

LIFE STORIES

PROFILES
FROM

THE NEW YORKER

EDITED BY

DAVID REMNICK



TRAVELS IN GEORGIA

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(1986)

ASKED for the gorp. Carol passed it to me. Breakfast had been heavy with cathead biscuits, sausage, boiled eggs, Familia, and chicory coffee, but that was an hour ago and I was again hungry. Sam said, "The little Yankee bastard wants the gorp, Carol. Shall we give him some?" Sam's voice was as soft as sphagnum, with inflections of piedmont Georgia.

"The little Yankee bastard can have all he wants this morning," Carol said. "It's such a beautiful day."

Although Sam was working for the state, he was driving his own Chevrolet. He was doing seventy. In a reverberation of rubber, he crossed Hunger and Hardship Creek and headed into the sun on the Swainsboro Road. I took a ration of gorp—soybeans, sunflower seeds, oats, pretzels, Wheat Chex, raisins, and kelp—and poured another ration into Carol's hand. At just about that moment, a snapping turtle was hit on the road a couple of miles ahead of us, who knows by what sort of vehicle, a car, a pickup; run over like a manhole cover, probably with much the same sound, and not crushed, but gravely wounded. It remained still. It appeared to be dead on the road.

Sam, as we approached, was the first to see it. "D.O.R.," he said. "Man, that is a big snapper." Carol and I both sat forward. Sam pressed hard on the brakes. Even so, he was going fifty when he passed the turtle.

Carol said, "He's not dead. He didn't look dead."

Sam reversed. He drove backward rapidly, fast as the car would go. He stopped on the shoulder, and we all got out. There was a pond beyond the turtle. The big, broad head was shining with blood, but there was, as yet, very little blood on the road. The big jaws struck as we came near, opened and closed

bloodily—not the kind of strike that, minutes ago, could have cut off a finger, but still a strike with power. The turtle was about fourteen inches long and a shining horn-brown. The bright spots on its marginal scutes were like light bulbs around a mirror. The neck lunged out. Carol urged the turtle, with her foot, toward the side of the road. "I know, big man," she said to it. "I know it's bad. We're not tormenting you. Honest we're not." Sam asked her if she thought it had a chance to live and she said she was sure it had no chance at all. A car, coming west, braked down and stopped. The driver got out, with some effort and a big paunch. He looked at the turtle and said, "Fifty years old if he's a day." That was the whole of what the man had to say. He got into his car and drove on. Carol nudged the snapper, but it was too hurt to move. It could only strike the air. Now, in a screech of brakes, another car came onto the scene. It went by us, then spun around with squealing tires and pulled up on the far shoulder. It was a two-tone, high-speed, dome-lighted Ford, and in it was the sheriff of Laurens County. He got out and walked toward us, all Technicolor in his uniform, legs striped like a pine-barrens tree frog's, plastic plate on his chest, name of Wade.

"Good morning," Sam said to him.

"How y'all?" said Sheriff Wade.

Carol said, "Would you mind shooting this turtle for us, please?"

"Surely, Ma'am," said the sheriff, and he drew his .38. He extended his arm and took aim.

"Uh, Sheriff," I said. "If you don't mind . . ." And I asked him if he would kindly shoot the turtle over soil and not over concrete. The sheriff paused and looked slowly, with new interest, from one of us to another: a woman in her twenties, good-looking, with long tawny hair, no accent (that he could hear), barefoot, and wearing a gray sweatshirt and brown dungarees with a hunting knife in the belt; a man (Sam) around forty, in weathered khaki, also without an accent, and with a full black beard divided by a short white patch at the chin—an authentic, natural split beard; and then this incongruous little Yankee bastard telling him not to shoot the road. Carol picked up the turtle by its long, serrated tail and carried it, underside toward her leg, beyond the shoulder of the highway, where she set it down on a patch of grass. The sheriff followed with his .38. He again took aim. He steadied the muzzle of the pistol twelve inches from the turtle. He fired, and missed. The gun made an absurdly light sound, like a screen door shutting. He fired again. He missed. He fired again. The third shot killed the turtle. The pistol smoked. The sheriff blew the smoke away, and smiled, apparently at himself. He shook his head a little. "He should be good," he said, with a nod at the turtle. The sheriff crossed the road and got into his car. "Y'all be careful," he said. With a great screech of tires, he wheeled around and headed on west.

Carol guessed that the turtle was about ten years old. By the tail, she carried it down to the edge of the pond, like a heavy suitcase with a broken strap. Sam

etched plastic bags from the car. I fo to the edge of the water. Carol plac Kneeling, she unsheathed her hunti fessional way, to slice around the cre legs—in thick steaks of red meat—c the steaks into a plastic bag. All the ingly, reassuringly, nurse to patient under the plastron and found an ov prise. She pulled out some global Hundreds of mosquito fish came d shook their heads, worried the fat. body. The eggs were like ping-pong all fitted into the turtle was more th six of them in there, fully finished, ultimate form. "Look at those eg that's sad. You were just about to why the snapper had gone out of t to bury her eggs in some place s tachment to the place where she generations of her forebears had l turtle twitched. Its neck moved. was gone. The nails on the ends c tle draped one of these talons ove fat and threw a huge hunk into th pesticides?" she said. "You're fat hog." Finishing the job—it took turtle. She put more red meat in half for us to eat. With her kn twenty-eight or so, in a sandban doing at just that time. Carol pic gers. The leeches had come off th right. That's all we can say grac Picking up the inedible parts— them into the pond. They hit wi

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fetched plastic bags from the car. I found a long two-by-ten plank and carried it to the edge of the water. Carol placed the snapper upside down on the plank. Kneeling, she unsheathed her hunting knife and began, in a practiced and professional way, to slice around the crescents in the plastron, until the flesh of the legs—in thick steaks of red meat—came free. Her knife was very sharp. She put the steaks into a plastic bag. All the while, she talked to the dead turtle, soothingly, reassuringly, nurse to patient, doctor to child, and when she reached in under the plastron and found an ovary, she shifted genders with a grunt of surprise. She pulled out some globate yellow fat and tossed it into the pond. Hundreds of mosquito fish came darting through the water, sank their teeth, shook their heads, worried the fat. Carol began to remove eggs from the turtle's body. The eggs were like ping-pong balls in size, shape, and color, and how they all fitted into the turtle was more than I could comprehend, for there were fifty-six of them in there, fully finished, and a number that had not quite taken their ultimate form. "Look at those eggs. Aren't they beautiful?" Carol said. "Oh, that's sad. You were just about to do your thing, weren't you, girl?" That was why the snapper had gone out of the pond and up onto the road. She was going to bury her eggs in some place she knew, perhaps drawn by an atavistic attachment to the place where she herself had hatched out and where many generations of her forebears had been born when there was no road at all. The turtle twitched. Its neck moved. Its nerves were still working, though its life was gone. The nails on the ends of the claws were each an inch long. The turtle draped one of these talons over one of Carol's fingers. Carol withdrew more fat and threw a huge hunk into the pond. "Wouldn't it be fun to analyze *that* for pesticides?" she said. "You're fat as a pig, Mama. You sure lived high off the hog." Finishing the job—it took forty minutes—Carol found frog bones in the turtle. She put more red meat into plastic sacks and divided the eggs. She kept half for us to eat. With her knife she carefully buried the remaining eggs, twenty-eight or so, in a sandbank, much as the mother turtle might have been doing at just that time. Carol picked away some leeches from between her fingers. The leeches had come off the turtle's shell. She tied the sacks and said, "All right. That's all we can say grace over. Let's send her back whence she came." Picking up the inedible parts—plastron, carapace, neck, claws—she heaved them into the pond. They hit with a slap and sank without bubbles.

AS we moved east, pine trees kept giving us messages—small, handpainted signs nailed into the loblollies. "HAVE YOU WHAT IT TAKES TO MEET JESUS WHEN HE RETURNS?" Sam said he was certain he did not. "JESUS WILL NEVER FAIL YOU." City limits, Adrian, Georgia. Swainsboro, Georgia. Portal, Georgia. Towns on the long, straight roads of the coastal plain. White-painted, tin-roofed bungalows. Awnings shading the fronts of stores—prepared for heat and glare. Red earth. Sand roads. Houses on short stilts. Sloping verandas. Unpainted boards.

"D.O.R.," said Carol.

"What do you suppose that was?"

"I don't know. I didn't see. It could have been a squirrel."

Sam backed up to the D.O.R. It was a brown thrasher. Carol looked it over, and felt it. Sam picked it up. "Throw him far off the road," Carol said. "So a possum won't get killed while eating him." Sam threw the bird far off the road. A stop for a D.O.R. always brought the landscape into detailed focus. Pitch coming out of a pine. Clustered sows behind a fence. An automobile wrapped in vines. A mailbox. "Donald Foskey." His home. Beyond the mailbox, a set of cinder blocks, and on the cinder blocks a mobile home. As Sam regathered speed, Carol turned on the radio and moved the dial. If she could find some Johnny Cash, it would elevate her day. Some Johnny Cash was not hard to find in the airwaves of Georgia. There he was now, resonantly singing about his Mississippi Delta land, where, on a sharecropping farm, he grew up. Carol smiled and closed her eyes. In her ears—pierced ears—were gold maple leaves that seemed to move under the influence of the music.

"D.O.R. possum," Sam said, stopping again. "Two! A grown one and a baby." They had been killed probably ten minutes before. Carol carried the adult to the side of the road and left it there. She kept the baby. He was seven inches long. He was half tail. Although dead, he seemed virtually undamaged. We moved on. Carol had a clipboard she used for making occasional notes and sketches. She put the little possum on the clipboard and rested the clipboard on her knees. "Oh, you sweet little angel. How could anybody run over *you*?" she said. "Oh, I just love possums. I've raised so many of them. This is a great age. They are the neatest little animals. They love you so much. They crawl on your shoulder and hang in your hair. How people can dislike them I don't understand." Carol reached into the back seat and put the little opossum into a container of formaldehyde. After a while, she said, "What mystifies me is: that big possum back there was a male."

Bethel Primitive Baptist Church. Old Canoochee Primitive Baptist Church. "THE CHURCH HAS NO INDULGENCES." A town every ten miles, a church—so it seemed—every two. Carol said she frequently slept in church graveyards. They were, for one thing, quiet, and, for another, private. Graham Memorial Church of the Nazarene.

Sam and Carol both sat forward at the same moment, alert, excited. "D.O.R. Wow! That was something special. It had a long yellow belly and brown fur or feathers! Hurry, Sam. It's a good one." Sam backed up at forty miles an hour and strained the Chevrolet.

"What is it? What is it?"

"It's a piece of bark. Fell off a pulpwood truck."

The approach to Pembroke was made with a sense of infiltration—Pembroke, seat of Bryan County. "Remember, now, we're interested in frogs," Sam said, and we went up the steps of Bryan County Courthouse. "We understand there is a stream-channelization project going on near here. Could you

tell us where? We're courthouse thought beard, the shoeless y us—they in their pu The last thing they r representing the sta the channelization w who knew everythin when she opened th go, but try a man n Lanier was five miles beside the road. Mill gernails, a driver of around the wheel w cutting the hose. He stream channelizatio

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His directions were a dirt road crossed a been replaced by a c vert. Upriver, far as t saws. Back from the understory—every t under revision. It ha tween vertical six-fo fact, become a ditch-machine, slowly bac now, grunting and b walk toward it along of the cut trees were crossed the ditch. Th Sam and I walked th was an American dr letters more than a f took six-foot bites. As swinging up and out Carol began to take p upstream. When she down and stopped. stepped out of the c crane, he inclined hi

tell us where? We're collecting frogs." It is hard to say what the clerks in the courthouse thought of this group—the spokesman with the black-and-white beard, the shoeless young woman, and their silent companion. They looked at us—they in their pumps and print dresses—from the other side of a distance. The last thing they might have imagined was that two of the three of us were representing the state government in Atlanta. The clerks did not know where the channelization was going on but they knew who might—a woman in town who knew everything. We went to see her. A chicken ran out of her house when she opened the screen door. No, she was not sure just where we should go, but try a man named Miller in Lanier. He'd know. He knew everything. Lanier was five miles down the track—literally so. The Seaboard Coast Line ran beside the road. Miller was a thickset man with unbelievably long, sharp fingernails, a driver of oil trucks. It seemed wonderful that he could get his hands around the wheel without cutting himself, that he could deliver oil without cutting the hose. He said, "Do you mind my asking why you're interested in stream channelization?"

"We're interested in frogs," Sam said. "Snakes and frogs. We thought the project might be stirring some up."

Miller said, "I don't mind the frog, but I want no part of the snake."

