

The background of the cover is a photograph of a red canoe on a calm body of water. The canoe is viewed from the front, showing its pointed prow. A coiled yellow rope is visible inside the canoe. The water is still, and the sky is a pale, hazy blue with a bright light source, possibly the sun, creating a soft glow. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

The
53rd
Parallel

CARL NORDGREN

a River of Lakes novel

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The 53rd Parallel

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As with all my life's work, this book is dedicated to my wife, Marie

INTRODUCTION OF CHARACTERS

This Man

A great 17th century Annishinabe hunter and warrior who lives on in the lives of the Ojibway who respect the ancient ways.

Brian Burke

This great big man is an Irish ghilley blessed and cursed by his dreams and passions. With his wife Deidre he is the father of Tommy, Katie, and Patrick.

Maureen O'Toole

A girl one moment, a woman the next, her rich black hair and bright blue eyes captivate. She's from Northern Ireland, just outside Derry, and a foot soldier for the IRA.

Kevin Coogan

He has a shop in Dublin where he sells musical instruments. Even as a young man the IRA entrusted him with important responsibilities. Maureen is one of his recruits.

Eamon Burke

Brian and Eamon are cousins who grew up brothers. Eamon is a couple of years older and the only man in the West of Ireland bigger than Brian.

Deidre Burke

Married to Brian, the mother of his three children.

Joe Loon

An Ojibway, the elder of his clan of some of the last 'off the

Reserve' Ojibway living on the River. He is a dreamer of visions.

Naomi

Joe Loon's wife.

Albert Loon

Joe Loon's nephew, though raised as a son. The father of Mathew Loon.

Mathew Loon

A young boy of the Ojibway village, Albert Loon's son, Joe Loon's grandson, and Simon Fobister's close cousin.

Simon Fobister

A young boy of the Ojibway village. His father left his family when Simon was very young. His mother is Joe Loon's daughter and Joe Loon has helped raise him. He calls Mathew Loon Big Brother, Mathew Loon calls him Little Brother.

Nokomis

A title of honor for the matriarch of the clan, and Albert Loon's mother.

Old George Fobister

An older Ojibway man, long a loyal member of Joe Loon's clan.

Sean Russell

The leader of the Irish Republican Army leading up to World War II

James and Stephen Miller, the pulp mill brothers

Grandsons of the owner of Atibiti Lumber Company

Chapter 1

THIS MAN RIDES THE MOOSE

WITH SO MUCH LIGHT ABSORBED in the full rolling clouds of fog floating over the River's lake and shrouding the fir and birch forests it seemed like dusk all day. At the far end of the lake, where the current collected its force to return to the River's channel, some of the clouds were smoke.

A large animal was swimming in the middle of the lake, lost now in a fog cloud, then seen as a shadow before it emerged. It was a big bull moose, his heavy muzzle held just above the water's surface, his dewlap submerged, his large ears folded back, a massive rack of antlers trailing a stalk of broken reed behind.

The drifting silver white clouds just above hid the sky. The big bull's bulk was hidden under the water and his neck cut a modest wake.

Following the moose at some distance, veiled in a great curtain of cloud, then appearing, and only slowly closing the gap, was a gracefully rounded long-nose birch bark canoe paddled by This Man. Before his people were called Ojibway by the French voyageurs and then Chippewa by the English fur traders, they called themselves Annishinabe, for they were the Original People, the First People, and This Man had been a great Annishinabe hunter, and a courageous warrior.

He was dressed in light buckskin leggings and jacket. A heavily beaded pouch draped over his shoulders and crossed at his chest, bandolier-like, repeating the floral pattern painted on the bow of

the canoe. He wore a bright red wrap around his head and his hair fell with the extra cloth over his shoulders. The tip of a foxtail was woven into his hair above his right ear.

This Man paddled once hard to glide, paddled twice hard to glide. The first glide revealed the image of a fox carved into one side of the paddle blade, and with the next stroke and glide the image carved on the opposite side of the blade was revealed—a rabbit dashing away.

This Man paddled to a rhythm that he began to hum deep in his chest as he followed the moose across the lake. He drew close enough to hear the moose snorting a heavy breath, then kept that distance and followed the moose across the lake.

The moose approached the thickest cloud as somewhere a loon cried and the fog clouds captured the trilling wail of high tremolo calls and kept reviving them as they echoed everywhere. When he saw the moose approaching the thick cloud This Man paddled faster to close the distance. He paddled right up behind the moose as the broken bit of reed washed free from the antlers and swirled first in the moose's wake and then twirled in the paddle's whirlpool.

This Man pulled hard with his paddle one last time, then dropped it as the canoe darted alongside the moose. This Man looked up to a break in the fog where he could see blue sky. He heard a song floating muffled from the shore; it seemed to be from another world, and he stood and sang a welcome from his world. When the clouds broke and he could hear the song more fully he raised his voice to join the others.

It was The Path of Souls song.

Just as they disappeared into the cloud, This Man leapt from the canoe onto the moose's back and he sang louder still.

Chapter 2

"IT'S A GRAND DREAM."

IT WAS THE SUMMER OF 1939 in the West of Ireland on the shores of Lough Mask, where the River drained the lough. Sportsmen from England and Europe escaped there from the threat of war for the world-class salmon and brown trout fisheries of the River and Lough Mask and Lough Corrib, though the recent depths of despair had diminished the flow of visitors.

Brian Burke was the ghillie Lord Clarendon had hired to guide his fishing of these waters, and Clarendon was attended by his manservant as well. It was their first day out; they had been fishing the River all morning. Clarendon listened to Brian's suggestions carefully, respectfully, and quickly understood the River's clues as Brian framed them for him. He cast his flies with accuracy and handled his line effectively; the fishing had been superb.

They were taking a leisurely break before they fished Lough Mask. Lord Clarendon, full of his morning pleasure, sighed, and, enjoying his contentment, sighed again as he sat on a camp chair set in place for him by his manservant who brought him his favorites from the wicker hamper. Brian stood apart, near shore, studying the storm clouds passing to the north of them, then admiring the two largest trout his Lordship had caught that morning.

