



A NOVEL

AUTHOR OF *IN THE LAKE OF THE WOODS* AND *TOMCAT IN LOVE*

Tim O'Brien

"The suspense is spellbinding.

... What puts this tale above
countless others is the care
and eloquence of Tim O'Brien."

— *Chicago Sun-Times*

Northern
Lights

Praise for
Northern Lights

“Linked themes of the great outdoors, of the frontier, of pitting oneself against nature and against aboriginal inhabitants of various species.”

Times Literary Supplement

“Excellent done, slipping in and out between impressionism and straight narrative and very excitingly conveying the reality ... of men past the end of their endurance.”

Listener (UK)

“Haunting ... survival, courage, and heroes are examined beautifully and simply.”

Publishers Weekly

Books by Tim O'Brien

If I Die in a Combat Zone

Northern Lights

Going After Cacciato

The Nuclear Age

The Things They Carried

In the Lake of the Woods

Tomcat in Love

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For Ann

*With gratitude to the Arrowhead people,
who will know perfectly well that there is no such town as Sawmill
Landing, that Grand Marais doesn't sponsor ski races,
that these characters are purely fictitious and that this is just a story.*

*... and, lo, there was a great earthquake;
and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair,
and the moon became as blood. And the stars
of heaven fell unto the earth even as a fig tree
casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of
a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll
when it is rolled together; and every mountain
and island were moved out of their places ...
For the day of his wrath is come.
And who shall be able to stand?*

REVELATIONS

Contents



[Cover](#)

[Other Books by This Author](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Heat Storm](#)

[Elements](#)

[Shelter](#)

[Black Sun](#)

[Blizzard](#)

[Heat Storm](#)

[Elements](#)

[Shelter](#)

[Blood Moon](#)

One



Heat Storm

Wide awake and restless, Paul Milton Perry clawed away the sheets and swung out of bed, blood weak, his fists clenching and closing like a pulse. He hadn't slept. He sat very still. He listened to the July heat, mosquitoes at the screen windows, inchworms eating in the back pines, the old house, a close-seeming flock of loons. What he did not hear, he imagined. Timber wolves and Indians, the chime of the old man's spoon in the spit bucket, the glacial floes, Harvey hammering at the half-finished bomb shelter, ice cracking in great sheets, the deep pond and Grace's whispering, and a sobbing sound. He sat still. He was naked and sweating and anaemic and flabby. Thinking first about Harvey, then about the heat, then the mosquitoes, he'd been sailing in a gaunt nightlong rush of images and half-dreams, turning, wallowing, listening like a stranger to the sounds of his father's house.

He sat still.

Harvey was coming home.

There was that, and there was Grace, and there were the mosquitoes crazy for blood against the screen windows.

"Lord, now," he moaned, and pushed out of bed, found his glasses, and groped towards the kitchen.

He returned with a black can of insecticide. Then he listened again. The bedroom was sullen and hot, and he was thinking murder. Carefully, he tied the lace curtains to one side. He ignored Grace's first whisper. He pushed the nozzle flush against the screen window. Then, grinning and naked, he pressed the nozzle and began to spray, feeling better, and he flushed the night with poison from his black can.

He grinned and pressed the nozzle. His fingers turned wet and cool from condensed poison, and he listened: mosquitoes and june bugs, dawn crickets, dawn birds, dragonflies and larvae and caterpillars, morning moths and sleeping flies, bear and moose, walleyes and carp and northerns and bullheads and tiny salamanders. It was dark everywhere. The black can hissed in the dark, ejaculating sweet chemicals that filled the great forest and his father's house. He sprayed until the can was empty and light, then he listened, and the odor of poison buoyed him.

He sat on the bed. Harvey was coming home, and he was dizzy.

“Bad night,” Grace whispered.

“Lord.”

“Poor boy.”

“Poor *mosquitoes*.”

“Shhhhh,” she always whispered. “Shhhhh, just lie back now. Come here, lie back. You’re just excited. Phew, what a stink! Come here now. Lie back.”

“Killed a billion of them.”

“Shhhhh, lie back.”

“No use. What a night. Lord, what a crummy awful night.”

“Relax now. I heard you all night long.”

“Mosquitoes, the blasted heat, everything.” He sat on the bed. He was still holding the defused can of insecticide. Poison drifted through the dark room.

“Poor boy. Come here now. Here, lie back. Lie back.” Her hand moved to his neck. “Here now,” she whispered. “Lie back and I’ll rub you. Poor boy, I heard you tossing all night long. Just lie back and I’ll give you a nice rub and you can sleep and sleep.”

“I’m going for a walk.”

“None of that. You just lie still and I’ll rub you.” Her hand brushed up his spine and rested on his shoulder. Vaguely through the cloud of poison he heard the hum of returning insects, thousands and millions of them deep in the woods, and he began scratching himself. He was flabby and restless. “I’m going for a walk.”

“Poor, poor Paul,” she said. She removed his glasses. “There now. Just lie back and I’ll give you a rub. There. There, how’s that now? Better now? Poor boy, you’re just excited about Harvey coming home, that’s all, that’s all. Just lie back and I’ll rub you and you can sleep.”

“What time is it?”

“Shhhhh. Plenty of time. Still dark, see? You just lie still now.”

“Lord,” he moaned.

“A nice rub?”

“I’m going for a walk.”

“Shhhhh, none of that. Let me rub you.”

“Damn mosquitoes.”

“I know.”