His directions were perfect—through pine forests, a right, two lefts, to where a dirt road crossed a tributary of the Ogeechee. A wooden bridge there had been replaced by a culvert. The stream now flowed through big pipes in the culvert. Upriver, far as the eye could see, a riparian swath had been cut by chain saws. Back from the banks, about fifty feet on each side, the overstory and the understory—every tree, bush, and sapling—had been cut down. The river was under revision. It had been freed of meanders. It was now two yards wide between vertical six-foot banks; and it was now as straight as a ditch. It had, in fact, become a ditch—in it a stream of thin mud, flowing. An immense yellow machine, slowly backing upstream, had in effect eaten this river. It was at work now, grunting and belching, two hundred yards from the culvert. We tried to walk toward it along the bank but sank to our shins in black ooze. The stumps of the cut trees were all but covered with mud from the bottom of the river. We crossed the ditch. The dredged mud was somewhat firmer on the other side. Sam and I walked there. Carol waded upcurrent in the stream. The machine was an American dragline crane. The word "American" stood out on its cab in letters more than a foot high. Its boom reached up a hundred feet. Its bucket took six-foot bites. As we approached, the bucket kept eating the riverbed, then swinging up and out of the channel and disgorging tons of mud to either side. Carol began to take pictures. She took more and more pictures as she waded on upstream. When she was fifty feet away from the dragline, its engine coughed down and stopped. The sudden serenity was oddly disturbing. The operator stepped out of the cab and onto the catwalk. One hand on the flank of his crane, he inclined his head somewhat forward and stared down at Carol. He

was a stocky man with an open shirt and an open face, deeply tanned. He said, "Howdy."

"Howdy," said Carol.

"You're taking some pictures," he said.

"I sure am. I'm taking some pictures. I'm interested in the range extension of river frogs, and the places they live. I bet you turn up some interesting things."

"I see some frogs," the man said. "I see lots of frogs."

"You sure know what you're doing with that machine," Carol said. The man shifted his weight. "That's a *big* thing," she went on. "How much does it weigh?"

"Eighty-two tons."

"Eighty-two *tons*?"

"Eighty-two tons."

"Wow! How far can you dig in one day?"

"Five hundred feet."

"A mile every ten days," Sam said, shaking his head with awe.

"Sometimes I do better than that."

"You live around here?"

"No. My home's near Baxley. I go where I'm sent. All over the state."

"Well, sorry. Didn't mean to interrupt you."

"Not 't all. Take all the pictures you want."

"Thanks. What did you say your name was?"

"Chap," he said. "Chap Causey."

We walked around the dragline, went upstream a short way, and sat down on the trunk of a large oak, felled by the chain saws, to eat our lunch—sardines, chocolate, crackers, and wine. Causey at work was the entertainment, pulling his levers, swinging his bucket, having at the stream.

If he had been at first wary, he no doubt had had experience that made him so. All over the United States, but particularly in the Southeast, his occupation had become a raw issue. He was working for the Soil Conservation Service, a subdivision of the United States Department of Agriculture, making a "water-resource channel improvement"—generally known as stream channelization, or reaming a river. Behind his dragline, despite the clear-cutting of the riverine trees, was a free-flowing natural stream, descending toward the Ogeechee in bends and eddies, riffles and deeps—in appearance somewhere between a trout stream and a bass river, and still handsomely so, even though it was shaved and ready for its operation. At the dragline, the recognizable river disappeared, and below the big machine was a kind of reverse irrigation ditch, engineered to remove water rapidly from the immediate watershed. "How could anyone even conceive of this idea?" Sam said. "Not just to do it, but even to *conceive* of it?"

The purpose of such projects was to anticipate and eliminate floods, to drain swamps, to increase cropland, to channel water toward freshly created reservoirs serving and attracting new industries and new housing developments.

Water sports would flourish on the erate below the surface: new pul Conservation Service was annual stream-channelization projects, land to farmers who already had Agriculture could not do enough was bookkeeping. He got money went up in value when the swam for not farming the drained land been someone who plowed land Service had been the epicenter of victories over erosion of the land ered ecology, the S.C.S. was the river mechanics, upsetting the owl. The Soil Conservation Service fifteen thousand people, and all edge of things, was Chap Causey nothing but the pounding of his eradicated a swamp.

After heaving up a half-dozer eral feet. The broad steel shoes were bound together in pairs. Collectively, they were called "r bridge over the river. As Causey beams, he would reach down a snare a loop of the cable that weighed at least half a ton—ar dropped perfectly into place, a stream side. Near the tree line enough to bury under a gas station his hook and his hundred-foot move it on in the direction he wanted and hook, he handled his mate: he were dribbling a basketball deft. He was world class. "I like thing," Sam said.

Carol said, "See that three-foot out." She gestured toward the week earlier, a hundred and fifty must have seen the gesture. Perhaps that he was being watched, at the stump in his bucket, and Carol's feet. It towered over his

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Water sports would flourish on the new reservoirs, hatchery fish would proliferate below the surface: new pulsations in the life of the rural South. The Soil Conservation Service was annually spending about fifteen million dollars on stream-channelization projects, providing, among other things, newly arable land to farmers who already had land in the Soil Bank. The Department of Agriculture could not do enough for the Southern farmer, whose only problem was bookkeeping. He got money for keeping his front forty idle. His bottomland went up in value when the swamps were drained, and then more money came for not farming the drained land. Years earlier, when a conservationist had been someone who plowed land along natural contours, the Soil Conservation Service had been the epicenter of the conservation movement, decorated for its victories over erosion of the land. Now, to a new generation that had discovered ecology, the S.C.S. was the enemy. Its drainage programs tampered with river mechanics, upsetting the relationships between bass and otter, frog and owl. The Soil Conservation Service had grown over the years into a bureau of fifteen thousand people, and all the way down at the working point, the cutting edge of things, was Chap Causey, in the cab of his American dragline, hearing nothing but the pounding of his big Jimmy diesel while he eliminated a river, eradicated a swamp.

After heaving up a half-dozen buckets of mud, Causey moved backward several feet. The broad steel shoes of the crane were resting on oak beams that were bound together in pairs with cables. There were twelve beams in all. Collectively, they were called "mats." Under the crane, they made a temporary bridge over the river. As Causey moved backward and off the front pair of beams, he would reach down out of the sky with a hook from his boom and snare a loop of the cable that held the beams. He snatched them up—they weighed at least half a ton—and whipped them around to the back. The beams dropped perfectly into place, adding a yard to Causey's platform on the upstream side. Near the tree line beyond one bank, he had a fuel tank large enough to bury under a gas station, and every so often he would reach out with his hook and his hundred-foot arm and, without groping, lift the tank and move it on in the direction he was going. With his levers, his cables, his bucket, and hook, he handled his mats and his tank and his hunks of the riverbed as if he were dribbling a basketball through his legs and behind his back. He was deft. He was world class. "I bet he could put on a baby's diapers with that thing," Sam said.

Carol said, "See that three-foot stump? I sure would like to see him pull *that* out." She gestured toward the rooted remains of a tree that must have stood, a week earlier, a hundred and fifty feet high. Causey, out of the corner of his eye, must have seen the gesture. Perhaps he just read her mind. He was much aware that he was being watched, and now he reached around behind him, grabbed the stump in his bucket, and ripped it out of the earth like a molar. He set it at Carol's feet. It towered over her.

After a modest interval, a few more buckets of streambed, Causey shut off the dragline and stopped for an adulation break. Carol told him he was fabulous. And she meant it. He was. She asked him what the name of the stream was. He said, "To tell you the truth, Ma'am, I don't rightly know."

CAROL said, "Do you see many snakes?"

"Oh, yes, I see lots of snakes," Causey said, and he looked at her carefully.

"What kinds of snakes?"

"Moccasins, mainly. They climb up here on the mats. They don't run. They never run. They're not afraid. I got a canoe paddle in the cab there. I kill them with the paddle. One day, I killed thirty-five moccasins. People come along sometimes, like you, visitors, come up here curious to see the digging, and they see the dead snakes lying on the mats, and they freeze. They refuse to move. They refuse to walk back where they came from."

If Causey was trying to frighten Carol, to impress her by frightening her, he had picked the wrong person. He might have sent a shot or two of adrenalin through me, but not through Carol. I once saw her reach into a semi-submerged hollow stump in a man-made lake where she knew a water snake lived, and she had felt around in there, underwater, with her hands on the coils of the snake, trying to figure out which end was the front. Standing thigh-deep in the water, she was wearing a two-piece bathing suit. Her appearance did not suggest old Roger Conant on a field trip. She was trim and supple and tan from a life in the open. Her hair, in a ponytail, had fallen across one shoulder, while her hands, down inside the stump, kept moving slowly, gently along the body of the snake. This snake was her friend, she said, and she wanted Sam and me to see him. "Easy there, fellow, it's only Carol. I sure wish I could find your head. Here we go. We're coming to the end. Oh, damn. I've got his tail." There was nothing to do but turn around. She felt her way all four feet to the other end. "At last," she said. "How are you, old fellow?" And she lifted her arms up out of the water. In them was something like a piece of television cable moving with great vigor. She held on tight and carried her friend out of the lake and onto the shore.

At Carol's house, Sam and I one night slept in sleeping bags on the floor of her study beside Zebra, her rattlesnake. He was an eastern diamondback, and he had light lines, parallel, on his dark face. He was young and less than three feet long. He lived among rocks and leaves in a big glass jar. "As a pet, he's ideal," Carol told us. "I've never had a diamondback like him before. Anytime you get uptight about anything, just look at him. He just sits there. He's so great. He doesn't complain. He just waits. It's as if he's saying, 'I've got all the time in the world. I'll outwait you, you son of a bitch.'"

"He shows you what patience is," Sam said. "He's like a deer. Deer will wait two hours before they move into a field to eat."

In Carol's kitchen was the long, that Sam and Carol had stick like a big hot dog, beside it upon him, had just been hit; wounded the snake were standing gravel was coming toward the over and crushing the diamondback said, "Do you want it?" Surprised the stricken snake, carried it off it on the floor between her feet leaving the car unlocked. Oh, that night."

"What did he taste like?" I asked.

"Taste like? You know, like a squirrel."

Carol's house, in Atlanta, was a square—kitchen, study, storage room—tongue-and-groove boards, no vestibule were more or less situated there. An oak with a three-foot was so close to it that it virtu on the stoop. Around it were White columns adorned the Paint peeled from the clapboards some vestigial grasses in it (been mowed for possibly a decade weeds. The house stood on five creek. The basement was converted into a dim room where Carol ner, standing on a pipe. I had a tailed hawk, and at sight of any rate, I could not have taken was incendiary. Slowly, ang yard and a half. His talons in a spread-winged posture revealed the snowy chest, the rufous broken. Carol had brought him and stood by him and said not so bad. Come on, Big minute or two—the wide wing his chest. Fear departed, but "What will he ever do?" I asked. She said, "Nothing, I guess."

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In Carol's kitchen was the skin of a mature diamondback, about six feet long, that Sam and Carol had eaten in southwest Georgia, roasting him on a stick like a big hot dog, beside the Muckalee Creek. The snake, when they came upon him, had just been hit and was still alive. The men who had mortally wounded the snake were standing over it, watching it die. A dump truck full of gravel was coming toward the scene, and Carol, imagining the truck running over and crushing the diamondback, ran up to the men standing over it and said, "Do you want it?" Surprised, they said no. "No, *Ma'am!*" So she picked up the stricken snake, carried it off the road and back to the car, where she coiled it on the floor between her feet. "Later, in a gas station, we didn't worry about leaving the car unlocked. Oh, that was funny. We do have some fun. We ate him that night."

"What did he taste like?" I asked her.

"Taste like? You know, like rattlesnake. Maybe a cross between a chicken and a squirrel."

Carol's house, in Atlanta, consisted of four small rooms, each about ten feet square—kitchen, study, storage room, bedroom. They were divided by walls of tongue-and-groove boards, nailed horizontally onto the studs. A bathroom and vestibule were more or less stuck onto one side of the building. She lived alone there. An oak with a three-foot bole stood over the house like an umbrella and was so close to it that it virtually blocked the front door. An old refrigerator sat on the stoop. Around it were the skulls of a porpoise, a horse, a cow, and a pig. White columns adorned the façade. They were made of two-inch iron pipe. Paint peeled from the clapboard. The front yard was hard red clay, and it had some vestigial grasses in it (someone having once tried a lawn) that had not been mowed for possibly a decade. Carol had set out some tomatoes among the weeds. The house stood on fairly steep ground that sloped through woods to a creek. The basement was completely above grade at the rear, and a door there led into a dim room where Carol's red-tailed hawk lived. He was high in one corner, standing on a pipe. I had never been in the immediate presence of a red-tailed hawk, and at sight of him I was not sure whether to run or to kneel. At any rate, I could not have taken one step nearer. He was two feet tall. His look was incendiary. Slowly, angrily, he lifted and spread his wings, reached out a yard and a half. His talons could have hooked tuna. His name was Big Man. His spread-winged posture revealed all there was to know about him: his beauty—the snowy chest, the rufous tail; his power; his affliction. One of his wings was broken. Carol had brought him back from near death. Now she walked over to him and stood by him and stroked his chest. "Come on, Big Man," she said. "It's not so bad. Come on, Big Man." Slowly, ever so slowly—over a period of a minute or two—the wide wings came down, folded together, while Carol stroked his chest. Fear departed, but nothing much changed in his eyes.

"What will he ever do?" I asked her.

She said, "Nothing, I guess. Just be someone's friend."