Brian was still a young man, tall and big. Clarendon was no bigger than the average English Lord firmly planted in his middle age. He showed such genuine delight in the morning's events that Brian decided it was the moment he had been waiting for, to tell

him of his dream.

Brian's Irish voice boomed over all.

"So you'll find me tellin' this dream every day, keepin' it polished, yeah. Yourself, now I wonder this, have you ever had a dream deserved a daily exercise?"

"To be honest with you, I've always found it annoying to listen to others talk about their dreams. My wife is incessant, telling me such nonsense as delivering meat pies on horseback to the villagers then realizing she's hopelessly lost." With a flip of his hand he continued, "And once she starts it's too late to stop her. I find it's to be avoided from the start."

"Women befuddle easy, you're right there. But the grandest dream ever, you'd want to hear that now, knowin' it will be as glorious a story as this morning has been, an' take but a moment to tell you, an' then we'll be findin' you more monsters like these."

Clarendon got up from his chair and joined Brian's up-close admiration of his catch.

"The fishing's been marvelous. It appears your reputation as the best in the West is well earned, young man."

"Makes sense they'd give the best fisherman the best ghillie, yeah." Brian stooped down to pick up the largest brown, to pose it, to appreciate the heft of it.

"As I was watchin' yourself bringin' in such a beauty as this one here, an' she's ten pounds, I'd wager the day's wages on that, an' that's none too common these days. As I was watchin' you, I was thinkin' a fisherman of such quality needs to hear a dream made of the same stuff."

"Very well then, proceed with your night-time fantasies."

Brian laid the fish down with the others.

"Oh no, no fantasy this, not at all. It's one of them dreams offering, nay beggin' to come true since the—"

"You've my permission. Proceed."

"It captures everything you were feelin' this mornin'." Brian picked up the second of the biggest trout, slightly smaller than the first, but it had fought with a heroic determination. "Like when this beauty first rose to your fly, and your heart felt that low down tug, a taut line connectin' you to what it is we need connectin' to so we

don't ever lose track of what it is we're made for."

Clarendon smiled as he clapped Brian's arm.

"You Irish play with our language in such an original manner. I find it highly entertaining, if you don't mind my saying so. And you really are remarkably accurate with your description, yes."

"An' am I right thinkin' yer feelin' it again, yeah, that it's so strong in you now, just the discussin' of it carries its own delight?"

"I was told you were a most amusing ghillie as well. It appears you are all of that."

Brian frowned, confused at that description, as Clarendon smiled and returned to his camp chair where his man was refreshing his tea and adding a bit of cheese and biscuit to his plate. He sighed again as he settled to show all was right with his world. When he looked up Brian was holding both of the two biggest brown trout, one in each hand, the solid bodies swaying a bit as they hung in front of him.

"And you say all of that is there in your dream? In what fashion?"

"I'm dreamin' I'm servin' it up, all that brilliance you feel, I'm servin' it up to hundreds an' hundreds of rich American businessmen."

Clarendon looked to his man to see if he had followed it, but he shook his head no, so Clarendon turned back with confusion.

"I'd say that sounds as bizarre as delivering meat pies."

Brian took that as an insult but hid the feeling by studying the fish, and waited just a moment so the scowl dancing on his lips wouldn't be heard in his voice. When he was collected again, he looked up.

"Nothin' bizarre about it." Brian laid the fish back, wiped his hands on his trousers, and reached into his back pocket, unfolding the tattered magazine article he retrieved.

"This is from the February edition of *Wilderness of the Worlds*."

Without direction the manservant retrieved the pages. Brian showed how the torn parts fit together and pointed out the pictures he wanted Clarendon to see before he handed it over.

"It's a bit worn, yeah, I carry it with me always, but there's pictures, you see, of the most beautiful forests an' rivers and lakes in

Canada, in County Ontario an—”

“Ontario isn’t a county, it’s a province.”

“An’ wilderness all the same, wilderness filled with rivers and lakes and still so wild there’s red men who hunt them an’ trap an’ the Hudson Bay Company is still there to trade with ‘em, for beaver an’ mink pelts, just like in the pioneer days we see in the American Western films.”

Clarendon examined the photographs quickly then handed the pages back to his man for their return to Brian.

“Yes, lovely Canadian forests. I dare say it looked just like that here a few centuries ago before your people cut down all the trees, but what does this have to do with your dream?”

Brian could sense he’d lost the best moment but decided he could still recover.

“The land in those pictures is so cheap they’re practically givin’ it away so someone like meself, an maybe someone like yourself, so we can come an’ build a fishin’ lodge to create jobs for the red men who live in these woods. Ojibway Indians is what they call ‘em.”

Clarendon motioned he needed more tea, and his man came for his cup.

“What are you suggesting?”

“An’ when I see just how cheap this land is, it’s wilderness forests with moose an’

wolves an’ waters filled with huge pike and trout. Well now, it appears to me in a dream just beggin’ to come true that I—”

Clarendon stood and walked to where his waders were laid out, distancing himself from Brian’s enthusiasm.

“As I say, this entertaining quality you Irish possess, it never ceases to bring a smile to anyone who appreciates good story telling.”

Again Brian bristled.

“I’m askin’ you to respect a man’s dream here now, and let me tell you about this loveliest little cove with a bit o’ beach where we’ll build a spectacular fishin’ lodge.”

Lord Clarendon turned with his waders in hand, and his man brought the tea to him there.

“Yes, yes, I’m sure it would all be quite charming, but if you’re

suggesting I should consider being your banker, I can tell you quite firmly I'm really not interested."

Brian followed him.

"Picture a lodge where a sportin' man such as yourself would be proud to sip a

tea in the morning and a whiskey at the evening as you tell your stories about the great places you've fished and the adventures you—"

"I don't like being directed and I must request you be decent enough to make it easy for me to say no." Lord Clarendon traded with his man, waders for tea cup. "Any further and you'll only be embarrassing yourself."

