

drinkable, swimmable, irresistible, blueberry blue—the exact color of this morning’s sky.

The sun is high enough now, above the hills, to cast the golden glow of morning down into the camp. The warm air, true to Indian summers in the Northwest, settles onto the forest like a comfortable blanket. Lyle breathes it all in.

Gotta love the smell of those campfires. Smoke follows beauty and me. Mr. Evans says it keeps the mosquitoes away. They don’t bite me anyway ’cause I have anti-mosquito blood.

Musty sleepin’ bags, canvas tents and propane. It puffs when you light it with a wooden match. Blue flame with a yellow tip like candy corn. Stare right at the lantern and you can’t see at all. Watery hot chocolate, graham crackers with Hershey’s and burnt-to-a-crisp marshmallows. If you just toast ’em golden brown you’re a wuss or a girl.

Repetition has refined Lyle’s hacking into actual chopping, and the chopping sends wood chips rocketing in every direction, filling the air and littering the ground. The morning breeze rustles through the trees, drawn from the hills by the warm sunlight striking the cool water of Lake Pend Oreille.

Most people woulda quit by now but this is the easiest way to get a lotta firewood. Besides, the guys’ll think this is the coolest!

When a tree falls, wait ’til it almost hits you, then move fast at the last second. Don’t be scared ’til I’m scared! I never exaggerate, swear to God!

Lyle focuses on the motion of the hatchet and finds a rhythm, steadier and less frantic. His arms are tired but he doesn’t slow down—doesn’t even consider it.

CRACK!!! The sharp noise splits the air like a gunshot and echoes against the opposite side of the meadow. Birds fill the sky in a noisy flurry and quickly disappear over the ridge. Lyle

stops. He waits. He can hear the voices from the camp below, distant and indistinct. He listens, but he can't make them out.

Swinging the hatchet out wide, he puts every ounce of effort into another hit. The tree responds with an unearthly rumble. Lyle waits again, and then lifts his hatchet. As he is about to strike, the tree interrupts, emitting a crackling sputtering groan that starts quietly and quickly crescendoes into a frightening roar.

Lyle leaps up and backs away, awestruck by the immensity and power of the sound. The massive tree slowly leans and twists and begins to fall. The wind takes hold of its boughs and it topples, tearing off the higher limbs of its neighbors, ripping larger and larger branches from the surrounding trees with the enormous force of its descent, finally slamming heavily into the ground and bouncing sideways in a roaring din of breaking branches and splintering wood.

The thunderous noise attracts the attention of the entire camp. Everyone freezes, staring up at the crest of the hill. The tree has landed parallel to the hillside and lies there, in plain view of the Scouts below. Lyle clammers up on top of it, waves the hatchet above his head, and screams out a high-volume Indian war cry. It echoes for miles.

Standing on the downed tree, he goes to work hacking off the branches. The first few come away easily, but when he encounters one of the larger limbs, he struggles. After chopping into it from the top, he attacks it from one side and then the other. Growing impatient, he kicks down at the limb, throwing all of his weight against it. The branch snaps. The tree takes a forward turn and pitches him over backwards onto the ground.

Lyle watches in horror, as the tree meets the downward slope and takes another slow roll . . . and then another, as if testing its newfound freedom. He springs to his feet and tears after it, clinging to the trunk and digging his fingers into the bark in a desperate attempt to stop it.