Outside the basement door was a covered pen that housed a rooster and a seagull. The rooster had been on his way to Colonel Sanders' when he fell off a truck and broke a drumstick. Someone called Carol, as people often do, and she took the rooster into her care. He was hard of moving, but she had hopes for him. He was so new there he did not even have a name. The seagull, on the other hand, had been with her for years. He had one wing. She had picked him up on a beach three hundred miles away. His name was Garbage Belly.

Carol had about fifteen ecosystems going on at once in her twenty-by-twenty house. In the study, a colony of dermestid beetles was eating flesh off the pelvis of an alligator. The beetles lived in a big can that had once held forty pounds of mincemeat. Dermestids clean bones. They do thorough work. They all but simulate the bones. Carol had obtained her original colony from the Smithsonian Institution. One of her vaulting ambitions was to be able to identify on sight any bone that she happened to pick up. Also in the can were the skulls of a water turkey, a possum, and a coon.

The beetles ate and were eaten. Carol reached into the colony, pulled out a beetle, and gave it to her black-widow spider. The black widow lived in a commercial mayonnaise jar. Carol had found her in the basement while cleaning it up for Big Man. The spider's egg was getting ready to hatch, and when it did thousands like her would emerge into the jar. Efficiently, the black widow encased the beetle in filament gauze that flowed from her spinnerets.

Carol then fed dermestids to her turtles. She had three galvanized tubs full of cooters and sliders, under a sunlamp. "They need sun, you know. Vitamin D." She fed dermestids to her spotted salamander, and to her gray tree frog. Yellow spots, polka dots, on black, the salamander's coloring was so simple and contrasting that he appeared to be a knickknack from a gift shop, a salamander made in Japan. The tree frog lived in a giant brandy snifter, furnished with rocks and dry leaves. With his latex body and his webbed and gummy oversize hands, he could walk right up the inside of his brandy snifter, even after its shape began to tilt him backward, then lay a mitt over the rim and haul himself after and walk down the outside. He could walk straight up a wall; and he did that, while digesting his beetle. He had been with Carol three years. He was a star there in her house. No mayonnaise jar for him. He had the brandy snifter. It was all his and would be as long as he lived.

Notebooks were open on Carol's desk, a heavy, kneehole desk, covered with pens, Magic Markers, brushes, pencils, drawing materials. The notebooks had spiral bindings and were, in part, diaries.

17 April. Okefenokee. Caught two banded water snakes, one skink. . . .

18 April. To King's Landing. Set three line traps baited with peanut butter, caught a rather small moccasin AGKISTRODON coming from under shed. Put out ninety-five set hooks baited with pork liner. To gator hole. Tried to use shocker, after putting up seines across exit. No luck!

19 April. D.O.R. *Natrix ri*
snake; *Elaphe guttata guttata*,
21 April. S.W. Georgia. D
Country. Fresh. Possum D.O.

The notebooks were also, in

Dissolve mouse in nitric aci
tell every element.

A starving snake can gair

Gray whales are born wit
are grown they swim five th
sand and stand on their tail

And the notebooks were,
drawing of something—a m
case of a spotted salamand
printing it into her memory.
specific—too eccentric, wild
other maps, including a top
Carol wanted to remember:

12 May. Caught *Natrix eri*
A.M. Saw quite a large gatc
cypress at edge of creek.
water. *Elaphe obsoleta spil*
Finally climbed tree but sr

26 June. Sleep on nest
protect eggs from feral ho
hog. . . .

27 August. Oconee Ri
Natrix was trying to pull
Snake finally won. Didn't
and wouldn't let go ever
trains. Found catfish on s

The rods of the verteb
Nocturnal animals that
rods. Crocodiles. Seals. R

13 June. North Georg
competition with the sta
apart. As of old, I wishe
round worm was glowin
lows us to see in the darl

Above the desk, tacked
west of Baxley, Highway

19 April. D.O.R. *Natrix rigida*, glossy water snake; *Farancia abacura*, mud snake; *Elaphe guttata guttata*, corn snake. . . .

21 April. S.W. Georgia. D.O.R. vulture, ½ mi. E. Leary, Hwy 62, Calhoun Country. Fresh. Possum D.O.R. nearby. . . .

The notebooks were also, in part, ledgers of her general interests.

Dissolve mouse in nitric acid and put him through spectrophotometer—can tell every element.

A starving snake can gain weight on water.

Gray whales are born with their bellies up and weigh a ton, and when they are grown they swim five thousand miles to breed in shallow lagoons and eat sand and stand on their tails and gravity-feed on pelagic crabs.

And the notebooks were, in part, filled with maps and sketches. Making a drawing of something—a mermaid weed, the hind foot of an opossum, the egg case of a spotted salamander, a cutaway of a deer's heart—was her way of printing it into her memory. The maps implied stories. They were of places too specific—too eccentric, wild, and minute—to show up as much of anything on other maps, including a topographical quadrangle. They were of places that Carol wanted to remember and, frequently enough, to find again.

12 May. Caught *Natrix erythrogaster flavigaster*, red-bellied water snake 9:30 A.M. Saw quite a large gator at 9:35. Ten feet. Swarm of honeybees 25 feet up cypress at edge of creek. Large—six-foot—gray rat snake in oak tree over water. *Elaphe obsoleta spiloides*. Tried unsuccessfully to knock it into canoe. Finally climbed tree but snake had gone into hole in limb. . . .

26 June. Sleep on nest where loggerhead laid eggs Cumberland Island, to protect eggs from feral hogs. Return later find that hog has eaten eggs. Shoot hog. . . .

27 August. Oconee River. Saw *Natrix* wrestling with a catfish in water. *Natrix* was trying to pull fish out on bank. Snake about 2½ feet. Fish 8 inches. Snake finally won. Didn't have heart to collect snake as he was so proud of fish and wouldn't let go even when touched. Camped by railroad bridge. Many trains. Found catfish on set hook, smoked him for supper. . . .

The rods of the vertebrate eye provide scotopic vision—sight in dim light. Nocturnal animals that also go out in daylight need slit eyes to protect the rods. Crocodiles. Seals. Rattlesnakes. Cottonmouths.

13 June. North Georgia. Oh, most glorious night. The fireflies are truly in competition with the stars! At the tops of the ridges it is impossible to tell them apart. As of old, I wished for a human companion. On the banks of a road, a round worm was glowing, giving off light. What a wonderful thing it is. It allows us to see in the darkness.

Above the desk, tacked to a wall, was the skin of a bobcat—D.O.R. two miles west of Baxley, Highway 341. "I was excited out of my mind when we found

him," Carol said. "He was the best D.O.R. ever. It was late afternoon, January. He was stiff, but less than a day old. Bobcats move mostly at night. He was unbloody, three feet long, and weighed twenty-one pounds. I was amazed how small his testicles were. I skinned him here at home. I tanned his hide—salt, alum, then neat's-foot oil. He had a thigh like a goat's—so big, so much beautiful meat. I boiled him. He tasted good—you know, the wild taste. Strong. But not as strong as a strong coon."

Zebra lifted his head, flashed his fangs, and yawned a pink yawn. This was the first time in at least a day that Zebra had moved. Carol said the yawn meant he was hungry. Zebra had had his most recent meal seven weeks before. Carol went over to the gerbil bin to select a meal for Zebra. "Snakes just don't eat that much," she said, shaking her head in dismay over the exploding population of gerbils. She tossed one to a cat. She picked up another one, a small one, for Zebra. "Zebra eats every month or two," she went on. "That's all he needs. He doesn't do anything. He just sits there." She lifted the lid of Zebra's jar and dropped the gerbil inside. The gerbil stood still, among the dry leaves, looking. Zebra did not move. "I'm going to let him go soon. He's been a good friend. He really has. You sometimes forget they're deadly, you know. I've had my hand down inside the jar, cleaning it out, and suddenly realized, with cold sweat, that he's poisonous. Ordinarily, when you see a rattlesnake you are on guard immediately. But with him in the house all the time I tend to forget how deadly he is. The younger the snake, the more concentrated the venom."

The gerbil began to walk around the bottom of the big glass jar. Zebra, whose body was arranged in a loose coil, gave no sign that he was aware of the gerbil's presence. Under a leaf, over a rock, sniffing, the gerbil explored the periphery of Zebra's domain. Eventually, the gerbil stepped up onto Zebra's back. Still Zebra did not move. Zebra had been known to refuse a meal, and perhaps that would happen now. The gerbil walked along the snake's back, stepped down, and continued along the boundary of the base of the jar, still exploring. Another leaf, another stone, the strike came when the gerbil was perhaps eight inches from Zebra's head. The strike was so fast, the strike and the recovery, that it could not really be followed by the eye. Zebra lanced across the distance, hit the gerbil in the heart, and, all in the same instant, was back where he had started, same loose coil, head resting just where it had been resting before. The gerbil took three steps forward and fell dead, so dead it did not even quiver, tail out straight behind.

Sam had once told me how clumsy he thought rattlesnakes were, advising me never to walk through a palmetto stand third in a line, because a rattlesnake, said Sam, takes aim at the first person, strikes at the second, and hits the third. After watching Zebra, though, I decided to go tenth in line, if at all. Carol seemed thoughtful. "I've had copperheads," she said. "But I'm not really that much on snakes. I'm always worrying that someday I'll come home and find the jar turned over and several dead cats lying around on the floor." That night, on the floor in my sleeping bag, I began to doze off and then imagined

rolling over and knocking Zebra when I started to doze off again, hands, watching him through

There was a baby hawk in a began to scream. Nothing was took a rabbit out of the refrigerator been a rabbit D.O.R. The rabbit most of the rabbit. There follow Carol had frogs' legs, trout, bread and what she called trash fish. tiny of the other items was in various occupants of the house and beetle, reptile, arachnid, n POSSUM," black on Chinese red.

In the bedroom was a deersk a deer wouldn't go uphill shot, it was a slickhead. It had been walls were watercolors and c blown-up photographs of John Johnny Cash was in her bedroom including "Earth Stars," a relief photographs and said that who she had turned to Johnny Cash to the philosophy in his lyrics, once pulled her through.

Carol grew up in Rochester Atlanta. Her father, Earl Ruc aged the Atlanta processing g *grata* at home, so she went to a lot of comfort out there in the sisters. That is why I'm more They're warm-blooded. Fish fish." Her parents mortally f made her a snake stick. Her that it was not ladylike to be Northside High in Atlanta. A jobs—she fixed car radios, University, studied biology, an on river swamps, an ecologist man. His subspecialty was c that had a cottonmouth under them. He weighed and mea Carol. She had taken his co

ver. It was late afternoon. January. s move mostly at night. He was un-y-one pounds. I was amazed how at home. I tanned his hide—salt, e a goat's—so big, so much beauti- know, the wild taste. Strong. But

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rolling over and knocking Zebra out of his jar. The same thought came to me when I started to doze off again. I spent most of the night with my chin in my hands, watching him through the glass.

There was a baby hawk in a box in the kitchen, and early in the morning he began to scream. Nothing was going to quiet him except food. Carol got up, took a rabbit out of the refrigerator, and cut it up with a pair of scissors. It had been a rabbit D.O.R. The rabbit was twice the size of the hawk, but the hawk ate most of the rabbit. There followed silence, bought and paid for. In the freezer, Carol had frogs' legs, trout, bream, nighthawk, possum, squirrel, quail, turtle, and what she called trash fish. The trash fish were for Garbage Belly. The destiny of the other items was indistinct. They were for the consumption of the various occupants of the house, the whole food chain—bird, amphibian, beast and beetle, reptile, arachnid, man. A sign over the kitchen sink said "EAT MORE POSSUM," black on Chinese red.

In the bedroom was a deerskin. "I saw blood on the trail," Carol said. "I knew a deer wouldn't go uphill shot, so I went down. I found it. It wasn't a spike buck, it was a slickhead. It had been poached. I poached it from the poacher." On the walls were watercolors and oils she had done of natural scenes, and three blown-up photographs of Johnny Cash. A half-finished papier-mâché head of Johnny Cash was in her bedroom as well, and other pieces of her sculpture, including "Earth Stars," a relief of mushrooms. Carol looked reverently at the photographs and said that whenever she had had depressing and difficult times she had turned to Johnny Cash, to the reassurances in the timbre of his voice, to the philosophy in his lyrics, to his approach to life. She said he had more than once pulled her through.