"Only one thing more an' I'll leave off, for ya see we'd only need to start with five or

six cabins, an' the Indians can build 'em, so we'll have cheap labor. It's log cabins we'd be building, so most of the materials will be free, yeah, an' when we see what a fine job I'm doin' keepin' the first cabins filled with the Chicago factory owners, many of them sons of Irishmen who would love a bit a' ol' sod at the end of a day, we can add more cabins."

After sipping his tea, Lord Clarendon handed the cup back to his man and began putting on his waders.

"Perhaps you aren't feeling it here in your little corner of the world, but there's a

Depression going on and a war that's getting closer to enveloping the whole world every day. There are few rich American businessmen taking holiday these days and I expect fewer soon."

"It won't please me to point it out to ya, but if we hain't feelin' your Depression, it's only that we've grown numb from livin' our own since the day yer people stole our island from us, an' cut down our beautiful forests, an' so here's the bet I'd be makin' with you. Your Depression will be over well before ours will be."

Lord Clarendon was struggling with his waders and it took a moment for his man to realize it and put the cup down, so his help was too late to keep his Lordship from tripping a bit when he turned suddenly at Brian's last comment. When he collected himself, he was a British Lord.

“I was feeling good, no, I was feeling *grand*, much to your credit, but now you’ve got me... I don’t know, what have you got me?”

His man offered, “Peeved?”

“Peeved, thank you, yes. I’ve come over here to relax and get away from business grabbers, to fish the waters my ancestors—”

“We all know who yer family used to be.”

Lord Clarendon pulled his waders up over his chest.

“You know who we *used* to be? Do you know that it *used* to be this land was productive and cared for a damn sight better than is happening now. How rude of you to force me to say these things in defense of my family name.”

“I hope your family cared for it. You not only owned it, you owned nearly every bit of everything was around it. An’ now I’m to understand when we have nothin’ else to give, then you’re declarin’ our language is for your entertainment?”

“So you tell me your dreams and expect that I will give you my money, what, out of pity for your plight?”

The Lord delivered this line with his man blocking his view as he helped buckle the last shoulder strap on his waders, so he didn’t see how his words brought Brian to his full height and red fierceness to his face.

“Hear this clear, an’ that is if I ever saw you lookin’ at me with pity, I’d put a stop to that right away, so.”

“Now you’re going to become the radical Republican, are you?”

Brian snorted his laugh of disdain. Behind his back the folks from his village and the neighboring ones referred to him and his quick and ferocious temper as the Red Bull Demon, and it was the Red Bull Brian was becoming even as he struggled against it.

“Me a radical Republican? Never thought so, unless you’re sayin’ so’s the whole world become Republican for believin’ you had no right takin’ our island from us in the first place, let alone keepin’ it for... how would you say it? For so bloody long.”

“Some important lines are being crossed here now. This is not what I expect from someone in your position, and it will be fully reported to the game steward.”

“So the reason you’re the man I must be askin’ for the money I need for this dream is simple. When you take what’s mine, at some

point I'll be knockin on yer door an' askin for it back." He tried to control his anger for one more attempt. "You know how much my fee for services is, or how *little* is more like it, an' you can see how long it would take for me to save what I'd be needin'. But I'd be payin' you back in just three years, if ya'd rather lend it than be investin' it."

"You know the difference between a loan and selling shares, so I have to take you *seriously*? You have no right to continue haranguing me when I have explained I don't want to hear another word about this silly dream of yours. Now let's get back to the water."

The British Lord stepped forward boldly though with waders on there was just a bit of waddle to his walk. In any case, he expected the Irishman to retreat the half step that would clear the path down to the shore.

Instead Brian leaned forward just enough, and there was even more size advantage than first expected, so their shoulders collided and his Lordship nearly fell, staggering two steps back. Brian's rapidly rising anger burned brighter than Lord Clarendon's frustrated indignation, but before his Lordship realized it, he had collected himself and turned to Brian.

"I think you should re-examine this behavior immediately, or you'll find I am quite prepared to withhold your fee altogether."

Brian loaded up a hard right, and threw it. It was the sledgehammer punch he had thrown many times with devastating effect when the Red Bull Demon raged within. But it wasn't a pub brawl with nothing to lose, and so he continued to fight hard against it and he was able to stop the punch in the last instant, a foot short of Lord Clarendon's jaw. Lord Clarendon would have crumbled from the blow, he knew it, and he shrank from the threat.

But Brian's rage kept building. He knew he must walk away.

"Keep me fee money. Take it home an' put it back in the Bank of feckin' England with the rest of our patrimony. Ya feckin' Brit."

Brian turned to Lord Clarendon's manservant.

"You were watching, and I never laid a finger on 'im..."

The man stepped back, and nodded yes without meaning to.

"So you won't be tellin' falsehoods about what happened later."

The man looked away, and Brian walked up the bank to the road as his Lordship sputtered threats. Brian climbed into the

fishing lodge's panel van, slammed the door behind him, started it, and pulled away, leaving his Lordship and his man stranded at the riverside.



That same day, in County Tyrone, one of the Six Counties of British Northern Ireland, a dirty and dented Ford Talbot chugged down a quiet country road weaving a route through the moors, headed east and south towards the Dublin road. It was raining softly.

Kevin drove. He was a quiet man and a serious one. Though he had served the Irish Republican Army for years, and been a unit commander the past two, he had just turned thirty. While he drove he was intently questioning his passenger, Maureen O'Toole, his raven-haired, blue-eyed recruit—she appeared a lovely girl one moment, a beautiful woman the next.

Maureen answered his questions but was distracted, watching to see if the car following them would finally pull off onto the upcoming side road. It had been following their route for some time now, staying well back at times, even disappearing in the road's turns, but always reappearing in the straight-aways. Theirs had been the only two cars on the road for some time.

