

Cloud Woman’s milk had stopped flowing, but a cousin had recently given birth to a child and had enough for both. She and Shell Woman returned to the burning ground at mid-morning to resume their vigil. Again, this was not the usual way at the time of the *ushtu*, but Bird Singer did not say anything.

In front of lean-tos, *hubos*, even the *kum* itself, people prepared the giving poles, which were part of the second night of the Mourning Time. Baskets, clothing, blankets, personal things of every kind were strung on fifteen-foot-high poles as gifts for the dead, to let them know they were still remembered, and to make their lives in the Sky Land easier. The poles for those recently departed were hung quite heavily. Normally, Cloud Woman would have prepared the pole for her husband, but today the squaws did her work.

Few saw Swift Water that day. His summer lean-to near the west stream stood empty. He stayed in the *hubo* of his parents, and when he did appear it was only to pass between it and the one where his brother had dwelled. The Kalkalya Maidu knew what the young man did.

When he emerged at sunset, Swift Water carried an effigy of Deer Hunter. It had been fashioned from stuffed wildcat skins and dressed in clothes, including the yellow bandanna, as well as dance regalia, all from his brother’s lodge. The left arm hung a bit shorter than the right, but otherwise he had created a good likeness of a human form. The “head” was another skin, tightly pulled and sewn in the rear. Nearly faceless, it bore a dot of a nose and two uneven slits for its eyes; angry eyes, those who saw it thought.

The people carried their giving poles to the burning ground and pushed them into the earth around the brush fence, a yard back. Swift Water staked the effigy by itself near the west opening of the enclosure then joined his family at Deer Hunter’s grave. Effigies of the other dead Maidu stood at the east opening.

With darkness Bird Singer strode solemnly into the enclosure and put a torch to the tinder. The larger pieces of wood, bone-dry, caught fast, flames probing the sky as the caretaker stepped out of the circle.

Now, by tradition, he told the people what was expected of them on the second night of the *ushtu*, his voice droning on through the crackle of the fire. By the end, no one listened. The wailing again rose above the Sierra foothills; the Weeping Dance began. The people chanted songs, many different ones, at the same time. Pieces of food were cast into the flames, which had spread through the enclosure and rose as high as the brush fence. Shining Eyes and Swift Water “fed” the effigy of Deer Hunter.

The people cried and sang and danced the Weeping Dance. Flames rose high above the cemetery of the Kalkalya Maidu, soon leaping onto the brush fence.

On the granite hillside the Eagle fluttered madly.

Long into the night they mourned, never stopping, never tiring. All around them the earth seemed to burn of its own accord, though none felt the flames. And through this fire of no heat, people swore that the

spirits of those whose hearts had recently gone away floated restlessly, also weeping, in need of a way to travel to the Sky Land. But Swift Water was dubious, for he so badly wanted to see Deer Hunter, though the spirit of his brother had not yet appeared to him.

An hour before dawn, when the *usbtu* should have been waning, Bird Singer called out some words. The people ran to their giving poles, pulled them from the earth and cast them into the dying blaze, which flared anew. This rekindled the fire within each Maidu heart, and they danced more wildly, wept and sang even louder than before, all the while pummeling their heads and chests. A few squaws had to be restrained from jumping into the flames.

Shining Eyes took the effigy of Deer Hunter off the stake and gave it to his youngest son. Swift Water walked with it toward the fire, where by custom it would be hurled in.

The effigy's head twisted to the side, its angry eyes finding Swift Water.

The boy dropped the effigy and leaped back. Shining Eyes asked, "What is it, my son?"

"Didn't you see...?" Swift Water pointed at the effigy.

"I saw nothing." The shaman knelt by the effigy and probed it with a finger. "Hurry, for you must finish what..."

He was staring at Swift Water's feet when his words trailed off. The boy looked down.

On the earth before him lay the salmon fetish that his brother should have taken with him into the Sky Land.

Swift Water wanted to reach for it but his hand trembled. Shining Eyes picked up the fetish he'd once given his oldest son, looked it over and hung it around the boy's neck.