Carol grew up in Rochester, New York, until she was twelve, after that in Atlanta. Her father, Earl Ruckdeschel, worked for Eastman Kodak and managed the Atlanta processing plant. She was an only child. Animals were *non grata* at home, so she went to them. "You have to turn to something. There was a lot of comfort out there in those woods. Wild creatures were my brothers and sisters. That is why I'm more interested in mammals than anything else. They're warm-blooded. Fish are cold-blooded. You can't snuggle up with a fish." Her parents mortally feared snakes, but she never did. Her father once made her a snake stick. Her mother told her, many times a month and year, that it was not ladylike to be interested in snakes and toads. Carol went to Northside High in Atlanta. After high school, for five years, she worked at odd jobs—she fixed car radios, she wandered. Then she went to Georgia State University, studied biology, and married a biologist there. He was an authority on river swamps, an ecologist—a tall, prognathous, slow-speaking scientific man. His subspecialty was cottonmouths. He had found an island in the Gulf that had a cottonmouth under every palmetto, and he lived for a time among them. He weighed and measured them one by one. He was a lot older than Carol. She had taken his course in vertebrate zoology. The marriage did not

really come apart. It evaporated. Carol kept going on field trips with him, and she stayed on at Georgia State as a biological researcher. The little house she moved into could not have been better: low rent, no class, high privacy, woods, a creek. And it was all her own. A cemetery was across the street. She could sleep there if she wanted to get out of the house. On Mother's Day, or whenever else she needed flowers, she collected bouquets from among the graves. From time to time, she wandered away. She had a white pickup truck and a German shepherd. His name was Catfish, and he was "all mouth and no brains." Carol and Catfish slept on a bale of hay in the back of the truck, and they went all over, from the mountains to the sea. They fished in the mountains, hunted in the sand hills, set traps in the Okefenokee Swamp. She began collecting specimens for the Georgia State University research collection. Most she found dead on the road. Occasionally, she brought new specimens into the collection, filling in gaps, but mainly she replenished exhausted supplies—worn-out pelts and skulls. There was always a need. An animal's skin has a better chance against a Goodyear tire than it does against the paws of a college student. She had no exclusive specialty. She wanted to do everything. Any plant or creature, dead or alive, attracted her eye.

She volunteered, as well, for service with the Georgia Natural Areas Council, a small office of the state government that had been established to take an inventory of wild places in Georgia worth preserving, proclaiming, and defending. While she travelled around Georgia picking up usable D.O.R.s for the university, she appraised the landscape for the state, detouring now and again into river swamps to check the range of frogs. Sam Candler, who also worked for the Natural Areas Council, generally went with her. Rarely, they flew in his plane. For the most part, they were on the road. Sam had a farm in Coweta County. He had also spent much of his life in the seclusion of Cumberland Island, off the Georgia coast. He was a great-grandson of the pharmacist who developed and at one time wholly owned the Coca-Cola Company, so he could have been a rampant lion in social Atlanta, but he would have preferred to wade blindfolded through an alligator swamp with chunks of horsemeat trussed to his legs. He wanted to live, as he put it, "close to the earth." He knew wilderness, he had been in it so much, and his own outlook on the world seemed to have been formed and directed by his observations of the creatures that ranged in wild places, some human, some not. Sam had no formal zoological or ecological training. What he brought to his work was mainly a sense of what he wanted for the region where he had lived his life. He had grown up around Atlanta, had gone to Druid Hills Grammar School and to Emory University and on into the Air Force. He had lived ever since on the island and the farm. His wife and their four children seemed to share with him a lack of interest in urban events. The Natural Areas Council had been effective. It had the weight of the government behind it. Georgia was as advanced in this respect as, say, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and New Jersey, where important conservancy

work was also being advanced than most other states. After all, the largest state was still wild. Georgia forest was full of sites of special interest. Sam and Carol had done a lot of assessing terrain, convincing owners to register

Sam had been a friend of his. He was now travelling around the state, collecting snakes, preserving them. He could not wait until I came, a year, though, while I was in New York, so I flew from Newark to Atlanta. I took the Airport tollbooths (four lanes, as thick on the paid side as the free side) and I saw thousands of murmuring cars, brabating, stinking, rattling. I left it, shamefully, to drive it home, and I got up on bumpers and signs. I went around town, told me to bring a bag of groceries. I had been like carrying a gun, and once I had to and I ran down the car, up the steps and into the truck and off to high ground. Carol met me, and we went for D.O.R.s. That night

IN a valley in north Georgia, I had a stone fireplace on the first night of a journey of a hundred miles of the state—a journey of the mountains, across the red hills to the river, a canoe on the top of the mountain. Made, in part, in the style of the mock the idea of a metaphor of the hun-

on field trips with him, and researcher. The little house she had no class, high privacy, woods, across the street. She could not go on Mother's Day, or whenever she was among the graves. From her pickup truck and a German Shepherd, mouth and no brains." Carol got out of the truck, and they went all the way into the mountains, hunted in the woods. She began collecting specimens. Most she found dead animals and put them into the collection, filled with supplies—worn-out pelts and animal skins. A cat's skin has a better chance of being accepted than a cow's. It was the skin of a college student. She was a biologist. Any plant or creature,

Georgia Natural Areas Council, which had been established to take an inventory of the state, proclaiming, and defending the state's usable D.O.R.s for the future. She was detouring now and again to see Candler, who also worked for the state. Rarely, they flew in his private plane. Sam had a farm in Coweta County, in the seclusion of Cumberland County, near the son of the pharmacist who owned the Coca-Cola Company, so he could be sure he would have preferred to live in the country with chunks of horsemeat and a few chickens close to the earth." He knew his own outlook on the world, and his observations of the creatures around him. Sam had no formal zoological training. His work was mainly a sense of wonder and a love of life. He had grown up in a small town near School and to Emory University. He had ever since on the island and had shared with him a lack of interest in the world. It had been effective. It had the effect of being advanced in this respect as, in the more important conservancy

work was also being accomplished on the state-government level, and far more advanced than most other states. There was much to evaluate. Georgia was, after all, the largest state east of the Mississippi River, and a great deal of it was still wild. Georgia forests, mountains, swamps, islands, and rivers—a long list of sites of special interest or value—had become Registered Natural Areas. Sam and Carol had done the basic work—exploring the state, following leads, assessing terrain, considering vegetation and wildlife, choosing sites, and persuading owners to register lands for preservation.

Sam had been a friend of mine for some years, and when he wrote to say that he was now travelling around the state collecting skulls and pelts, eating rattlesnakes, preserving natural areas, and charting the ranges of river frogs, I could not wait until I could go down there and see. I had to wait more than a year, though, while finishing up some work. I live in Princeton, New Jersey, so I flew from Newark when the day came, and I nearly missed the plane. Automobiles that morning were backed up at least a mile from the Newark Airport tollbooths (fourteen tollbooths, fourteen lanes), and the jam was just as thick on the paid side as it was on the unpaid side—thousands and thousands of murmuring cars, moving nowhere, nowhere to move, shaking, vibrating, stinking, rattling, *Homo sapiens* D.O.R. I got out of my car and left it there, left it, shamefully, with a high-school student who was accepting money to drive it home, and began to make my way overland to the terminal. I climbed up on bumpers and over corrugated fences and ducked under huge green signs. I went around tractor trailers and in front of buses. Fortunately, Sam had told me to bring a backpack. Carrying a suitcase through that milieu would have been like carrying a suitcase up the Matterhorn. Occasionally, I lost direction, and once I had to crawl under a mastodonic truck, but I did get through, and I ran down the cattle-pen corridors of the airport and, with a minute to go, up the steps and into the plane—relieved beyond measure to be out of that ruck and off to high ground and sweet air, taking my chances on the food. Sam and Carol met me, and we went straight to the mountains, stopping all the way for D.O.R.s. That night, we ate a weasel.

IN a valley in north Georgia, Carol had a cabin that was made of peeled logs, had a stone fireplace, and stood beside a cold stream. We stayed there on the first night of a journey that eventually meandered through eleven hundred miles of the state—a great loop, down out of the river gorges and ravine forests of the mountains, across the granitic piedmont and over the sand hills and the red hills to the river swamps and pine flatwoods of the coastal plain. Sam had a canoe on the top of the car. We slept in swamps and beside a lake and streams. Made, in part, in the name of the government, it was a journey that tended to mock the idea of a state—as an unnatural subdivision of the globe, as a metaphor of the human ego sketched on paper and framed in straight lines and

in riparian boundaries behind an unalterable coast. Georgia. A state? Really a core sample of a continent, a plug in the melon, a piece of North America. Pull it out and wildcats would spill off the high edges. Alligators off the low ones. The terrain was crisscrossed with geological boundaries, mammalian boundaries, amphibian boundaries—the range of the river frogs. The range of the wildcat was the wildcat's natural state, overlaying segments of tens of thousands of other states, one of which was Georgia. The State of Georgia. Governor Jimmy Carter in the mansion in Atlanta.

The first thing Sam and Carol wanted to assess on this trip was a sphagnum bog in Rabun County, off the north side of the Rabun Bald (4,696 feet). The place seemed marginal to me, full of muck and trout lilies, with swamp pinks in blossom under fringe trees and smooth alders, but Sam and Carol thought it ought to be registered, and they sought out the owner, a heavy woman, greatly slow of speech, with a Sears, Roebuck tape measure around her neck. She stood under a big white pine by the concrete front porch of her shingled house on a flinty mountain farm. Sam outlined the value of registering a natural area for preservation beyond one's years. She looked at him with no expression and said, "We treasure the bog." He gave her an application. ("Being aware of the high responsibility to the State that goes with the ownership and use of a property which has outstanding value in illustrating the natural history of Georgia, we morally agree to continue to protect and use this site for purposes consistent with the preservation of its natural integrity.") Perhaps she could consider it with her husband and his brothers and nephews when they came home. One day soon, he would stop back to talk again. She said, "We likes to hunt arrowheads. We treasure the bog."

The D.O.R.s that first day included a fan belt Sam took for a blacksnake—jammed on his brakes, backed up to see—and a banana peel that Carol identified, at first glimpse, as a jumping mouse. Eager was the word for them. They were so much on the hunt. "It is rare for specimens to be collected this way," Carol said. "Most people are too lazy. Or they're hung up on just frogs or just salamanders, or whatever, and they don't care about other things. Watching for D.O.R.s makes travelling a lot more interesting. I mean, can you imagine just going down the road?"

We went around a bend in a mountain highway and the road presented Carol with the find of the day. "D.O.R.!" she said. "That was a good one. That was a good one! Sam, hurry back. That was a weasel!"

Sam hurried back. It was no banana peel. It was exactly what Carol said it was: *Mustela frenata*, the long-tailed weasel, dead on the road. It was fresh-killed, and—from the point of view of Georgia State University—in fine condition. Carol was so excited she jumped. The weasel was a handsome thing, minklike, his long body a tube roughly ten by two, his neck long and slender. His fur was white and yellow on the underside and dark brown on his back. "What a magnificent animal!" Carol said. "And hard as hell to trap. Smell his

musk. The scent glands are back here, ing him, she had hoped against hope of all carnivores. She had never seen sively on tiny, selected mice. This one up to and including a rabbit twice his was on the back seat. The cooler was of the car. It was not disturbing. It v once collected a skunk D.O.R. They l bag within four additional plastic ba

Carol's valley resisted visitors. It v rimmed with mountains. It was the cascaded out of the south end. Ridge was interrupted by a fifty-five-hundr Standing Indian stood in North Caro valley was prize enough. Its floor v shoots of new corn. Its brooks were across the fields in the morning, hea ing on the dogwoods and leaves or mountains, though; it was still wint to the top. Sam had flown over this Oglethorpe to the Chattooga River, Bald. He said there was no valley in ness. It was about two miles long ar tion was twelve. Someone else, some name, but not here. Lyrical in its eff Tate City. On our way in, we stoppe nior residents. Their house, until re on boards among the rafters that th stream. Their house, made of logs, were in town, eighteen miles away. l pickup truck outside, fragments of dogs barking. The Youngs were app metabolisms, he sinewy, she more t cuits. Inside, Arthur rolled himself his wood-burning stove. Near him champion fiddler. Arthur went on s exchanged news with Carol. Christ wall. The room had two kerosene la tape. "I always wished I had power, kids. Now I don't care." Dusk was i we left soon and went on up the val

A wooden deck reached out from place had been cut out of woods—

orgia. A state? Really a of North America. Pull gators off the low ones. es, mammalian bound- frogs. The range of the ments of tens of thou- The State of Georgia.

is trip was a sphagnum Bald (4,696 feet). The es, with swamp pinks in m and Carol thought it a heavy woman, greatly e around her neck. She h of her shingled house egistering a natural area t with no expression and on. ("Being aware of the ership and use of a prop- tural history of Georgia, e for purposes consistent aps she could consider it en they came home. One "We likes to hunt arrow-

took for a blacksnake— na peel that Carol identi- the word for them. They to be collected this way," g up on just frogs or just t other things. Watching t mean, can you imagine

y and the road presented hat was a good one. That "

exactly what Carol said it on the road. It was fresh- University—in fine condi- l was a handsome thing, his neck long and slender. l dark brown on his back. d as hell to trap. Smell his

musk. The scent glands are back here by the tail." While backing up after seeing him, she had hoped against hope that he would be a least weasel—smallest of all carnivores. She had never seen one. The least weasel diets almost exclusively on tiny, selected mice. This one would have eaten almost anything warm, up to and including a rabbit twice his size. Carol put him in an iced cooler that was on the back seat. The cooler was not airtight. Musk permeated the interior of the car. It was not disturbing. It was merely powerful. Carol said they had once collected a skunk D.O.R. They had put it in a plastic bag within a plastic bag within four additional plastic bags. The perfume still came through.