"Comin' a bit closer now, Kev, but I still can't make 'em out."

"Are you going to answer my question?"

"Ask it again."

"Do you understand that you are as important as any one of them waiting for you?"

"You're asking do I think I am as important as the boys in London. I don't see myself that way, no. They're the heroes, yeah. But I am proud to be a servant to the heroes of our cause."

"That's what I'm saying. Russell wasn't eager to permit a young girl into this particular operation."

"I'm twenty my next birthday."

"And so that makes you just nineteen and he's after me to be sure you are looking at this full in the face. You need to acknowledge to me you understand that smuggling in the makings is no different than making them, and making them is the same as setting them off."

“You can tell Russell this girl’ll place ‘em too, if that be needed.” She turned to look straight at him. “And I prefer it when you call a thing what that thing is, Kevin. It’s makings for bombs and the bombs are for killing the enemy.”

They drove in silence for a moment, the wipers flipping back and forth across the streaked windshield, before Kevin asked the next question.

“And those who die in the blast of bombs you’re making? It’s enemy soldiers if we do our jobs with an exact effect. But that’s hard to deliver and there will come a day when others will be too close and they’ll be caught in the blast, civilians is what I mean, and they will be called ‘The Innocents’ in the headlines.”

“And so you’re tryin’ to talk me out of it, Kev, is that it?”

“That, or making sure you know what you are doing before you get all the way in it. We’ve never taken it to London like this before. There’s some who are against it. I’ve told you my misgivings because I need to make sure you know what you are doing.”

“Haven’t I been beggin’ you to get all the way in it? It’s what I have to do, so.”

“Lady Girl, what I’m trying to tell you is you *don’t* have to. Right now you can tell me to turn around and I’ll take you home and Russell will thank you for what you have done already and what your Da—”

The car didn’t turn off on the side road.

“The car’s still back there.”

“And you don’t have to worry who might be following you. Unfortunately, there’s lots of girls whose da’s were murdered by Black n’ Tans. But they sit home trying to forget it, permitting themselves a smile as they sit with their mums and wait for a lad to come calling for a River walk.”

Maureen stared back at the car quietly for a few moments, watching it come closer, then fade back again before she could see any details of the driver, and her throat choked from fighting deep emotion.

“There’s time for walks... later... an’ them who can forget is better off than me, Kevin, I understan’... but this time is for mindin’ me da’s memory by gettin’ ‘im his due.”

“No, Lady Girl, you have to be doing this thing we’re setting off to do, not for revenge, but for true Fenian causes.”

“Not for revenge? Not for revenge.” She stared forward now, and they drove along quietly for a mile. When she faced Kevin there was a tear falling across her cheek, but Kevin didn’t hear it in her voice.

“I want the Brits out of the Six Counties as much as you or Russell or anyone. It was Derry where they murdered me da, in front of us, Kevin. In the house he was born in, in Derry.” Her tears were falling now, but still her voice had held steady.

“Your da was a brave man and I understand righteous anger. But your da always told me to keep personal feelings under control, that’s what I’m saying. I’m saying anger clouds the mind, and what you are setting off to do requires full composure and great discipline.”

“If you don’t want me angry then don’t talk to me about sittin’ at home an’ smilin’ with me mum, Kevin, because when I sit with her... When I share a smile with me mum it carries the memory of that last moment Da was alive. When *she* had to look away. I knew she wouldn’t be able to look him in the eye, so I did it for her, I held him in my eyes so he could see his family loved him and we were proud of him but she couldn’t watch... So I did... She was lookin’ at me as that bastard put the pistol right there an’ shot me da... An’ Kevin, what she tells me now is she doesn’t know what was more frightful to see, me da’s murder, or me fillin’ up with hatred as I watched it happenin’. So you see, Kevin, I can’t smile at me mum when she cries til mornin’... I will find the men who did this to him, and I will kill them. In the meantime, I will carry on his work.”

They drove in silence. The car followed them. Maureen saw another side road ahead. Kevin checked the rear-view mirror.

“Then I’ll let Russell know there’s no doubt. You’re all the way in.”

“I have lots of reasons to deliver the bomb makings to the boys in London. Assure Russell I’m all the way in.”

Maureen saw the car behind them finally take a southward fork in the road and she turned back to Kevin.

“An’ God bless the innocents, so.”



The fishing lodge's van was parked in front of the main street dry goods store in the village of Cong. It was parked in the exact spot Barry Fitzgerald's horse and cart would stop twelve years later in the filming of *The Quiet Man*, when the shop would be turned into Cohan's Pub for the movie. This night Brian stood at the bar in the pub across the street.

As the story of Red Bull Brian and the British Lord spread, men from town had joined earlier drinkers and paid for his drinks all afternoon and into the early evening.

"Any closer I'd felt his mustaches. As me demons was pullin' my right arm back and loadin' it with all their might, I was sure they was intendin' I'd be throwin' it full square to his jaw."

"Ah me Bri, I'm quiverin' each time I hear it. Here, let me get you anodder."

"An' his grandfather being the very landlord who failed at the Big House. Dat's feekin' perfect, feekin' beautiful."

The pub door opened and Brian looked up with a smile to see who'd be buying the next round. It was his cousin Eamon who'd come looking for Brian. Eamon Burke was a couple of years older than Brian, perhaps an inch taller and nearly two stones heavier. They were easily the largest men in the pub and celebrated by their village as the two biggest men for miles around. Eamon joined them, shaking his head at their high spirits.

"No singing at the lodge tonight, lads. Just fury over Jimmy's van gone missin' an' a British lord spittin' threats at your man here."

"Eamon, join us, we've just moved to the whiskey."

"I'm here fetchin' the van, Cos, an' they're calling for you as well. Finish that an' let's go see what we're facin'."

Brian sipped but didn't finish, then wiped his mouth and smiled to the crowd.

"You can fetch the van, Cos, but you hain't fetchin' me. Not to go apologize to no feekin' Brit."

