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The Sugarhouse

The first time I saw Peter Rhoades at work in his sugarhouse was an afternoon in March, in the 2010 season, after we had checked tubing. A bear had passed some time making holes in the lines at the uppermost reach of the system, and we had found the leaks by listening for the hissing sounds. We had come down through the woods, the yellow bright light on the branch tips, the sky a deep New Hampshire blue. We walked down through the field toward his grandfather's house, where his Aunt Margaret now lived, along the soft snow. Then we went to get his tractor, a 1947 Farmall, and we gathered sap, first from barrels and then from a steel tank, a milk tank. The tank was overflowing, due to a sudden run, so Peter called George Hodskins at Bascom's to tell him he should make a pickup.

Peter's grandson, who was named after him and who they called Petey, went with us to gather sap and then back to the sugarhouse, staying there until he left to go to Aunt Margaret's just before dark. Peter fired up the evaporator, for the first time in 2010.

The Rhoades' sugarhouse was about 30 feet from a brook that ran hard in the spring and trickled in the summer. It was close enough so they could wash equipment in it. The sugarhouse

sat up against a bank into which a stonewall had been built—probably in the 1870s, Peter thought, after evaporating pans came into use. The placement against the bank allowed them to back a truck or tractor—in the old days a sled on a wagon—up to a sap tank that was on a level above the evaporator, so the sap could easily flow down to the pan. There are still after all the years indentations in the ground in front of the sugarhouse from when the horses, before them the oxen, came down the hill and looped back around to the road. Where the narrow road to the sugarhouse joined the road that ran from Aunt Margaret's to Peter's mother's house was a parking space, a 6000-gallon tank, and a shed that housed a vacuum pump and wiring. They were at the bottom of a ravine, and you would never find this place unless you knew exactly how to get there.

The sugarhouse itself was made of castaway boards and timbers. The support beams by the door were notched barn beams that had been in a dance pavilion in Alstead before they came to the sugarhouse, “and had probably been somewhere else before that,” Peter said. There weren't many straight lines in the place. There had been fires there, roofs repaired. So many repairs that not

much remained from the original structure. “It’s like George Washington’s axe,” Peter said. “With three new heads and five new handles.” There was a small window that looked out onto the brook. The door, made of plywood and braced with timber slabs, had old-fashioned metal latches that flipped up to the touch, and clinked, and that had been part of the original structure. Inside, there was a bench that ran along one wall and under the window. It was the only place to sit and where, at the end of the window, Peter and Deb filtered their syrup and poured it into containers.

At the end near the firebox door of the evaporator, they stacked wood, mostly pine and hemlock because it was a good use for that wood and because it burned fast and hot. Peter kept two piles in a field up the road, tall and narrow stacks, nine feet high and thirty feet long, that Peter propped up with poles, so the wood could catch the wind and sunlight and be dry to burn.

On the far side from the window, and by far I mean eight feet away, was a short set of stairs going up to the sap tanks. It was a good place to get away from the heat of the evaporator; Petey liked to climb up there.

In the center of the room was the evaporator, a Grimm model manufactured in the late 1930s, a duplicate of the Grimm Peter’s grandfather had bought in the late 1930s. It was a traditional wood-fired model, three feet wide and ten feet long, with a 7-foot fluted flue pan and a 3-foot finishing pan, through which the syrup traveled on the gradient path until it was drawn off

through a pipe and valve outside the pan and near the firebox doors.

Peter said of the sugarhouse, “It’s totally inefficient, but as long as the building doesn’t fall down, we’ll use it. We’re here because of the history.”

He described how it looked during the boiling time, at night. “When you walk up that road, and it’s totally dark, and cold, and then you see the light through the planks, and come in here and it’s all rosy and warm.” He spoke those words, and I hoped to see that someday.

Like so many sugarhouses, for that brief period of the year, it was a social place. Peter talked about how when he’s boiling, friends will drop by, to get some syrup or just watch the boil. “It’s the time for seeing each other, and for catching up.”

It had been the same when Peter’s grandmother boiled there. “She boiled for her generation,” Peter said. And when he was in school, walking down the road toward home after school, he would stop in to see her, with his sisters, during the sugar season.

Peter lit the fire in the evaporator as it was growing dark.

“There,” he said. “Off and running.” Petey left to stay with Aunt Margaret until his mother picked him up. The room filled with steam that hung in the air. Steam flowed out of the vents in the roof, floated down the rooflines and disappeared. Drops condensed on the ceiling and dripped on our heads. A couple from Walpole came by to talk to Peter; they had just built a

sugarhouse. I left, and walked down the dark road by the brook to my car.