"What...does it mean?" Swift Water asked.

The *yomi* shook his head. "It has come to you as a gift, so it is for you to understand."

Together they picked up the limp effigy and hurled it into the fire. When he heard Cloud Woman's wail, Swift Water knew she had been watching.

By tradition, the *usbtu* was not over with the second dawn. After the Weeping Dance, after the breast beating, came a time of levity, games, eating and drinking. But too much had happened to the Kalkalya Maidu that summer, and Red Arrow decided it would not serve them well. He ordered the ceremony dispensed with and told the people to go home.

"No! You cannot do this!" Bird Singer exclaimed. "The *usbtu* must be finished. Earthmaker will not accept them until the Mourning Time is complete!"

Following a talk with the caretaker, Shining Eyes, and other elders, the chief agreed to a compromise. Later that day, after they'd rested, the men of Kalkalya would leave on a deer hunt, one that had long been planned. This was, after all, the Season of Seeds, and the Season of Snow followed close behind, and you could never be too well-provisioned. When they returned in a couple of days, and the grief had waned a bit, *then* there would be feasting and levity, and the *usbtu* would be done.

While the others slept, Swift Water sat outside his parents' *hubo*. One hand clutched the fetish around his neck; the other gripped the hilt of a long, sharp obsidian knife, with which he dug absently in the earth. The knife had belonged to his brother. When the grieving Shell Woman crawled through the narrow opening early in the afternoon, she saw his confused look.

"You should rest, my son," she said.

"I do not wish to."

"Won't you be going with the others on the hunt?"

He shrugged. "I suppose so."

But when the men of Kalkalya gathered later, Swift Water did not appear. Not waiting, they set off toward the northeast, where there were choice hunting grounds. If everything went well, they would be back in two days.

At dusk, Swift Water stood among the pines and oaks to the west of Kalkalya and watched the activity. He had wandered aimlessly through the forest all the rest of that day and even now did not wish to be near the village. Perhaps he should have gone on the deer hunt; no, he'd not wanted that either.

The white skins continued to do what they always did, not concerned about the grief they'd caused the Maidu—the pain they'd caused *him*. Swift Water had looked upon their village from a far hillside. How he

hated them! He wished they would go back from where they came, leave this land to the people who had always been here. Take the shiny stones and go away!

Darkness fell rapidly. Staying in shadows, Swift Water walked to the burning ground. Bird Singer, in his lean-to, slept soundly. There was a joke among the people that when Bird Singer slept, it was an easier task to awaken the dead over whom he watched.

Swift Water found the new grave of his brother near what had been the outer ring of the enclosure, close to where he'd staked Deer Hunter's effigy. Bird Singer had cleared away most of the residue of the *ushtu*, but more remained; he would finish it tomorrow.

Swift Water did not know why he had come here, only that it was where he needed to be. He knelt atop the grave, still clutching the salmon fetish in one hand, the knife in the other. The earth, although untouched by fire, appeared as black as any around it.

From this blackness there rose a face—not his brother's true face, but that of the effigy, with its angry eyes.

Swift Water was certain he saw the face, however briefly, before fatigue and grief took him, and he sprawled across the grave.

10

Caleb Morgan wondered why in blazes he walked around out here at four o'clock in the morning.

Like everyone else he felt bone-tired. None of them had gotten any sleep the previous night, not with that godawful wailing and howling going on till dawn. It had shortened tempers and made the day at the diggings a waking nightmare. But at least this night had been quiet.

Which is why Morgan would have just as soon been in his tent, sawing wood. Only reason he walked around was so he wouldn't fall asleep standing up. Now he didn't know nearly as much about Indians as Mason and Beale did, and even though he hated the *alcalde*, Morgan had to agree with what he'd been saying the last couple of days. First off, if they wanted to attack they would've done so already, but they wouldn't, because they were cowards and their weapons were useless. And second, even if they got crazy enough to come into camp, these California Indians always waited for sunrise to do anything. Hell, everyone could've slept all night and just got up at dawn!