Carol's valley resisted visitors. It was seven miles from a paved road. It was rimmed with mountains. It was the coldest valley in Georgia. A trout stream cascaded out of the south end. Ridges pressed in from east and west. The north was interrupted by a fifty-five-hundred-foot mountain called Standing Indian. Standing Indian stood in North Carolina, showing Georgia where to stop. The valley was prize enough. Its floor was flat and green with pastureland and shoots of new corn. Its brooks were clear. Now, in May, there would be frost across the fields in the morning, heavy and bright, but blossoms were appearing on the dogwoods and leaves on the big hardwoods—only so far up the mountains, though; it was still winter on Standing Indian, stick-figure forests to the top. Sam had flown over this whole area, minutely, in his Cessna—Mt. Oglethorpe to the Chattooga River, Black Rock Mountain to the Brasstown Bald. He said there was no valley in Georgia like this one in beauty or remoteness. It was about two miles long and a half mile wide. Its year-round population was twelve. Someone else, somewhere else, would have called it by another name, but not here. Lyrical in its effrontery to fact, the name of the valley was Tate City. On our way in, we stopped to see Arthur and Mammy Young, its senior residents. Their house, until recently, had had so many preserves stacked on boards among the rafters that the roof sagged. Their outhouse straddled a stream. Their house, made of logs, burned to the ground one day when they were in town, eighteen miles away. Now they lived in a cinder-block hut with a pickup truck outside, fragments of machinery lying on the ground, hound dogs barking. The Youngs were approaching old age, apparently with opposite metabolisms, he sinewy, she more than ample, after sixty years of cathead biscuits. Inside, Arthur rolled himself a cigarette and sat down to smoke it beside his wood-burning stove. Near him was a fiddle. Sam said that Arthur was a champion fiddler. Arthur went on smoking and did not reach for the fiddle. He exchanged news with Carol. Christ looked down on us from pictures on each wall. The room had two kerosene lanterns, and its windows were patched with tape. "I always wished I had power, so I could iron," Mammy said. "When I had kids. Now I don't care." Dusk was near and Carol wanted time in the light, so we left soon and went on up the valley, a mile or so, to her log cabin.

A wooden deck reached out from the cabin on stilts toward the stream. The place had been cut out of woods—hemlock, ironwood, oak, alder, dogwood,

rhododendron. A golden birch was standing in a hole in the center of the deck. Carol got out the weasel and set him, paws up, on the deck. Sam unpacked his things and set a bottle of The Glenlivet near the weasel, with three silver cups. I added a bottle of Talisker. Sam was no bourbon colonel. He liked pure Highland malt Scotch whisky. Carol measured the weasel. She traced him on paper and fondled his ears. His skull and his skin would go into the university's research collection. She broke a double-edged Gillette blade in half the long way. "Weasels are hard to come by, hard to scent, hard to bait," she said. "We've tried to trap a least weasel. We don't even have one. I hate to catch animals, though. With D.O.R.s, I feel great. We've got the specimen and we're making use of it. The skull is the most important thing. The study skin shows the color pattern."

With a simple slice, she brought out a testicle; she placed it on a sheet of paper and measured it. Three-quarters of an inch. Slicing smoothly through the weasel's fur, she began to remove the pelt. Surely, she worked the skin away from the long neck. The flesh inside the pelt looked like a segment of veal tenderloin. "I lived on squirrel last winter," she said. "Every time you'd come to a turn in the road, there was another squirrel. I stopped buying meat. I haven't bought any meat in a year, except for some tongue. I do love tongue." While she talked, the blade moved in light, definite touches. "Isn't he in perfect shape?" she said. "He was hardly touched. You really lose your orientation when you start skinning an animal that's been run over by a Mack truck." From time to time, she stopped for a taste of The Glenlivet, her hand, brown from sun and flecked with patches of the weasel's blood, reaching for the silver cup. "You've got to be careful where you buy meat anyway. They inject some animals with an enzyme, a meat tenderizer, before they kill them. *That* isn't any good for you." Where the going was difficult, she moistened the skin with water. At last it came away entire, like a rubber glove. She now had the weasel disassembled, laid out on the deck in cleanly dissected parts. "I used to love to take clocks apart," she said. "To see how they were built. This is the same thing. I like plants and animals and their relationship to the land and us. I like the vertebrates especially." The weasel's tailbone was still in the skin. She tugged at it with her teeth. Pausing for a sip, she said that sometimes you just had to use your mouth in her line of work, as once when she was catching cricket frogs. She had a frog in each hand and saw another frog, so she put one frog into her mouth while she caught the third. Gradually, the weasel's tailbone came free. She held it in her hand and admired it. "Some bones are real neat," she said. "In the heart of a deer, there's a bone. And not between the ventricles, where you'd expect it. Some animals have bones in their penises—raccoons, for example, and weasels." She removed the bone from the weasel's penis. It was long, proportionately speaking, with a hook at the penetrating end. It was called a baculum, she said, which meant "rod" in Latin. She would save it. Its dimensions were one way to tell the weasel's age. Baculums are also involved in keying dif-

ferences in species. Sam said it made a great toothpick. Carol turned the pelt inside out. The procedure with a study skin is to turn it away.

The dusk was deep then. The air was cold. It was on its way integrating into coals. The cabin. Carol put the weasel on the coals.

"How do you like your w

"Extremely well done," I

Carol sniffed the aroma. "It's not cow. The first time I did, and the bad taste is. I did, and fat on."

The taste of the weasel's mouth after dinner. The first time how good everything is," chickens—boy, have those one poisonous mammal it can even eat that."

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ferences in species. Sam said he kept a raccoon's baculum in his wallet because it made a great toothpick. He got out his wallet and displayed his great toothpick. Carol turned the pelt inside out and folded the forepaws in an X, standard procedure with a study skin. She covered it with a deep layer of salt and packed it away.

The dusk was deep then. Carol had finished working almost in the dark. The air was cold. It was on its way to thirty. Sam had a fire going, inside, already disintegrating into coals. The smell of burning oak was sweet. We went into the cabin. Carol put the weasel on the tines of a long fork and roasted it over the coals.

"How do you like your weasel?" Sam asked me.

"Extremely well done," I said.

Carol sniffed the aroma of the roast. "It has a wild odor," she said. "You *know* it's not cow. The first time I had bear, people said, 'Cut the fat off. That's where the bad taste is.' I did, and the bear tasted just like cow. The next bear, I left the fat on."

The taste of the weasel was strong and not unpleasant. It lingered in the mouth after dinner. The meat was fibrous and dark. "It just goes to show you how good everything is," said Carol. "People who only eat cows, pigs, sheep, chickens—boy, have those people got blinders on! Is that tunnelization! There's one poisonous mammal in the United States: the short-tailed shrew. And you can even eat that."

Sam built up the fire.

"How can you be sure that something is not too old?" I asked.

"My God, if you can't tell if it's bad, what's the difference?" said Carol.

Sam said, "If it tastes good, don't knock it."

"People don't make sense," Carol said. "They hunt squirrels, but they wouldn't consider eating a squirrel killed on the road. Only once have I ever had competition for a D.O.R. A man wanted a squirrel for his black servant, and we had a set-to in the road."

There were double-deck bunks in the corners of the room. The corners were cold. We pulled three mattresses off the bunks and put them down side by side before the fire. We unrolled our three sleeping bags. It had been a big day; we were tired, and slept without stirring. Sam dreamed in the night that he was eating his own beard.

WITH a load of honey and cathead biscuits, gifts of Mammy Young, we went down out of the valley in the morning, mile after mile on a dirt road that ran beside and frequently crossed the outlet stream, which was the beginnings of the Tallulah River. Some twenty miles on down, the river had cut a gorge, in hard quartzite, six hundred feet deep. Warner Brothers had chosen the gorge as the site for the filming of a scene from James Dickey's novel, "Deliverance."

This mountain land in general was being referred to around the state as " 'Deliverance' country." The novel seemed to have been the most elaborate literary event in Georgia since "Gone with the Wind." "Deliverance" was so talked about that people had, for conversational convenience, labelled its every part ("the owl scene," "the guitar scene"). It was a gothic novel, a metaphysical terror novel, the structural center of which involved four men going through the rapids of a mountain river in canoes. They were attacked. The action climax occurred when one of the canoemen scaled the wall of a fantastically sheer gorge to establish an ambush and kill a mountain man. He killed him with a bow and arrow. Carol and Sam, like half the people in Atlanta and a couple of dozen in Hollywood, called this "the climb-out scene," and they took me to see where Warners would shoot. The six-hundred-foot gorge was a wonder indeed, clefting narrowly and giddily down through the quartzite to the bed of the river that had done the cutting. Remarkably, though, no river was there. A few still pools. A trickle of water. Graffiti adorned the rock walls beside the pools. There was a dam nearby, and, in 1913, the river had been detoured through a hydropower tunnel. Steel towers stood on opposite lips of the chasm, supported by guy wires. A cable connected the towers. They had been built for performances of wire walkers, the Flying Wallendas. Nearby was the Cliffhanger Café. A sign said, "Enjoy Coca-Cola. See it here, free. Tallulah Gorge. 1200 feet deep." The Georgia Natural Areas Council looked on. Too late to register that one. The eye of the Warner Brothers camera would, however, register just what it wanted to select and see, and it would move up that wall in an unfailing evocation of wilderness. I was awed by the power of Dickey. In writing his novel, he had assembled " 'Deliverance' country" from such fragments, restored and heightened in the chambers of his imagination. The canoes in his novel dived at steep angles down breathtaking cataracts and shot like javelins through white torrents among blockading monoliths. If a canoe were ten inches long and had men in it three inches high, they might find such conditions in a trout stream, steeply inclined, with cataracts and plunge pools and rushing bright water falling over ledges and splaying through gardens of rock. Dickey must have imagined something like that and then enlarged the picture until the trout stream became a gothic nightmare for men in full-size canoes. A geologically maturer, less V-shaped stream would not have served. No actual river anywhere could have served his artistic purpose—not the Snake, not the Upper Hudson, not even the Colorado—and least of all a river in Georgia, whose wild Chattooga, best of the state's white-water rivers, has modest rapids: a bouncing run, much pleasure, no particular danger. The people of the "Deliverance" mountains were malevolent, opaque, and sinister. Arthur and Mammy Young.

There were records of the presence of isolated cottonmouths on Dry Fork Creek, in wild, forested piedmont country east of Athens. Dry Fork Creek, a tributary of a tributary of the Savannah River, was about halfway between

Vesta and Rayle, the begin woods along the creek. It was highland moccasin (the *Agkistrodon contortrix* cotton water moccasin (the cottonmouths belong in the cotton rivers—*Agkistrodon piscivorus* this would be a rare experience part, I regretted that I lacked shoes. Sam's feet were covered anything that could have shown ran her eye over every flat she quickly moved on. Sam under big sycamores, water leaves on the ground, cold of tracks she found was different those are possum tracks. I am sum right there, no way a bar like that with no cool every night. Possums can healthy place. I don't much dead trees." One big deer changed that, would have coons—*piscivorus piscivorus* of his map, beyond his rattlesnakes were not there. "The Cemocheckabee, cotton

Buffalo disappeared from noted this when he visited Florida, 1773–74." Bartlett scribe in detail the American sedentary English poets (Columbus, and Coleridge). Ten crossed Bartram's path. Pines, Scrub white Oaks sort of Ridge, come to a foot of the hills of the great licked in the Clay, former Cattle, deer, and horses, greesey Marle of various but nothing saltish that Philomath, Georgia 306 a buffalo lick. Philomath

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ed cottonmouths on Dry Fork of Athens. Dry Fork Creek, a r, was about halfway between

Vesta and Rayle, the beginning and the end of nowhere. We searched the woods along the creek. It would not have been at all unusual had we found the highland moccasin (the copperhead) there, for this was his terrain—*Agkistrodon contortrix contortrix*. What we were looking for, though, was the water moccasin (the cottonmouth), inexplicably out of his range. Cottonmouths belong in the coastal plain, in the rice fields, in the slow-moving rivers—*Agkistrodon piscivorus piscivorus*. Seeing a cottonmouth in a place like this would be a rare experience, and Carol fairly leaped into the woods. For my part, I regretted that I lacked aluminum boots. Carol was wearing green tennis shoes. Sam's feet were covered with moccasins. Carol rolled every log. She lifted anything that could have sheltered a newt, let alone a snake. By the stream, she ran her eye over every flat rock and projecting branch. Always disappointed, she quickly moved on. Sam sauntered beside her. The flood plain was beautiful under big sycamores, water oaks, maples: light filtering down in motes, wet leaves on the ground, cold water moving quietly in the stream. But the variety of tracks she found was disturbingly incomplete. "There, on that sandbar—those are possum tracks. Possums and coons go together, but that's just possum right there, no way about it. And that is not right. There shouldn't be a bar like that with no coon tracks on it, even if the water goes up and down every night. Possums can live anywhere. Coons can't. Coon tracks signify a healthy place. I don't much like this place. It's been cut over. There are no big dead trees." One big dead tree with a cottonmouth under it would have changed that, would have glorified Dry Fork Creek for Carol, coons or no coons—*piscivorus piscivorus* caught poaching, out of his territory, off the edge of his map, beyond his range. I felt her disappointment and was sorry the snakes were not there. "Don't be disappointed," she said. "When we go down the Cemocheekabee, cottonmouths will show us the way."