I returned a few days later on the weekend with my wife. Peter and Deb were just starting the fire when we arrived. Soon it was roaring and the sap was frothing.

The season was underway all throughout the region. On the way over, driving to Peter and Deb's, we had passed sugarhouses and seen the smoke trails coming from their stacks.

Peter and Deb usually tapped in late February and began boiling at the beginning of March, give or take a few days depending on the flow. Good runs tended to come around the third week of March, Peter had observed. "For years and years the best run was always between March 23 and 25," he said, especially after rainy nights. Usually they boiled into the first week of April or a little longer.

From their 5000-tap operation that yielded about 70,000 to 80,000 gallons of sap, the Rhoades kept 5000 gallons to make syrup. They sold the rest to Bruce Bascom, Peter's childhood friend and the largest producer of maple syrup in New Hampshire. They boiled by the traditional method, without the use of a reverse osmosis machine, which meant longer boils. They made about one hundred gallons a year, sold it to friends and family, shipped some by mail or sold it to those customers who visited the sugarhouse. There was a group of those, loyal customers, who came by specifically to taste the syrup right after it was made and leave with some still hot in the container. After this day, we would become one

of those.

Peter and Deb took turns stoking the fire, keeping it as hot as they could. They had different methods of tending the fire, and Peter did seem to jab and stoke the wood more often with the stick they used. But the procedure was the same, basically—feed wood to the fire from the pile nearby and keep it blazing.

While he worked Peter talked about the sugarhouse and its iterations. The room had been rebuilt in 1947; there had been a fire on the roof and they used the sugarhouse a few years before repairing it.

When Peter's grandmother had boiled, there was no floor. "She would put down some boards," Peter said. "Sometimes the brook would overflow, and a rivulet would come right through our sugarhouse."

"Peter's grandmother was a tiny woman," Deb said. "Really tiny."

"Yeah, but she climbed Mount Monadnock at eighty. She worked every day of her life."

Peter talked about how when his grandmother made syrup, she determined when it was finished by taking a temperature reading—syrup boils at a higher temperature than water. "She would measure by degrees, pour it out into a tin, and put a drop of the syrup on top of the tin. That would be how she could tell the color of the syrup."

It was so elemental, this—fire and water, wood and tree sap, steam and smoke. That had to be some of the appeal, this atavistic act of boiling over a wood fire, for hours. Deb checked the syrup at the front of the pan now and then

with a hydrometer, to measure density, and with a thermometer. Peter checked by lifting the syrup with a scoop and watching how it sheeted off the edges. He watched the bubbles to see how they held together—when they seemed to stick to one another the syrup was getting close.

As I watched, I said something about the King Lot, and the trees, what a fine few hours I had experienced there. A couple of weeks ago I had gone along with Peter and Deb while they tapped trees. They had been tapping together for forty years, with Peter drilling the holes and Deb setting the spouts. We had walked through a dark glade of hemlocks to what looked like a clearing but was actually a stand of maples—a “sugar orchard,” Peter called it. The King Lot covered twelve acres and ran down toward the brook near the sugarhouse. The trees were like tall columns, 80 to 90 feet high, and 150 to 200 hundred years old, Peter thought. In recent years the trees hadn’t been used for sap production. Peter had been managing them for timber, which was why they were so tall and straight—“Long, straight stems with high crowns,” he said, “which is what you want for timber.” During the syrup shortage in 2008 when the payment for sap went from 21 to 32 cents a gallon, Peter cleared the underbrush and strung tubing, and so returned the trees to their use of fifty to a hundred years ago. I kept looking up at them. “This is one of our favorites,” he said. “It’s nice to look up at the blue sky above them when the leaves are out.” Peter thought that people don’t look up at the crowns of the trees often enough when they are in the

woods. They worked through the morning, and on the way back Peter pointed out a foundation for an arch that had been used to make syrup in this sugar orchard before the time of evaporators and sugarhouses. He said he knew of at least a dozen other arches nearby. They valued the history in their woods. They hoped someone in their family would be interested in taking them over someday. Not just in owning them, but in continuing the tradition.

At the King Lot Peter had said, “We hope that the grandkids come along with enough interest to take over when we’re too weak to come out here.”

“Petey seems to be very interested now,” Deb said. “He wants to come down here all the time, to the sugarhouse.”

Peter talked about how when he was a boy he thought he would be a dairy farmer, but it became clear by the time he was ten that dairying wasn’t the best choice. He decided in his teens to go into forestry. Now he was a forester for several towns around here, had a reputation for being a very ethical forester, had a private clientele, and this, the sugaring operations at the center of a sizeable managed forest, with its various orchards, named according to the previous owners. They had built their holdings up to 800 acres over the years.

