

## Prologue

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It was warm for mid May in the Cariboo country. In the stillness after he'd shut the car door, Inspector Peter Gregory stood looking down toward the lakeshore. Swallows swerved among the trees near the lodge, and a dry breeze swept in from the west, rippling the lake's surface. He remembered a week in October twenty years ago. There was no Loon Lake Lodge in those days, no guided hunting at five hundred dollars a day, no fishing with hired boat and tackle, and no need for the police. He breakfasted on fresh trout each morning, and hunted mule deer in the mountains on the south side. One afternoon, he came across Paul Vincent's cabin by a small lake on the plateau. A beaver colony at the outlet gave Vincent, who was a Shuswap Indian, just enough pelts to buy flour and sugar for his wife and two children. It grew late and Vincent asked them to stay for the night. A big wind blew in over the eastern ridges, and they stared at the flaring embers in the fireplace while the wind roared outside. Vincent told him that before the white men came to that country herds of elk would visit the lake. He said that in the fall of the year the sky would be filled for days and nights with the sound of geese winging their way south—wide, ragged arrowheads of the great gray birds, far up, gabbling like old women. And then quite suddenly the sky would be silent and empty, and immediately the snow would begin to

fall, because the geese had gone. Everything used to be simple like that, Vincent said. You lived and you died like the wind, like the waves on the lake, or the way leaves turn over and fall. You accepted what you were. He turned to Peter, the angle of the firelight deepening the lines of his face. Now, he said, the white men want everything to exist for them. They want power over life and death. His eyes were caverns directed at the young man. The old ones of his tribe, he said, used to claim that the white men were demons who had come up from the underworld.