Turning around at the east end of the camp, Morgan thought he heard a sound. He took a few steps and heard it again. Seemed to be coming from behind the supply tent. One of the boys probably, taking a piss.

"Someone there?" he called in a soft voice. No answer.

Pulling out his revolver, Morgan went to look behind the tent.

#

Something drew Mason up from the pit of his drunken slumber. Not an easy task rousing the Bear Man. Albert Lick usually had to shake him for half a minute or more.

"Wha' the..." he muttered, thinking maybe the squaw whore had rolled over and kicked him. No, the filthy heathen hadn't been in camp for days. Probably Albert snoring; but he had to strain to hear the man's nasal breathing.

Mason rolled over slowly. His eyes widened as they found the entrance to the tent; he sat up with startling suddenness.

"You? No!" he exclaimed then reached for his gun. "Okay, come over here and see what I got for you!"

#

Four shots roused the weary camp. They gathered around, weapons drawn, a few men lighting lanterns.

"Where'd those shots come from?" Sam Beale asked.

"Dunno," Edwin Brookmire replied.

"Who's on watch?"

"Caleb, I think—"

"Hey, over here!" a voice exclaimed.

They found Morgan behind the supply tent, on his back. When Beale lifted the man's beard, they saw that his throat had been cut in a jagged semi-circle from one ear to the other.

"*Jesus help us!*" William Root exclaimed.

Morgan's gun lay at his side. Beale checked it and saw that it had not been fired.

"Bear!" someone said. "Anyone seen Bear?"

They looked around, but the *alcalde* was not among them. Carrying Morgan's gun as well as his own, Beale led them to Mason's tent. They hesitated outside for a moment. Then, Beale pulled aside the flap, and they stormed in.

Mason's nude body lay atop his cot, mouth agape, bulging eyes staring upward. A vertical cut had been made from his neck to his genitals, the two halves then spread apart. Near the end of the cot, between Mason's legs, stood a wash pan. On the bottom of it lay his heart, which had been sprinkled with gold dust from a small poke. That poke had been left open at the edge of the cot, and a thin rivulet of the valuable dust now trickled to the floor.

Some of the men hurried outside to vomit. Beale, white-faced, indicated Mason's still smoking gun as he said to Brookmire, "He had time to fire shots at whoever did this, and even drunk he usually hit what he wanted. I don't understand..."

They heard a noise. Both of them whirled around. Against the opposite wall of the tent, Albert Lick sat cross-legged on the floor. Beale and Brookmire knelt before him.

"Albert, what the hell happened here?" Brookmire asked. "Who did this?"

But he did not respond. Brookmire waved his lantern in front of the man's face. They saw his eyes staring dumbly straight ahead, his lips trembling.

Albert Lick could not tell what he had witnessed in the tent.

Beale and Brookmire took him outside, where the other men had formed a tight knot, their eyes and guns trained on any shadow or sound from the forest, the river, the hills. Away from the sight of death now, Beale's anger surged.

"Goddamn Diggers!" he cried. "Filthy murderin' bastards!"

"What're we gonna do, Sam?" a man named Isaac Parker asked.

"We can't let 'em get away with this. They can't think they kin kill white folks without paying for it. I say we do 'em the same way!"

They had all liked Caleb Morgan. And while no one would have mourned Bear Mason, the brutality of his murder made it easy for Beale to incite the men. The only dissenter was William Root, who assigned himself the care of poor Albert. It seemed clear that Albert wasn't going to emerge from his nightmare. Both to help Albert and to avoid the inevitable bloodshed, Root said he would take the young man to Sacramento, where there were doctors.

But the others agreed with Beale, now accepted as their leader, and as they dug the graves for Mason and Morgan on an incline back from the river's south bank, the flames of their vengeance burned hotter. When they were done, and Root had read from *Numbers 14:29*, they again gathered around Beale.