"Right, so. But if I'm to take care you need to do me a favor, Cos, an' tell me your version of the story. A moment with Brian, lads, he'll be right back. I'll just be askin' himself for some advice on how to proceed."

Eamon led Brian outside behind the van. Brian leaned on the back door, his arms folded across his chest. Eamon stood facing him.

“He was laughin’ at my dream, Cos, an’ it all starts with how one man respects another man’s dream.”

“No, it all starts with a man earnin’ a livin’ for his family. I set you up at the only fishin’ lodge in all the West with anything like a steady business an—”

“Innish Cove is a grand business opportunity. You’ve said so yourself many times.”

“You’ve named it.”

“I’m still thinkin’ of a name for the camp, but the cove I’ve been dreamin’ of, that’s Innish Cove.”

“I’ve said it’s a grand dream, yes I have, but if the choice you’ll be offerin’ guests is bein’ your London bankers or your punchin’ bag, well then I start to feel a little different about it. There’s no song in what happened today, Cos, but I did see Gardai arrivin’ at the lodge as I was leavin’.”

“What will they arrest me for? Abandonin’ a man in the middle of the best trout fishin’ he’s ever seen? He said so a dozen times. He caught two trout over six pounds and one a’ them was nearly eight.”

“He says you swung at him, an’ if he hadn’t ducked at the last instant, you’d a broke his jaw. He’s declarin’ an assault.”

“He may be a lord in England, but he’s a lying coward in Ireland.” Brian stood. “So I will go with you, yeah, an’ I’ll tell him to repeat his story with his man who saw it all standin’ there in front of me.”

Eamon knew that would be a mistake.

“You’re right. No need in you joinin’ me. I believe this will be handled best with you sittin’ in your cottage awaitin’ the outcome.”

“I’m tellin’ ya’ his man saw it all, an’ if you can find anyone who ever knew me to throw a punch an’ miss I want to meet ‘im. I stopped.” Brian stood. “You can fetch for ‘em all ya want, but I’m makin’ plans for a new life now, Cos, an’ he was laughin’ at ‘em.”

“Hangin’ out at the pub tellin’ the lads all about yer dreams hain’t the same as makin’ plans.”

“Don’t talk like this is just idle fantasy, Cos. I’m doin’ this for

my family an' for yours. Not a one of us is meant to be just another generation of famine survivors."

"Your family needs your wages more than your dreams, more than ever now since there hain't many around these days, Bri."

"So I got to get us out of here."

"You need guests who trust you an' you need to be takin' your money home an' not leavin' it in there—"

"I've not paid for a drink today."

"An' ya need to be takin' care of your woman again so she don't get so run down as the last time."

Brian looked for further signs of what Eamon meant by the last time, and as he seemed confused, Eamon shook his head.

"So you didn't know?"

"What are you sayin'?"

"About your poor Deirdre."

"What about her?"

"You didn't know your wife's with child again?"

"What? Sure. Of course I know."

"Did you know before I just told you now?"

"Whatta you sayin'? I'm a great da."

"No one questions Tommy and little Katie love their da, but Deirdre is always tellin' me missus that you're never home attendin' to her."

"If that's her contention how is it she's with child again?"

"When she came by last night to tell me missus, she said she hadn't told you yet."

"She shouldn't be tellin' none our business."

"She don't need anger, Cos, she needs you lookin' after her. She didn't appear tip top

last night when she came 'round for a cup. She told my Marie she's scared she's carryin' again so soon."

"That's the way women talk. She's stronger than you think. I'm the one was lookin' after her after we lost the last baby, an' she never was as bad off as the midwife was sayin'."

"I'll talk to Jimmy for you an' see if I can settle things with him. Maybe he'll make a big show out of sackin' you an' then he can hire you back after Clarendon leaves. Jimmy don't like the man neither,

his father was struck more than once by them when they was the landlords at the Big House.”

“Jimmy knows I find his guests more brown trout than anybody else he’s got.”

“Give me the keys, and no more sellin’ shares to guests, Bri. Promise me that.”

“But who else do I have?”

“You need the wages, Cos.”



Late that night Brian sat at the table in his cottage in the light of an oil lamp, close to the small peat fire. He leaned over a piece of paper, a thick stub of pencil in his hands. On top of the page he had written the words “Plans for the Canadian fishing operation to be named the Great Lodge at Innish Cove, Brian Burke Proprietor and Host,” and below that he wrote “Ojibway Indians as ghillies” and “trees for log cabin construction” and “Chicago business men many Irish” but the rest of the page was blank.

Their bedroom door opened and Deirdre stepped from darkness into the glow at the light’s edge, her bare feet sounding soft, her voice hard.

“When did you come in?”

“A while ago.”

“Why didn’t you come home for supper?”

“I’m home now.”

“You were at the pub all night.”

“An’ all afternoon.”

“Your guest left off fishin’ early?”

“The day he had, I’m guessin’ he’s still shakin’ with excitement.”

“He paid you the full wage?”

“Not yet.”

“We need wages, Brian.”

“You’ll wake little Katie if you keep huffin’ at me.”

“Oh, no, don’t you tell me how to be carin’ for these children.”

“An’ I’m carin’ for these children and theirs to come with what I have in front of me here, so leave off an’ get yourself back in bed.”

“I’ve got another child growin’ in me.”

Brian pushed the table away and pivoted in his chair to face his

wife.

“I’ve been told. Eamon knew, his missus knew, what’s next, the whole feckin’ village knows an’ then you tell the father.”

“You haven’t been home now, have you?”

“I sleep next to you every night, how the hell else would you be carryin’ again?”

“That’s the only time you’re home, to crawl on top of me.”

“I’m just sayin’ you ought not be tellin’ others before you tell the father... or are you tellin’ me somethin’ else now?”