Buffalo disappeared from Georgia in early Colonial time. William Bartram noted this when he visited the colony and wrote "Travels in Georgia and Florida, 1773–74." Bartram, from Philadelphia, was the first naturalist to describe in detail the American subtropics. After his book reached London, sedentary English poets cribbed from his descriptions (Wordsworth, for example, and Coleridge). Ten miles south of Dry Fork Creek, Sam, Carol, and I crossed Bartram's path. In Bartram's words, "We came into an open Forest of Pines, Scrub white Oaks, Black Jacks, Plumb, Hicory, Grapes Vines, Rising a sort of Ridge, come to a flat levill Plain, and at the upper side of this, levell at the foot of the hills of the great Ridge, is the great Buffiloe Lick, which are vast Pits, licked in the Clay, formerly by the Buffiloes, and now kept smoothe and open by Cattle, deer, and horses, that resort here constantly to lick the clay, which is a greesey Marle of various colours, Red, Yellow & white, & has a sweetish taste, but nothing saltish that I could perceive." Bartram was describing what is now Philomath, Georgia 30659—a one-street town consisting of thirty houses and a buffalo lick. Philomath was established, early in the nineteenth century, as a

seat of learning—hence the name. The town was the address of an academy whose students, in time, vanished like the buffalo. Now it was a place of pre-eminent silence under big oaks, and as we glided into town we were the only thing that moved. Ninety blacks, fifty whites lived there, but no one was out in the midday shade. The almost idling engine was the only sound. In an L-shaped elegant clapboard house, built in 1795, lived Dorothy Daniel Wright. Sam and Carol, having read Bartram's description and having determined that the buffalo lick was still intact, wanted to see it and, they hoped, to register it as a Georgia Natural Area. Miss Wright was the person to see. It was her lick. She was in her upper sixties. Her hair was white and swept upward, and crowned with a braided gold bun. Her welcome was warm. She showed us the lick. Cattle and deer had licked it slick all through her girlhood, she said. Now it was covered with grass, some hawthorn and sumac, and dominated by an immense, outreaching laurel oak. Carol squatted flat-footed, knees high, and handed pieces to me and Sam. It was sweet, bland, alkaline, slightly chewy. "My first thought was 'soapy,'" she said. "I expected it to get stronger, but it didn't. The final thought was 'sweetness.'" She put a bit more in her mouth and ate it contemplatively. There was, apparently, no sodium chloride in this ground. Phosphate, sodium, and calcium are what the buffalo licked. Where did they get their salt? "Twelve miles away there was salt," Miss Wright said. "Twelve miles is nothin' to a buffalo roamin' around. Between the two licks, they got all the minerals they needed for their bovine metabolism." Miss Wright had taught biology and chemistry in various high schools for forty-three years. She was eager to register the Great Buffalo Lick Natural Area, which had once been a boundary-line landmark separating the Georgia colony from the territory of the Creeks and Cherokees. She took us home to a lunch of salad and saltines. Into the salad went mushrooms, violets, and trout lilies that Carol had gathered in the mountains the day before.

Leaving Philomath, heading south, Sam commented how easy and pleasant that experience had been and how tense such encounters could sometimes be. He talked about a redneck peanut farmer in south Georgia, owner of a potential Natural Area. This redneck had taken one look at Sam's beard and had seemed ready to kill him then and there.

"What is a redneck, Sam?"

"You know what a redneck is, you little Yankee bastard."

"I want to hear your definition."

"A redneck is a fat slob in a pickup truck with a rifle across the back. He hates 'niggers.' He would rather have his kids ignorant than go to school with colored. I guess I don't like rednecks. I guess I've known some."

"Some of my best friends are rednecks," Carol said.

D.O.R. blacksnake, five miles south of Irwinton—old and bloated. "I'll just get it off the road, so its body won't be further humiliated," Carol said. Across a

fence, a big sow was grunting. "Here, piggy-poo, look w
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the address of an academy. Now it was a place of pre- to town we were the only ere, but no one was out in nly sound. In an L-shaped y Daniel Wright. Sam and g determined that the buf- hoped, to register it as a o see. It was her lick. She ept upward, and crowned e showed us the lick. Cattle she said. Now it was cov- minated by an immense, knees high, and dug with e clay, and handed pieces chewy. "My first thought er, but it didn't. The final mouth and ate it contem- n this ground. Phosphate, ere did they get their salt? l. "Twelve miles is nothin' they got all the minerals nt had taught biology and rs. She was eager to regis- nce been a boundary-line rritory of the Creeks and d saltines. Into the salad ad gathered in the moun-

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fence, a big sow was grunting. Carol carried the snake to the fence. She said, "Here, piggy-poo, look what I've got for you." She tossed the snake across the fence. The sow bit off the snake's head and ate it like an apple.

"Interesting," Carol said, "that we can feed a rotten snake to something we in turn will eat."

I said I would rather eat the buffalo lick.

Carol said, "I'll tell you the truth, I've had better clay."

We were out of the piedmont and down on the coastal plain, into the north of south Georgia. The roadside ads were riddled with bullet holes.

"PREPARE TO MEET JESUS CHRIST THE LORD." "WE WANT TO WIPE OUT CANCER IN YOUR LIFETIME." "WE CANNOT ACCEPT TIRES THAT HAVE BEEN CAPPED AS TRADE-INS."

Johnny Cash was back. Indians were now his theme. He was singing about a dam that was going to flood Seneca land, although the Senecas had been promised title to their land "as long as the moon shall rise." Cash's voice was deeper than ever. He sounded as if he were smoking a peace pipe through an oboe. Carol hugged herself. "As long . . . as the moon . . . shall rise . . . As long . . . as the rivers . . . flow."

"DON'T LOSE YOUR SOUL BY THE MARK OF THE BEAST."

We ate muskrat that night in a campsite on flat ground beside Big Sandy Creek, in Wilkinson County, innermost Georgia—muskrat with beans, chili powder, onions, tomatoes, and kelp. "I have one terrible handicap," Carol said. "I cannot follow a recipe." The muskrat, though, was very good. Carol had parboiled it for twenty minutes and then put it through a meat grinder, medium grind. Firewood was scarce, because the area was much used by fishermen who were prone to build fires and fish all night. Carol went up a tall spruce pine, and when she was forty feet or so above the ground she began to break off dead limbs and throw them down. She had to throw them like spears to clear the living branches of the tree. Pine burns oily, but that would not matter tonight. The muskrat was in a pot. Sam and I built up the fire. He pitched a tent.

To pass time before dinner, I put the canoe into the river and paddled slowly downstream. Carol called to me from the tree, "Watch for snakes. They'll be overhead, in the limbs of trees." She was not warning me; she was trying to raise the pleasure of the ride. "If you don't see the snake, you can tell by the splash," she went on. "A frog splash is a concentrated splash. A snake splash is a long splat." Gliding, watching, I went a quarter of a mile without a splash or a splat. It was dusk. The water was growing dark. I heard the hoot of a barred owl. Going back against the current, I worked up an appetite for muskrat.

After dinner, in moonlight, Sam and Carol and I got into the canoe and went up the river. A bend to the left, a bend to the right, and we penetrated the intense darkness of a river swamp that seemed to reach out unendingly. We could only guess at its dimensions. Upland swamps occur in areas between streams. River swamps are in the flood plains of rivers, and nearly all the streams in the Georgia coastal plain have them. They can be as much as six miles wide, and when the swamps of two or more big rivers connect, the result can be a vast and separate world. The darkness in there was so rich it felt warm. It was not total, for bars and slats of moonlight occasionally came through, touched a root or a patch of water. Essentially, however, everything was black: black water, black vegetation—water-standing maples, cypress—black on black. Columnar trunks were all around us, and we knew the channel only by the feel of the current, which sometimes seemed to be coming through from more than one direction. Here the black water sucked and bubbled, roiled by, splashed through the roots of the trees. Farther on, it was silent again. Silent ourselves, we pushed on into the black. Carol moved a flashlight beam among the roots of trees. She held the flashlight to her nose, because the eye can see much more if the line of sight is closely parallel to the beam. She inspected minutely the knobby waterlines of the trees. Something like a sonic boom cracked in our ears. "Jesus, what was that?"

"Beaver."

The next two slaps were even louder than the first. Carol ignored the beaver, and continued to move the light. It stopped. Out there in the obsidian was a single blue eye.

"A blue single eye is a spider," she said. "Two eyes is a frog. Two eyes almost touching is a snake. An alligator's eyes are blood red."

Two tiny coins now came up in her light. "Move in there," she said. "I want that one."

With a throw of her hand, she snatched up a frog. It was a leopard frog, and she let him go. He was much within his range. Carol was looking for river frogs, pig frogs, carpenter frogs, whose range peripheries we were stalking. She saw another pair of eyes. The canoe moved in. Her hand swept out unseen and made a perfect tackle, thighs to knees. This was a bronze frog, home on the range. Another pair of eyes, another catch, another disappointment—a bullfrog. Now another shattering slap on the water. Another. The beaver slapped only when the canoe was moving upstream. The frog chorus, filling the background, varied in pitch and intensity, rose and fell. Repeatedly came the hoot of the barred owl.

Sam dipped a cup and had a drink. "I feel better about drinking water out of swamps than out of most rivers," he said. "It's filtered. No one ever says a good word for a swamp. The whole feeling up to now has been 'Fill it in—it's too wet to plow, too dry to fish.' Most people stay out of swamps. I love them. I like the water, the reptiles, the amphibians. There is so much life in a swamp. The sounds are so different. Frogs, owls, birds, beavers. Birds sound different in swamps."

"You see a coon in here and you
"It's a beautiful home with thou
With all this ecological intoxicat
the canoe.

"Life came out of the swamps,"
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On down the dirt road from
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Adel, Moultrie, a hundred miles

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nt in swamps."

"You see a coon in here and you realize it's his whole world," Carol said.

"It's a beautiful home with thousands of creatures," Sam said.

With all this ecological intoxication, I thought they were going to fall out of the canoe.

"Life came out of the swamps," Sam said. "And now swamps are among the last truly wild places left."

We went back downstream. Tobacco smoke was in the air over the river. Occasionally, on the bank, we saw an orange-red glow, momentarily illuminating a black face. Fishing lines, slanting into the stream, were visible against the light of small fires. The canoe moved soundlessly by, and on into the darkness. "The groids sure love to fish," Sam murmured. The moon was low. It was midnight.

NOW, at noon, a hundred miles or so to the southeast and by another stream, we were sitting on the big felled oak, pouring out the last of the wine, with Chap Causey moving toward us a foot at a time in his American dragline crane. He swung a pair of mats around behind him and backed up a bit more, and as he went on gutting the streambed the oak began to tremble. It must have weighed two or three tons, but it was trembling and felt like an earthquake—time to move. Carol picked up a piece of dry otter scat. She bounced it in the palm of her hand and looked upcurrent at the unaltered stream and downcurrent into the new ditch. She said, "You can talk about coons' being able to go off into the woods and eat nuts and berries, because they're omnivores. But not this otter. He's finished." She broke open the scat. Inside it were fishbones and hair—hair of a mouse or hair of a young rabbit. There were fish otoliths as well, two of them, like small stones. She flung it all into the stream. "He's done for," she said, and waved good-bye to Chap Causey.

On down the dirt road from the stream-channelization project, we saw ahead a D.O.R.

"Looks like a bad one," Carol said.

Sam stopped. "Yes, it's a bad one," he said. "Canebrake. Do you want to eat him?"

Carol leaned over and looked. "He's too old. Throw him out of the road, the poor darlin'. What gets me is that some bastard is proud of having run over him. When I die, I don't want to be humiliated like that."

Sam threw the rattlesnake out of the road. Then we headed southwest through underdeveloped country, almost innocent of towns—Alma, Douglas, Adel, Moultrie, a hundred miles from Alma to Moultrie.

D.O.R. king snake, blue jay, sparrow hawk, wood thrush, raccoon, catbird, cotton rat. The poor darlin's. Threw them out of the road.

A.O.R. hobo—man with a dog. "Oh, there's a good guy," Carol said as we passed him. "He has a dog and a bedroll. What else do you need?"

D.O.R. opossum. Cook County. Three miles east of Adel. Carol spoke admiringly of the creature flexibility of the opossum. Among the oldest of mammals, the possum goes all the way back to Cretaceous time, she said, and, like people, it has never specialized, in a biological sense. "You can specialize yourself out of existence. Drain the home of the otter. The otter dies. The opossum, though, can walk away from an ecological disaster. So much for that. Try something else. He eats anything. He lives almost anywhere. That's why the possum is not extinct. That's why the possum has been so successful." One place this particular possum was never going to walk away from was Georgia Highway 76. Technology, for him the ultimate ecological disaster, had clouted him at seventy miles an hour.