"First light's an hour off," the Oregonian said. "We'll start after 'em soon. The quicker we settle this, the better."

"How're we gonna find 'em?" Louis Hobart asked.

They turned to Jonathan Canfield, a smooth-faced man who looked younger than his twenty-eight years. Canfield had served the Army as a scout and was the camp's best hunter.

"I followed them one time for a while," he said, "and I think I know which way their village is. It ain't easy going—some climbing and such—but I'll get us there."

A chorus of hate rose one more time then was still. The men of Rainbow's End made ready.

Swift Water pulled himself from a hard sleep. For a moment he could not remember where he was; then, seeing the ashes that lay around him, the boy knew.

He sat up on Deer Hunter's grave. Distant fiery streaks told of the coming dawn. Over in his lean-to, Bird Singer slept soundly.

Swift Water still held the salmon fetish and knife. Glancing at the latter his eyes widened.

A dark red stain marred the tip of the knife.

Swift Water rubbed both sides of the blade on the earth. The stain would not go away.

He wiped it with the hem of his mantle. The stain would not go away.
His fingers trembled as he held the blade.
Images assaulted him, confused him.
In his lean-to, Bird Singer stirred.
Swift Water stood, dropped the knife on his brother's grave, turned and ran from the burning ground.

#

Cloud Woman's *hobo* burned.

The smoke drove her from it before the flames. Grabbing her baby, she crawled outside.

A white skin giant—they were all giants, she'd heard, although she'd never seen one—stood there, waiting.

Louis Hobart, grinning, clubbed the squaw and her child to death. Some of the pitch from her hair stuck to his trousers, which angered him.

When Shining Eyes and Shell Woman emerged, choking, from their lodge, Sam Beale shot them each two times in the head.

The brave whom the white skins called Captain George had not gone on the deer hunt because of terrible headaches from the blow he had received. The flames passed through his *hobo* quickly, and he was ablaze when he burst outside. Isaac Parker fired twice into his stomach, none of the wounds proving fatal. Captain George died slowly, screaming as the flames consumed him.

The *kum* being larger, Red Arrow had a few moments to gather both his weapons and his thoughts before the flames drove him outside. Disdaining the narrow front entrance, where Zack Prevost waited, the chief of the Kalkalya Maidu uncovered a hidden hole at ground level of the semi-subterranean wood and earth structure and squirmed through. He cursed his ancient bones for moving so slowly.

When Prevost turned, a flint-tipped arrow pierced his throat and drained his life. Red Arrow's ancient bones had not diminished the skill that, as a boy, had won him his name.

Before he could nock another arrow, a blast from Jonathan Canfield's shotgun tore away most of his face. Canfield emptied a second barrel into Red Arrow from a distance of two feet.

On the burning ground, Bird Singer had picked up the discarded obsidian knife and was looking it over when the thunder from the village began. Moving as quickly as his weary legs allowed, he went to see what was happening. In recent years his eyes had been failing him, and even with the village in sight he could discern only dark blurs in the hazy dawn.

"Over there, on the hill!" someone shouted in what Bird Singer realized—too late—was the white skins' tongue. The first bullet killed him; the next five made no difference.

The miners were methodical in their destruction of the Kalkalya Maidu and the razing of the village. Of the thirty-seven there—old people, squaws, children, a couple of braves who had not gone on the deer hunt—none survived.

Upon checking the bodies Jonathan Canfield found the jagged obsidian knife, which had slipped from the caretaker's hand. He carried it to Sam Beale, who touched the tip. A dark stain passed onto his fingers.

"Blood's been spilled with this, real recent," he said. "Boys, we did the right thing!"

He tried to wipe the stain onto his trousers, but without success. He spat on his fingers and tried again.

The stain would not go away.

Throwing the knife down in disgust Beale shouted, "Let's get outta here!"

They returned to Rainbow's End, heady with their *victory*, which they soon began to celebrate. Kegs of Forty Rod were opened; a fiddle, accordion and Jew's-harp became a band. Men whistled, stomped and sang.