Deirdre entered the full lamp light and took one more step to slap Brian. He caught her wrist and held her arm but as Deirdre began to swing with her other arm he pushed her away, hard. She stumbled back, slipped and fell, and hit her head on the wall, but that was just a glancing blow for her back took the full force flat on the hard floor. Her cry at the shock was lost as her breath was knocked out of her. Her body twisted as the pain demanded.

Brian saw he’d hurt her and rushed to her side.

“Oh, here now, I’m sorry, Deirdre.”

He tried to lift her to her feet but she couldn’t rise, for a second wave of pain twisted her back.

“No, hooo, no... jest... hoo... let me lie here for a moment.”

Brian cupped her head, and she lay there, then a smaller wave of pain jerked her up and Brian caught her head when the spasm released her. He had felt how cold the floor was so he wrapped his arms around her the next time she flinched in pain and he carried her momentum forward.

“Lemme get you into bed. Can you get up?”

He picked her up as she winced and whined and twisted to relieve more pain. He carried her back into the darkness of the bedroom.

“I’ve a... baby growin’ in me Bri... ya can’t hit me when you feel like it.”

“I didn’t hit you. It was that Red Bull Demon in me who pushed you; he’s been dancin’ round all day. You’re not bad hurt, are you?”

“Of course I’m bad hurt.”

He placed her gently on the bed, then knelt at her side.

“Do I need to get someone?”

“Let me lie here... hoo... let me see.”

The worst pain didn't return and slowly she was able to relax her body on the bed.

“That wasn't me, you know that. I'm the man who is going to get us outta here, Deirdre, that's who I am. I'm the man who will make this dream come true an' some folks today was laughin' at it an' since then the Demon has been testin' an' tauntin' me.”

“Just let me rest here.” She folded her arm over her face. “Without havin' to listen to your nonsense.”

“You want me to leave you?”

“I want you to leave me alone and let me rest.”

Brian patted her shoulder, stood, and left the room. He returned to his paper, picked up the pencil, and underlined everything he had written.



A week later Maureen was in a Customs line waiting to claim her luggage—the two large trunks she had checked into stowage on the Dublin-to-Holyhead ferry. Three young British soldiers stood by and she had casually allowed them to admire her when she passed to get in line. She cocked her hip when she turned back to catch their gaze. Then she smiled and offered a wave that beckoned them to her.

“I wasn't sure if you soldier boys are lookin' serious or lookin' bored.”

“See 'ere now, birdie, it's what a 'ighly trained British soldier has been 'ighly trained to do, to look 'ighly trained.”

“You have to be trained to be serious, do you?”

“That's 'cause otherwise, deep down inside, we're just like you Irish. We're all of us just looking for a little bit a' fun.”

“A little bit a' fun? Just so happens I'm on my way to London to join my girlfriends for a little bit a' fun.”

“Lookin' for a bit a' fun in London are you?”

“An' did I say there's three of 'em?”

“Four Irish lasses enjoying Londontowne, without an escort?”

“An' those other three, they're the pretty ones.”

“Listen to this birdie sing.”

“We got a leave comin' Tuesday.”

“So I’ve got an offer for you highly-trained British soldiers. If you’ll fetch those two trunks for me right over there, those two big ones an’ mind ‘em careful, they’re heavy with everything dear to me. It took one Irish lad to carry ‘em, may take all three of you.”

“Ah now, birdie, you give me a chance and I’ll be ‘appy to show you what one good British soldier can do.”

“If you’ll help me get ‘em loaded on me bus, I’ll write our address out for you an’ as soon as you get into London, we’ll find out what the British Army means by a little bit a’ fun.”

“An’ ‘ow do we know you’ll give us the proper address?”

“I don’t see anyone queuing up to offer a better deal, so... It’s those two trunks, right there. Careful with ‘em. Me friends back home warned me to watch out for British soldiers. Whatta you think they meant by that?”

Chapter 3

THE RIVER FLOWS NORTH

THAT SAME DAY FOUR OJIBWAY fished the River that drained the great sweep of northwestern Ontario wilderness, collecting and carrying the waters north to Hudson Bay. They were two men and two boys, and they fished the River where it opened up to a massive lake that the Ojibway call Kaputowaganickcok, “The Lake where the Funereal Fires Burned on Shore.” They worked from a large wooden freight canoe, hauling in their gill net.

Joe Loon was the elder to his family clan. The younger man was Albert Loon, Joe Loon’s nephew, though adopted and raised as his son after Albert’s father never returned from a hunting trip when Albert was a young boy.

They hauled and folded the net between them while Mathew Loon, Albert’s nine-year-old son, and Simon Fobister, Joe Loon’s seven-year-old grandson, pulled walleyes from the net and slipped them into the wet burlap bags at their feet. It was proving to be a good haul.

They reset the net above the shoal below Top Rock Hole then headed back to their village a couple of miles north where the River had carved out a quiet bay. Joe Loon paddled from the stern, Albert from the bow, and the boys made plans for the last hours of daylight as they paddled from opposite sides in the middle. Together they found a steady pace and cut through the waters briskly, easily.

They paddled across the waters their ancestors had fished for over 200 years, driven there from the East not by European settlers

but by Iroquois and then driving the Dakota they found here further West out onto the Great Plains after a hundred years of forest battles and ambushes.

They turned wide of a large island when no one recognized the two boats pulled up on the shore of the island's southern point. Without seeing the boats' owners, they knew they belonged to the white man.

The village wasn't far from the island and Joe Loon guided the freight canoe in line with two others and next to the smaller birch bark canoe the children had named Nigig, Otter, for the elders described Otter's grace as the model for the children as they learned to handle the light craft. Back from shore at the edge of the forest were two large canvas miner's tents, a smaller tent, three full-sized birch-bark wigwams, and one small wigwam. Joe Loon's clan, the Ojibway of these Keewatin forests, had kept camp here since late in the spring and had for generations.