Between Moultrie and Doerun, in the watershed of the Ochlockonee, was a lake in a pine grove surrounded by fifty acres of pitcher plants. They belonged to a couple named Barber, from Moultrie, who had read about the Natural Areas Council and had offered their pitcher plants to posterity. Sam and Carol, posterity, would accept. This was the largest colony of pitcher plants any of us was ever likely to see. Bright-green leaves, ruddy blooms, they glistened in the sun and nodded in the breeze and reached out from the lakeshore like tulips from a Dutch canal. Barber cut one off at the base and held up a leaf—folded upon itself like a narrow goblet, half full of water. The interior was lined with bristles, pointing downward. In the water were dozens of winged creatures, some still moving, most not. Barber had interrupted a handsome meal. His pitcher plants, in aggregate, could probably eat a ton of bugs a day. Sam said he sure was pleased to be able to make the pitcher plants a Georgia Natural Area. Carol saw a tiny water snake. She picked it up. It coiled in her hand and snapped at her. She talked gently to it until it settled down. "Are you going to be good now?" she said. She opened her hand, and the snake sat there, placidly, on her palm. The Barbers did not seem charmed. They said nothing and did not move. Carol set down the snake. It departed, and so did the Barbers. They went back to Moultrie in their air-conditioned car, leaving us their lake, their pines, their pitcher plants.

We jumped into the lake with a bar of soap and scrubbed ourselves up for dinner. In places, the lake was warm from the sun and in places cold from springs. We set up the tent and built a fire. The breeze was cool in the evening in the pines. Carol's stomach growled like a mastiff. She said that when she was hungry she could make her stomach growl on cue. It growled again. She had a tape recorder in the car. Sam got it and recorded the growls, which seemed marketable. He said they could scare away burglars. We fried beefsteaks and turtle steaks under a gibbous moon. We buried the fossils of pleasure: three cow bones and a bottle that had held The Glenlivet. Frogs were hooting. There were no owls. We slept like bears.

At six in the morning, we got into the canoe and moved slowly around the lake. Sam cast for bass. He could flick his lure seventy feet and drop it on a pine

needle. He could lay drive it, if he wanted wrapped itself hopeful branch up out of the cage. Under blue sky far as you could see, ate it with fried turtle with more turtle egg fee with milk and he

The yolk of a turtle though, pops and bl matter how blazing snapping turtle will and dance and skitt So you give up tryin

D.O.R. cat. D.O.R. was made to stop. Natural Areas Council only forty miles away Camilla, Newton, El dark pecans. Sometimes the margins opened palisades of pine.

D.O.R. gray squirrel

"We've got enough

More pines, more sky. Out of the sky philosophy falling like leaves on . . . for after night

D.O.R. fox squirrel perfect shape. Kneaded tail so that it caught that," she said. "M like that." Gently, she looked alive in her stopped at the next

D.O.R. nighthawk her lap, just to look spread, head in profile white. Around the adapted for catching

needle. He could lay it under stumps with the delicacy of an eyedropper, or drive it, if he wanted to, halfway down the lake. He caught two bass. One wrapped itself hopelessly into a big waterlogged multiple branch. We pulled the branch up out of the water. The bass had himself woven into it like a bird in a cage. Under blue sky and star-burst clusters of longleaf pine—pitcher plants far as you could see, the lake blue and cool—we cooked the bass in butter and ate it with fried turtle eggs. Then we fried salt-risen bread in the bass butter with more turtle eggs and poured Tate City honey over the bread. Chicory coffee with milk and honey. Fish-crackling off the bottom of the pan.

The yolk of a turtle egg cooks readily to a soft, mushy yellow. The albumen, though, pops and bubbles and jumps around the pan, and will not congeal. No matter how blazing the heat beneath it may be, the white of the egg of the snapping turtle will not turn milky and set. It will jump like a frog and bounce and dance and skitter all over the pan until your patience snaps or the fire dies. So you give up trying to cook it. You swallow it hot and raw.

D.O.R. cat. D.O.R. dog. Near the Mitchell County line. Carol sighed, but no move was made to stop. We were heading west on 37 to check out a river that the Natural Areas Council had been told was like no other in Georgia. Florida was only forty miles away. The terrain was flat and serene between the quiet towns—Camilla, Newton, Elmore. Cattle stood on light-green grassland under groves of dark pecans. Sometimes the road was a corridor walled with pines. Sometimes the margins opened out into farms, then closed down toward small cabins, more palisades of pine.

D.O.R. gray squirrel. "We could eat him," Carol said.

"We've got enough food," said Sam.

More pines, more pecans, more farms, a mild morning under a blue-and-white sky. Out of the sky came country music—the Carter Sisters, Johnny Cash, philosophy falling like hail: "It's not easy to be all alone, but time goes by and life goes on . . . for after night there comes a dawn. Yes, time goes by and life goes on."

D.O.R. fox squirrel. Baker County. He was as warm as in life, and he was in perfect shape. Kneeling in the road, Carol held out his long, feathery silver-gray tail so that it caught the sunlight. "There aren't many things prettier than that," she said. "Makes a human being sort of jealous not to have a pretty tail like that." Gently, she brushed the squirrel and daubed blood from his head. He looked alive in her hands. She put him in a plastic bag. The ice was low. We stopped at the next icehouse and bought twenty-five pounds.

D.O.R. nighthawk, fresh as the squirrel. Carol kept the hawk for a while in her lap, just to look at him. He could have been an Aztec emblem—wings half spread, head in profile, feathers patterned in blacks and browns and patches of white. Around the mouth were stiff bristles, fanned out like a radar screen, adapted for catching insects.

D.O.R. box turtle.

D.O.R. loggerhead shrike.

D.O.R. gas station. It was abandoned, its old pumps rusting; beside the pumps, a twenty-year-old Dodge with four flat tires.

D.O.R. cottonmouth. Three miles east of Bluffton. Clay County. Finding him there was exciting to Carol. We were nearing the Cemocheckobee, the river we had come to see, and the presence of one cottonmouth here on the road implied crowded colonies along the river. There was no traffic, no point in moving him immediately off the road. Carol knelt beside him. "He was getting ready to shed. He would have been a lot prettier when he had," she said. The skin was dull olive. Carol felt along the spine to a point about three-quarters of the way back and squeezed. The dead snake coiled. "That is what really frightens some people," she said. She lifted the head and turned it so that we could see, between the mouth and the nostrils, the deep pits, sensory organs, through which the striking snake had homed on his targets. Slowly, Carol opened the creature's mouth. The manuals of herpetology tell you not to do that, tell you, in fact, not to touch a dead cottonmouth, because through reflex action a dead one can strike and kill a human being. Now a fang was visible—a short brown needle projecting down from the upper jaw. "You have to be very careful not to scratch your finger on one of those," Carol said. She pressed with her fingertips behind the eyes, directly on the poison sacs, and a drop of milky fluid fell onto a stick she held in her other hand. Four more drops followed, forming a dome of venom. "That amount could kill you," she said, and she pressed out another drop. "Did you know that this is where they got the idea for the hypodermic syringe?" Another drop. "It has to get into the bloodstream. You could drink all you want and it wouldn't hurt you." She placed the cottonmouth off the road. Carol once milked honeysuckle until she had about two ounces, which she then drank. The fluid was so concentratedly sweet it almost made her sick.

Carol's purse fell open as we got back into the car, and out of it spilled a .22-calibre revolver in a case that looked much like a compact. Also in the purse was a Big Brother tear-gas gun, flashlight bulbs, chapstick, shampoo, suntan lotion, and several headbands. Once, when she was off in a swamp frogging and salamandering, a state trooper came upon the car and—thinking it might be an abandoned vehicle—rummaged through it. He found the purse and opened it. He discovered the pistol, the chapstick, the shampoo, et cetera, and a pink garter belt and black net stockings. He might have sent out a five-state alert, but Carol just then emerged from the swamp. She was on her way, she told him, to make a call on Kimberly-Clark executives in an attempt to get them to register some forest and riverbank land with the Natural Areas Council, and for that mission the black net stockings would be as useful as the pistol might be in a swamp or the chapstick in a blistering sun. "Yes, Ma'am." The visit to the Kleenex people was successful, as it happened, and the result

was the Griffin's Landing beds on the Savannah River, *gantissima*, forty-million

Down a dirt road, a scraped the car on both river's edge. We took Cemocheckobee was a reformed relaxed meander and the river had speed current was strong—n swift. It ran beneath a j intimate. The distance I could be no getting aw of snakes today," Carol shoved up the sleeves c and got a snakebite kit.

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was the Griffin's Landing Registered Natural Area, fifty acres—a series of fossil beds on the Savannah River containing by the many thousands *Crassostrea gigantissima*, forty-million-year-old oysters, the largest that ever lived.

Down a dirt road, across a railroad track, and on through woods that scraped the car on both sides, Sam worked his way as far as he could toward the river's edge. We took down the canoe, and carried it to the water. The Cemocheckobee was a rejuvenated stream. Widening its valley, long ago, it had formed relaxed meanders, and now, apparently, the land was rising beneath it, and the river had speeded up and was cutting deeply into the meanders. The current was strong—nothing spectacular, nothing white, but forceful and swift. It ran beneath a jungle of overhanging trees. The river was compact and intimate. The distance from bank to bank was only about thirty feet, so there could be no getting away from the trees. "I'd venture to say we'll see our share of snakes today," Carol exulted. "Let's go! This is cottonmouth country!" Carol shoved up the sleeves of her sweatshirt over her elbows. Sam went to the car and got a snakebite kit.

I had thought I might be apprehensive about this part of the journey. I didn't see how I could help but be. Now I realized that I was having difficulty walking toward the river. "Sam," I said, "wouldn't you prefer that I paddle in the stern?" I had put in many more hours than he had in canoes on rivers, so it seemed only correct to me that Sam should sit up in the bow and fend off branches and cottonmouths while I guided the canoe from the commanding position in the rear.

"I'll go in the stern," said Sam. "Carol will go in the middle to collect snakes. You go in the bow." So much for that. It was his canoe. I got in and moved to the bow. They got in, and we shoved off.

The canoe found the current, accelerated, went downstream fifty feet, and smashed into a magnolia branch. I expected cottonmouths to strike me in both shoulders and the groin. But the magnolia proved to be snakeless. We shot on through and downriver. We could not avoid the overhanging branches. The current was too fast and there were too many of them. Once or twice a minute, we punched through the leafy twigs reaching down from a horizontal limb. But I began to settle down. There weren't any snakes, after all—not in the first mile, anyway. And things Carol was saying made a difference. She said, for example, that snakes plop off branches long before the canoe gets to them. She also said that cottonmouths rarely go out onto branches. They stay back at the river's edge and in the swamps. Snakes on branches are, in the main, as harmless as licorice. Bands of tension loosened and began to drop away. I looked ahead. At the next bend, the river was veiled in a curtain of water oak. I was actually hoping to see a snake hit the surface, but none did. We slipped through and into the clear.

This was heavy current for a river with no white water, and when we rested the river gave us a fast drift. Scenes quickly changed, within the steep banks,

the incised meanders, against backgrounds of beech and laurel, white oak, spruce pine, Venus maidenhair, and resurrection fern. We came upon a young coon at the foot of a tree. He looked at us with no apparent fear. We pulled in to the bank. "Hey, there, you high-stepper, you," Carol said. "Get up that tree!" The coon put a paw on the tree and went up a foot or two and looked around. "Why aren't you afraid?" Carol went on. "Are you O.K., cooner?" The raccoon's trouble—probably—was that he had never seen a human. He was insufficiently afraid, and Carol began to worry about him. So she got out of the canoe and went after him. The coon moved up the tree fifteen feet. The tree was a slender maple. Carol started up it like a rope climber. The coon stayed where he was. Carol said, "I'm not climbing the tree to make him jump out. I'll just go high enough to let him know he ought to be afraid of people." When she got near him, the coon scrambled to the high branches, where he hung on to one and swayed. Carol stopped about twenty feet up. "Hey, coon! We're no good. Don't you know that?" she called to him. Then she slid on down. "Let that be a lesson to you!" she called from the bottom.

We moved on downstream, passing blue-tailed skinks and salamanders, animal tracks on every flat. A pair of beavers dived into the water and went around slapping the surface, firing blanks. Carol saw the mouth of their den, and she got out of the canoe, climbed the bank, and stuck her head inside. She regretted that she had not brought a flashlight with her. We moved on. We passed a banded snake sitting on a limb. He produced mild interest. Fear was gone from me. It had gone off with the flow of the river. There was a light splash to the right—as if from a slide, not a dive. No one saw what made it. "Otter," Carol said. "Pull in to the opposite bank—over there. Quickly!" We stopped the canoe, and held on to bush stems of the riverbank and waited. Nothing happened. The quiet grew. "The otter will come up and look at us," Carol said. We waited. Smooth, the river moved—never the same, always the same. No otter. "He is an extraordinarily intelligent and curious animal," Carol said. "He could go off somewhere, if he wanted to, just to breathe. But he wants to see us. He will not be able to stand it much longer. He will have to come up." Up came a face, chin on the water—dark bright eyes in a dark-brown head, small ears, wide snout: otter. His gaze was direct and unflinching. He looked at us until he had seen his fill; then he went back under. "Wouldn't you like to live in this creek?" Carol said. "You'd never get lonely. Wouldn't you like to play with the otter?"