And why not? They were all wealthy, and they'd just proven that no one, *especially* no filthy savages, could take away what belonged to them.

Sam Beale washed his hands a number of times. But the stain would not go away.

Swift Water had been sitting with his thoughts along the edge of a stream when he heard the sound of muffled thunder far in the distance. Almost immediately he started back to Kalkalya. It took him a while to reach the village.

All of the lodges had burned quickly and were little more than smoldering heaps of ash when he emerged from the dense brush. His legs shook beneath him as the boy's eyes took in the horrifying sight of the place where he had been born, now no more. Staggering toward it, he nearly stumbled over the body of Bird Singer at the base of a slight declivity. Farther along, he glanced down and saw the knife—Deer Hunter's knife—and absently picked it up.

No one lived; he checked them all. Standing over the bloodied mounds that had been Shining Eyes and Shell Woman, he tried to comprehend the reality that the hearts of his parents had gone away.

Two days earlier he had lost his brother; today, everything else.

"You were right, my Father," Swift Water said. "If only we had understood. The white skins *are* devouring our people!"

Picking up the frail body of Shell Woman he carried it to the burning ground, where he began digging the first of what would be many more graves.

#

That day, miles to the northeast, a vision struck down a young Kalkalya Maidu named Tall Bear.

For years Tall Bear had shown signs as a Dreamer, and many, Shining Eyes among them, thought he would one day be the successor to the old shaman. Leaving the others to hunt the deer, two braves took Tall Bear to a nearby village, where a *yomi* set to work sucking out his "pains." But before this could be accomplished, Tall Bear's eyes snapped open.

"The hearts of all our people have gone away," he said in an odd, sibilant voice.

13

When their euphoria subsided, the miners of Rainbow's End began having doubts about their immediate future along the Yuba River's north fork.

For the death of one Digger, two of their men had been brutally murdered. Now, they had wiped out an entire village. None of them were so ignorant or so drunk to understand that few braves had been among the dead.

"Time to get on over to San Francisco and start spendin' some gold," Hobart said.

"Time to head back east and live like a king," Brookmire added.

"Me, I'm gonna move on over to the Feather River," Beale said. "Heard the diggings there are even better than this."

One thing was clear: by tomorrow Rainbow's End would start on its way to becoming a memory. Hell, these diggings were played out anyway. Men began packing their belongings; supplies were divided up. No one said much about the Diggers, though numerous glances were cast into the surrounding forest and hills.

Long after sunset nearly half the men sat around one of the fires that burned along the fork. Of those in their tents, some turned fitfully in half-sleep.

Jonathan Canfield first noticed that something was different. Recently the nights had grown cooler, but not with the sharp, stinging cold now cutting through the layers of his wool sack coat.

"What the hell..." He stood, fingers squeezed white on the stock of his rifle.

Wind passing between trees or hills was common. What he heard now was not the wind itself, but a sound borne on the wind, something they'd heard before: the mourning cries of the Digger Indians. Not as loud as they had been on those two consecutive nights...

Not yet.

The chill of the night touched their flesh; the sounds of death rose, swirling with the capricious winds of the foothills. They listened to...

Wailing.

Cries.

Keening.

Howls.

Sobbing.

...and all the men along the river's edge now stood, while the others staggered out of their tents, every one of them armed, wary. But as yet they saw no enemy.

#

Shortly after, bursts of gunfire echoed through canyons and hills and startled animals in trees and on the ground. The thunder lasted half a minute, and once over, it was not repeated.

14

The men of the deer hunt found Swift Water along the edge of the burning ground. It did not matter to them what had killed the boy, only that he was dead, like all the others.

Before dying Swift Water had, by himself, managed to lay many of the people to rest in the burning ground. The graves had grown shallower with each interment. They buried Swift Water next, changing his soiled garments for a bearskin. The boy's few possessions, including a bone salmon fetish, were put into the earth with him. Also, the red bandanna, which he had discarded nearby.