Joe Loon was greeted by his wife, Naomi. Albert's widowed mother stood with her and as the oldest woman of the clan she was the Nokomis. Albert shared his wigwam with his wife Sarah and their three children and his mother. Simon Fobister and his mother, Joe Loon's only surviving daughter, lived in the wigwam closest to Joe Loon's wigwam. Simon's father abandoned his family when Simon was very young.

Old George Fobister, no older than Joe Loon but called Old George since he was a young man, lived alone in the smallest wigwam. Louis Assiniboine and his wife and two children slept in one of the tents, Sam Turtle and his family in the other. Simon Fobister and Mathew Loon were the oldest boys of the clan's eight children.

All of the children appeared from the bush to greet the returning fishermen and were followed by the rest of the clan.

"Ahneen."

"Ahneen."

After they unloaded the canoe Joe Loon put his hand on Mathew's shoulder and waited for everyone's attention.

"I have an adventure for a boy who will soon become a man."

"Yes, Grandfather."

“The white man camps at Many Tall Women Island. You will go there now. You will sell them fish for their meal.”

“They will speak the white man’s words to me, Grandfather. I do not understand many of their words.”

“The elders tell stories of the days our people traded with the white man before we knew their language. Take them four fish and bring me their largest silver coin that will trade for many good things at the Hudson Bay Post. Then you will have your own story to tell your grandchildren.”

Simon stood tall next to Mathew.

“I will be in this story with Big Brother.”

“Yes, you will be in the story with Big Brother.”

The boys put their arms over each other’s shoulders and followed Joe Loon as he retrieved three walleyes and a northern pike from the day’s catch.

“You will take Nigig,” their grandfather told them. The boys loaded the fish in the birch-bark canoe and before they climbed in and shoved off Joe Loon called to the spirits to watch over them.



Simon paddled Nigig from the bow, Mathew from the stern. As they found the rhythm to their strokes that created the greatest speed, Mathew allowed himself a sharp bark of joy. Simon smiled to hear it.

Just behind the boys This Man paddled his canoe. He had heard Joe Loon’s call, waited for them when they left the bay, and followed the boys into the open water. Soon the island was in sight and This Man kept pace with the boys as they approached the island and found a place to beach their canoe, out of sight of the white man’s camp. This Man paddled in to shore and beached his canoe next to *Nigig*.

“What do we do next, Big Brother?”

“We will arrive at their camp quietly. We will watch them before we let them know we are here.”

“Why?”

“We will watch them so we will know what we must do to bring them into our story.”

“Grandfather taught you this.”

“Yes.”

“This is what we will do.”

The boys ran through the forest at a fast trot, cutting between fir trees, leaping over logs, and ducking under branches, the bag of fish bouncing over Mathew’s shoulder, Simon behind but staying close.

This Man ran just ahead.

They slowed in the same step when they saw the trees opening at the far shore line and a few steps later they heard a voice ring loudly. The boys had visited this island before; they had explored it in play many times, and they knew a small, rocky bluff just ahead would let them look down on the campsite. This Man and the boys followed a

barely-worn path to the top of the bluff. They crouched around a boulder and then crawled closer to the edge, Mathew behind a stump, Simon behind Mathew, This Man standing behind a tree, watching the boys as they studied the camp just below them.

Two men near the cook’s fire were speaking loudly.

“I didn’t mean to start an argument with you. I’m just trying to get you to acknowledge that they won’t build the next mill anywhere near here, that’s all. I’ll bet you a week’s wages they’ll build it closer to Dryden.”

“I don’t want to bet with you.”

“Because you know I’m right.”

“Because I know they sent us here to do a job for ‘em. So let’s do it right, eh?”

“If you thought I intended to do otherwise, you don’t know me.”

A white woman stepped out of the tent and walked to the fire. She was holding a big bowl of batter and was beating it with the spoon she had just retrieved from the tent. There was a frying pan over the fire. The boys had seen one or two white men every time they went to the Post, but very few white women, so they were curious and watched her closely. She poured the batter into the pan, but not nearly as much as their grandmother poured when she was making fry bread. This white woman poured just a thin layer and the boys were curious so they studied her.

After a few moments she wrapped the frying pan handle with a towel, grabbed it with both hands, and stood. When she flipped

the pan and sent the disc of batter up into the air, Simon's hold on Mathew's arm tightened, and when the flying disc turned once and she caught it in the pan Simon cried softly, "Yaway."

"Quiet."

She returned the pan to the fire then turned, looked up at the bluff, and waved to the boys to come on down. They scooted back, looked at each other, then smiled.

"We will meet a white woman. We will find out what she is cooking. This will be a good story to tell the others."

"You are the oldest."

This Man stayed on the bluff to watch over the boys as they stepped into the opening of the camp filled with three white men—another had been resting in the tent but he came out when the others called to him to see the Indian boys, and the white woman stood in front of the men. She smiled at the boys when they stepped out of the forest. They looked only at her. Simon took Mathew's arm again and whispered to his cousin.

"I must taste that flying bread."

"It was like the moon flipping to show its other side."

"I thought this would be a story about selling fish to the white man. It is now a story about the white man's woman and the moon bread."

The woman's smile broadened as she listened.

"What a lovely sound your language makes. It's the song of the forest. Where did you boys come from? I saw you sneaking up when I was in the tent. You got anybody hiding back there with you?"

The Ojibway boys stepped forward. When the woman turned to check on her frying pan and waved the boys to follow they stayed with the men, to tend to business, but stealing glances at the woman. Mathew placed the sack of fish at his feet and opened it enough for the men to see inside.

He spoke one of the first English words taught in Joe Loon's village.

"Fish."

"You brought us fish, eh? I thought you come to swipe some of my wife's pancakes. You think they're here all alone?"

Mathew repeated the word fish then spoke to the men in the

forest language.

“You get these fish. You give us a big silver coin for Grandfather.”

“I have no idea what you’re saying, boy.”

“That ol’ Swede at the dock was telling me there’s still a couple of villages of

half-wild Indians back in the bush that have never lived on a reserve. These boys must be from some camp of that sort around here somewhere or other.”