A waterfall, about twelve feet high, poured into the river from the left. Two hundred yards downstream, another fall dropped into the river from the right. The feeder streams of the Cemocheckabee were not cutting down as fast as the river itself, and these hanging tributaries poured in from above, all the way down. We now moved through stands of royal fern under big sycamores and big beeches, and past another waterfall. "This is otter, beaver, coon heaven," Carol said. Her only disappointment was the unexpected scarcity of snakes. She said she had seen more than her share of "magnolia-leaf snakes" that day. Her imag-

ination, charged with hope as magnolia leaves into snakes, g disappointed, too. Only one lou

Sam said the threat to this ri on in the forests on both sides, register the river—and its mar; be too late. While he was speal and pointed to it, interrupting

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THE Cemocheckabee was itse there in southwestern Georgi where with the Chattahoochee back north. The Chattahoocheeveloped where railheads met th the Brasstown Bald, Georgia Carolina, and flows to Florida

laurel, white oak, came upon a young bear. We pulled in to "Get up that tree!" and looked around. "ner?" The raccoon's an. He was insuffigot out of the canoe. The tree was a slentayed where he was. out. I'll just go high. When she got near hung on to one and we're no good. Don't "Let that be a lesson

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ination, charged with hope and anticipation, could, and frequently did, turn magnolia leaves into snakes, green upon the branches. I found myself feeling disappointed, too. Only one lousy banded snake. The day was incomplete.

Sam said the threat to this river was the lumber industry. Logging was going on in the forests on both sides, and he would try to persuade the lumbermen to register the river—and its marginal lands—before the day came when it would be too late. While he was speaking, I saw a snake on a log at the water's edge, and pointed to it, interrupting him.

"Is that a banded snake?"

"That is not a banded snake," Carol said.

"Is it a bad one?"

"It's a bad one, friend."

"Well, at last. Where have you been all day?"

He had been right there, of course, in his own shaft of sun, and the sight of a shining aluminum canoe with three figures in it was not going to cause him to move. Moving back was not in his character. He would stay where he was, or go toward something that seemed to threaten him. Whatever else he might be, he was not afraid. He was a cottonmouth, a water moccasin. Carol was closer to him than I was, and I felt no fear at all. Sam, in the stern, was closest of all, because we were backing up toward the snake. I remember thinking, as we moved closer, that I preferred that they not bring the thing into the canoe, but that was the sum of my concern; we were ten miles downstream from where we had begun. The moccasin did not move. We were now right next to it. Sam reached toward it with his paddle.

"Rough him up a little to teach him to beware of humans," Carol said. "But don't hurt him."

Under the snake Sam slipped the paddle, and worked it a bit, like a spatula, so that the snake came up onto the blade. Sam lifted the cottonmouth into the air. Sam rocked the paddle. "Come on," he said. "Come on, there. Open your mouth so John can see the cotton."

"Isn't he magnificent?" Carol said. "Set him down, Sam. He isn't going to open his mouth."

Sam returned the moccasin to the log. The canoe moved on into a gorge. The walls of the gorge were a hundred feet high.

THE Cemocheckobee was itself a feeder stream, ending in the Chattahoochee, there in southwestern Georgia, at the Alabama line. An appointment elsewhere with the Chattahoochee—a red-letter one for Sam and Carol—drew us back north. The Chattahoochee is Georgia's most prodigious river. Atlanta developed where railheads met the river. The Chattahoochee rises off the slopes of the Brasstown Bald, Georgia's highest mountain, seven miles from North Carolina, and flows to Florida, where its name changes at the frontier. It is

thereafter called the Appalachicola. In all its four hundred Georgia miles, what seems most remarkable about this river is that it flows into Atlanta nearly wild. Through a series of rapids between high forested bluffs, it enters the city clear and clean. From parts of the Chattahoochee within the city of Atlanta, no structures are visible—just water, sky, and woodland. The circumstance is nostalgic, archaic, and unimaginable. It is as if an unbefouled Willamette were to flow wild into Portland—Salt into Phoenix, Missouri into Omaha, Charles into Boston, Hudson into New York, Delaware into Philadelphia, James into Richmond, Cuyahoga into Cleveland (the Cuyahoga caught fire one day, and fire engines had to come put out the blazing river). Atlanta deserves little credit for the clear Chattahoochee, though, because the Chattahoochee is killed before it leaves the city. It dies between Marietta Boulevard and South Cobb Drive, just below the Atlanta Water Intake, at the point where thirty-five million gallons of partially treated sewage and forty million gallons of raw sewage are poured into the river every day. A short distance below that stand two enormous power plants, whose effluent pipes raise the temperature of the river. A seven-pound brown trout was caught recently not far above the Water Intake. It is difficult to imagine what sort of fin-rotted, five-legged, uranium-gilled, web-mouthed monster could live in the river by Georgia Power. Seen from the air (Sam showed it to me once in his plane), the spoiling of the Chattahoochee is instant, from river-water blue to sewer ochre-brown, as if a pair of colored ribbons had been sewn together there by the city.

Now a sewer line was projected to run upstream beside the river to fresh subdivisions that would bloom beyond the city's perimeter highway. The sewer would not actually be in the water, but, unless it could be tunnelled or not built at all, it would cause the clear-cutting of every tree in a sixty-foot swath many miles long. A segment of the sewer was already under construction. The Georgia Natural Areas Council was among the leadership in an effort to put down this specific project and at the same time to urge a bill through the legislature that would protect permanently the river and its overview. Sam had asked Jimmy Carter to come get into a canoe and shoot the metropolitan rapids and see for himself the value and the vulnerability of the river. Carter was willing. So, in three canoes, six of us put in under the perimeter highway, I-285, and paddled into Atlanta.

Sam had Carter in his bow. Carter might be governor of Georgia but not of Sam's canoe. Carol and I had the second canoe. In the third was a state trooper, who had a pistol on his hip that could have sunk a frigate. In the stern was James Morrison, of the federal government, the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation's man in Atlanta. He wore wet-suit bootees and rubber kneepads and seemed to be ready to go down the Colorado in an acorn.

The current was strong. The canoes moved smartly downstream. Carter was a lithe man, an athletic man in his forties—at home, obviously enough, in boats. He was wearing a tan windbreaker, khaki trousers, and white basketball

shoes. He had a shock of white hair. He mentioned that he had grown up in Kinchafoonee and the Choctaw. He was black, had built a twelve-foot fence around the fields, we went down to the river and we drifted downstream and fished for bass and redbell. I could pick up a crossroads with a short road. Carol, and I had passed through. An enormous red-lettered sign read "JIMMY CARTER." Carter had paddled to Annapolis and into nuclear power. In 1953 to farm peanuts and he continued as he went on. The career of his boyhood was over. He had heard of A. D. Davis, I

Now, on the Chattahoochee, Georgia that the environment was less developed than some states. Sam went into the largest swamp. A hundred yards long, full of haystacks, eddies, and tunnels. The river was strong enough to flip a canoe.

In the shadow of a two-mile survey the scene. Carol said the Governor had binoculars. The muskrat was gone. "He's sniffin' around that lily pad. He's eating the lichens off the rocks."

"Various people," Morrison said by Alfred Kennedy.

"Kennedy?"

"A director of the First National Bank."

"Is he a good guy, so far?"

"From what I hear, he's a good guy."

"Sometimes it's better to make an issue of it than to make an issue of it. There was a touch of it. He grinned frequently, when he grinned and she told him. "And we were looking for a dog."

"Dog hobble," Carol said. "A coon track."

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shoes. He had a shock of wind-tossed sandy hair. In the course of the day, he mentioned that he had grown up in Archery, Georgia, by a swamp of the Kinchafoonce and the Choctawhatchee. He and his friend A. D. Davis, who was black, had built a twelve-foot bateau. "When it rained and we couldn't work in the fields, we went down to the creek and set out set hooks for catfish and eels, and we drifted downstream in the bateau hunting ducks with a shotgun. We fished for bass and redbellies, and we waded for jack. The bateau weighed eighty pounds. I could pick it up." Archery was three miles west of Plains, a crossroads with a short row of stores and less than a thousand people. Sam, Carol, and I had passed through Plains—in fifteen seconds—on our way north. An enormous red-lettered sign over the stores said, "PLAINS, GEORGIA, HOME OF JIMMY CARTER." Carter had played basketball at Plains High School, had gone on to Annapolis and into nuclear submarines, and had come back to Plains in 1953 to farm peanuts and to market them for himself and others, businesses he continued as he went on into the legislature and upward to become governor. The career of his boyhood friend had been quite different. The last Carter had heard of A. D. Davis, Davis was in jail for manslaughter.

Now, on the Chattahoochee, the Governor said, "We're lucky here in Georgia that the environment thing has risen nationally, because Georgia is less developed than some states and still has much to save." With that, he and Sam went into the largest set of rapids in the city of Atlanta. The rip was about a hundred yards long, full of Vs confusing to the choice, broad ledges, haystacks, eddies, and tumbling water. They were good rapids, noisy and alive, and strong enough to flip a canoe that might hit a rock and swing broadside.

In the shadow of a two-hundred-foot bluff, we pulled out on a small island to survey the scene. Carol said the bluff was a gneiss and was full of garnets. The Governor had binoculars. With them, he discovered a muskrat far out in the river. The muskrat was gnawing on a branch that had been stopped by a boulder. "He's sniffin' around that little old limb on top of that rock," Carter said. "Maybe he's eating the lichens off it. Look, there's another. Who owns the land here?"

"Various people," Morrison said. "Some are speculators. A lot of it is owned by Alfred Kennedy."

"Kennedy?"

"A director of the First National Bank," Carol said.

"Is he a good guy, so far as conservancy goes?"

"From what I hear, he's too busy making money."

"Sometimes it's better to slip up on people like that," Carter told her. "Rather than make an issue of it right away." He spoke in a low voice, almost shyly. There was a touch of melancholy in his face that disappeared, as it did frequently, when he grinned. A trillium caught his eye. He asked her what it was, and she told him. "And what's that?" he said.

"Dog hobble," Carol said. "*Leucothoe*. Look here." She pointed at the ground. "A coon track."

The canoes moved on, and the next stop was a visit with a fisherman who was casting from the bank. He was middle-aged and weathered, a classical, prototype fisherman, many years on the river. He was wreathed in smiles at sight of the Governor. I looked hard at Sam, but nothing in his face indicated that he had planted the man there. The fisherman, Ron Sturdevant, showed the Governor a Kodacolor print of a twenty-three-inch rainbow he had recently caught right here under this bluff. "I guess I'm glad I met you," Sturdevant said. "I'm glad you're taking this trip. I'm worried about the river."

"I hope we can keep it this way," Carter said.

We climbed from the river through a deep wood of oaks and big pines to a cave in which families of Cherokees had once lived. It was about a hundred feet up. The view swept the river, no structures visible. "Who owns this place?"

Sam said, "Alfred Kennedy."

"And he hasn't even slept here," said Carol.

"Have you slept here, Carol?" the Governor asked her.

"Many times," she told him. "With a dog named Catfish."

Morrison said, "There's gold here, around the Indian cave. It's never been mined."

"That would be a good way to keep this place undisturbed," Carter said. "To announce that there was gold up here."

Back on the river, he used his binoculars while Sam paddled. He saw four more muskrats and an automobile, upside down in the water, near the far bank. He also saw a turtle.

"What kind is it?" Carol asked him.

"If I knew what kind it was, I could tell you." He handed the binoculars across to her, too late.

"I've been down through here and seen fifteen turtles with bullet holes in their shells," Carol told him.

"What kind?" Carter said.

"Cooters and sliders."

There was a racket of engines. Out of nowhere came two motorcyclists riding in the river. A mile or so later, we took out, beside an iron bridge. Carol said she had washed her hair any number of times under that bridge.

The Governor invited us home for lunch. The mansion was new—a million-dollar neo-Palladian Xanadu, formal as a wedding cake, and exquisitely landscaped. Carol and Sam and I were ropy from a thousand miles of mountains, rivers, and swamps. None of us had changed clothes in nearly a week, but we would soon be eating grilled cheese sandwiches at a twenty-foot table under a crystal chandelier. The Governor, for that matter, did not look laundered anymore—mud on his trousers, mud on his basketball shoes. We parked in back of the mansion. A backboard, hoop, and net were mounted there. A ball sat on the pavement. Before going in, we shot baskets for a while.

"The river is just great," the Governor said, laying one in. "And it ought to be

kept the way it is. It's almost heartbre: destruction. I guess I'll write a letter to some self-restraint, it'll decrease the ar future.' I don't think people want to i nor or the legislature."

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kept the way it is. It's almost heartbreaking to feel that the river is in danger of
destruction. I guess I'll write a letter to all the landowners and say, 'If you'll use
some self-restraint, it'll decrease the amount of legal restraint put on you in the
future.' I don't think people want to incur the permanent wrath of the gover-
nor or the legislature."

"I've tried to talk to property owners," Carol said. "To get them to register
their land with the Natural Areas Council. But they wouldn't even talk to me."

The Governor said, "To be blunt about it, Carol, why would they?"

The Governor had the ball and was dribbling in place, as if contemplating a
property owner in front of him, one-on-one. He went to the basket, shot, and
missed. Carol got the rebound and fed the ball to Sam. He shot. He missed, too.

(1973)