Afterward the men spread wood and tinder across the burning ground and lit a fire, but there was no dancing, no chanting, only hearts shocked into silence by the enormity of their loss. The shadow of the Eagle danced briefly on the hillside, but this time the fire did not burn on and on, only long enough—they hoped—to help the others along to the Sky Land.

Leaving the burning ground behind, the Kalkalya Maidu dispersed to other villages, where their assimilation would only prolong the ultimate oblivion.

15

William Root had no skills in following a trail. Only by virtue of having made the trip a couple of times earlier did he manage to find his way back to the Yuba River's north fork, and to Rainbow's End.

He had been fortunate in Sacramento; an elderly couple of good Christian conscience had taken in poor Albert Lick, promising to get him to a doctor. After picking up supplies, Root had turned right around and headed back.

From what he'd seen, the Virginian knew that he and the others at Rainbow's End had made a wise decision months earlier. Sacramento overflowed with new arrivals, San Francisco even more so, he'd heard. And along the way, diggings both wet and dry tumbled into one another as men struggled for the small patches upon which they sought their fortunes. With autumn coming to the foothill country, a few camps had already mushroomed on the Yuba River's south and middle forks. By next spring, Rainbow's End would no longer stand isolated.

As he neared to within a mile of the camp, Root had already made his decision. Another week or two in the diggings, then he would find a way back home to his beloved South. How much money could a man need? he reasoned. His personal ambitions included building the biggest and grandest house of worship anyone had yet seen in Virginia.

The "trail" wound through a dense forest and would emerge just west of the camp. Preoccupied with his thoughts, Root did not notice the sounds of the forest falling behind him. Only after the two horses of his team, ignoring both rein and whip, began to snort and rear did he sense something was wrong.

Leaving the animals tethered, Root continued on foot. He held an old Bible in one hand, a pistol in the other; divine intervention, he knew, had its limitations. His strides, though steady, were cautious. Five minutes passed before he stepped out from the trees.

While every tent in Rainbow's End still stood, Root knew that the camp was dead. The first sign of death stared blindly at him from a tree at the edge of the camp. Edwin Brookmire had been pinned to the broad trunk of a sycamore by three arrows, one through each wrist—*Christ-like*, Root thought crazily—and a third through his neck.

Nearby lay the nude body of a young miner named Daniel Sullivan. It had been cut into pieces—seven, Root knew after taking inventory—then carefully reassembled, with a gap of an inch between each of the parts.

Now the sight and smell of death came from everywhere, and Root wondered how all except the *feel* of it had eluded him until now. Two miners were entwined grotesquely, their bodies caked with blood and flecked with gold dust, which had been sprinkled over them. Another—the baby-faced Jonathan Canfield—had been

staked upside-down on a tent pole. His severed genitals lay on the ground by his head, a six-pound nugget balanced in his crotch to take their place. And sitting upright just beyond him, their arms linked in some perverse camaraderie, were three headless corpses—one of them Louis Hobart, Root thought for sure. Each had a tin cup, from which they'd guzzled their share of Forty Rod whiskey, but which now brimmed over with gold.

The gold: Root now realized that it was everywhere—dust, flakes, nuggets, from thin layers to small cairns. He'd left footprints in the gold, which reached all the way to the edge of the river. Incredible wealth, the work of over twenty men for an entire summer, tossed upon the ground, the wind, the water.

Death filled the tents, too. Root knew this for certain and chose not to look inside them. It suddenly occurred to his overwrought brain that he needed to get away from this place, let others know what happened, warn them...

Not back the way he'd come; Root couldn't look at that again. He penetrated the forest behind the supply tent, intending to angle back to his wagon. His reeling strides were those of the drunkards he so despised.

When he nearly stumbled over the carcass of a mule, it occurred to him that he'd seen no animals either in or around the camp.

The mule had been gutted, its intestines and other organs thrown into some nearby manzanita bushes. Most of the remaining cavity had been filled up with Sam Beale, more pieces of him than there had been of Daniel Sullivan.

The rest of the cavity had been stuffed with gold.