“Been sent here to sell us these fish, eh? Show him some money. Let’s see what he does.”

The white man reached into his pocket and pulled out three coins; one was a big silver dollar, the one minted in 1935, the coin’s reverse design sculpted to show two Ojibway men paddling a birch-bark canoe, and that was the side displayed when he opened his hand to offer the coins to Mathew. Simon looked from it to Big Brother.

“That is the silver coin Grandfather wants.”

“It makes him happy each time he sees it.”

“Yes, but we could take the smaller coins and bring back some of the batter for the moon breads. What would Grandfather say if we did that?”

“We must taste the moon breads first.”

Mathew stepped forward and selected the two smallest coins, then continued on past the men to the cook fire where he hunkered down to study the pancakes stacked on a plate and the biggest one that nearly filled the frying pan.

“Yaway, Little Brother, these moon breads smell good.”

Simon pointed to the cook fire by puckering his lips out ahead of him and thrusting his chin so the white men would know he was following Mathew, then stood next to him, his hand resting on Mathew’s shoulder.

The woman clapped her hands in delight.

“Look at them. They’re adorable. I wish I had a camera.”

“They’re sure interested in your pancakes.”

“Fix ‘em up all they want. Give ‘em a big pat of butter and plenty of syrup.”

Mathew smiled when he realized that the bottle was pouring

what looked like the sweet goodness of the sugar bush on the moon breads. His grandmother would often pour a bit of it on his *manoomin* for him. The boys accepted their plates and took their first bites.

“Yaway, Big Brother. This is the best taste I have ever had in my mouth.”

“We must bring some back to our people. That would be the best end to this story.”



Simon pulled Nigig up on shore while Mathew retrieved their packages: a big jar of batter, a block of butter, a cup of maple syrup. They were first surrounded by the children, but then all the people of the village gathered to hear of their adventure. Before they were through telling them, Nokomis had uncovered the bowl of batter to dip, then lick, her finger.

She smiled. The children loved that smile and followed her when she turned to set a frying pan on the fire.

“I must grease the pan while the moon bread is floating above me?”

“No, Nokomis, you grease the pan first like you always do.” And the boys practiced their stories of their great adventure selling fish to the white men as the children gathered for the moon bread feast.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS NOVEL IS CRAFTED WITH RESPECT for the large historical events that advance our stories. So while I have fictionalized these events, I have not distorted them.

That respect extends to my use of labels and names for the First Nations Ojibway and in my presentation of their customs.

My guide on this matter is my good friend Steve Fobister. Steve and I worked together at Delaney Lake Lodge and Ball Lake Lodge in Northwestern Ontario back in the mid to late 60's. He went on to be an elected chief of the Grassy Narrows First Nation, serving his people at a crucial time.

Steve is an Ojibway. Others spell the tribal name Ojibwa (which is how I always have pronounced the name because it is how Steve pronounces it) or Ojibwe, and both seem to be increasingly popular. Back in the 60's I don't think I saw it spelled any way other than Ojibway, and the last gift Steve gave me was a T-shirt with "Ojibway Nation" on the front.

In this novel the Irish of the 30's call First Nations aboriginals "red men." I believe the novel benefits from that historical reference, and Steve agrees.

The label "Indian" is used most frequently, as it would have been at the time. Steve and many men I worked with never indicated that they considered Indian to be offensive, only inaccurate.

When a disposed people re-claim the authority to determine how they will be known, we all support that, we even celebrate it on our way to further victories for expressions of aboriginal justice. The First Nations people of Canada, the Native Americans in the US, those self-determined names will be used when the story catches up to them.

The representation of Ojibway customs and habits are accurate and only occasionally embellished for the story's purpose. Steve and I became good friends the four summers we worked together. He led me to Ojibway burial sites. He took me on my first expedition to a Hudson Bay Post. He invited me to sweat lodge ceremonies. He was born in a wigwam and didn't move to the reserve until he was nine, and it is my good fortune that he loves to tell stories as much as I do. He approves of the stories I tell of his people.

You might find this an interesting note about Steve Fobister's name. There are many Fobister's living at Grassy Narrows Reserve. It seems that when the government officials approached the Ojibway living in that area and told them they needed to adopt an English name for the official census records, the man leading that effort was named Fobister. Many of the Ojibway thought they were being told that was the last name they should choose.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CARL NORDGREN WAS BORN in Greenville, Mississippi where his great grandmother's house was across the street from the boyhood home of author Walker Percy. Carl has worked as a fishing guide on the English River in Northwestern Ontario and on the White River in the Arkansas Ozarks, as a bartender, a foundry man, and an entrepreneur. He lived with his family in Ireland for a year where he researched the IRA, and he currently teaches courses in Creativity to undergraduate students at Duke University. His first book, *Welcome to the Creative Populist Revolution*, was written to help us all grow our creative capacity and develop our entrepreneurial instincts. He graduated from Knox College and lives in Durham, North Carolina with his wife Marie where they have raised three daughters.

In his evocative debut novel Carl Nordgren weaves an ambitious tale about the power of dreams, the hope of new beginnings, and the dangers of ghosts who haunt our past.

In *The 53rd Parallel*, book one of the *River of Lakes* series, Brian Burke emigrates from 1950s West Ireland to the wilderness of Northwest Ontario with his partner Maureen O'Toole. He's been exiled from his village, and she is running from her IRA past.

The dreams of an Ojibway clan elder bring the Irish to the sacred place on the River, where they build The Great Lodge of Innish Cove. The dreams tell of a white man who will destroy the River and another who will protect it. While the Ojibway believe Brian and Maureen are the River's guardians, Maureen's IRA connections and the construction of a pulp mill upstream threaten to destroy the newly created Eden before it even begins.

Under the watchful eye of a warrior spirit, the clan and their Irish companions risk all they love to protect the River and the promises it holds for their future. The fates of the two groups will intertwine as both seek to ward off the encroachment of the modern world.

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 Light Messages



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