“After I finished college, when I was back here at home and spent a day in the woods, I would come home and talk to my dad and granddad about what I had done that day, and they knew every tree I was talking about. After they died, no one was interested in what I had done that

day. They had given me validity.”

That would have worked both ways, I suppose, in that he would have given validity to them too. And validity seemed to be what he was passing on, or hoped to do. That too could be a mutual gift, possibly.

Bruce Bascom had been looking at a similar challenge, with a very different set of conditions. His too was a forestry operation looking at another generation.

Bruce’s name had come up that day, as we talked about taste. The syrup that the two old friends produced was markedly different in character. Sometime when Peter and Deb stoked the fire, smoke came into the air. Some people claimed that smoke was a component in the flavor of some types of syrup, of this type. When Bruce used to visit Peter’s sugarhouse, he had teased him about the wood smoke getting into the sap and said he should try to find a way to filter that out.

This was a part of the discussion about the difference in flavor between the modern method—filtered and flash-cooked—and the traditional wood-fired approach with its lengthy boil. Often the word used to describe this kind of syrup, cooked for a long time over a hot fire, was caramelization. Bruce himself claimed that was the difference between the new and the old, the caramelization of sugars.

This syrup would be darker in color. Between the time five days ago when I had checked tubing with Peter and he had made the first fire of the season, there had been some 50-degree weather.

“Because of the two fifty-degree days we had this week, the syrup is going to be B-Grade, on the darker side,” Deb said.

That was okay with us. We liked B grade best of all. I had talked to one sugarmaker who sold to a diner in Boston, and the waitresses had told him they got better tips when they served B grade. They thought it had more flavor.

“The sap and the syrup is always changing over the course of the season,” Deb said. “Sometimes it will get dark and then lighten again.”

When some of the syrup was ready—219 degrees by the thermometer, 67 percent sugar by the hydrometer, sheeting off the spoon the way Peter liked—they took off a gallon and a half. They had boiled two hours to get that gallon and a half.

After opening the draw off valve and pouring syrup into a stainless steel bucket, Peter poured the syrup through two filter cloths, one a bit finer than the other, into a cream pan. We tasted some: exquisite.

Peter then poured a sample into a jar and placed it into a grading set, matching it to other samples. This syrup was not B-grade but a notch lighter, an A-dark. Third on the scale of color: A-light, A-medium, A-dark, then B, and even a darker C-grade, all according to light transmittance.

Deb poured the syrup into containers, plastic jugs, labeled them and we left with a gallon.

A week later in that 2010 season when we visited again—on March 20, the first day of spring—their season was over.

“This is the earliest we’ve ever shut down,” Peter said. “The trees want to run. It just won’t freeze.”

“We’ve been making C-grade all week,” Deb said.

When we arrived on this bright March day, Peter was on his tractor gathering water. He was going to use it to cool the evaporator and to clean it. Deb was in the sugarhouse. She was doing the last boil. They would make a few gallons at the sugarhouse, take what boiled down sap was left over, and finish it off in their kitchen.

The 2010 season had turned warm during the second week of March, right after Town Meeting Day. The temperatures started to rise into the 40s and 50s by day and settle around the freezing point at night, or even a few degrees below at Bascom’s, but not enough to give the trees the charge they needed to run. During that week I had been at Bascom’s and gone to check tubing with Jeremy Bushway at the Cole’s Lot, one of the colder places among Bruce’s sugar lots. There we had tromped along on snowshoes following the mainlines and looking for leaks, and were on the way back toward the road when Jeremy said it was going to be a “fast season.” I didn’t know what he meant, and wasn’t sure I believed him—there was so much snow on the ground—but I knew the run had slowed in the last couple of days. Kevin had told me the sap had run all through the night—good for gathering but not a good omen for the season. Jeremy said the forecast for the next five days called for temperatures above freezing at night. He told me that people on

gravity were cleaning up their equipment. Jeremy would work one more day checking tubing and then be finished for the season.

They were saying that the sugarmakers farther north were doing better, that the temperatures were fluctuating between mid-20s and mid-40s, and they did keep going longer. But later that year when Timothy Prescott, of the Proctor Maple Research Center, gave talks at maple meetings, he would say that 2010 “was a strange year, a short season with few freeze events. Between March 10 and March 27 there was no freeze at all.” There were only three major freeze events during the 2010 season throughout Vermont and New Hampshire, Prescott said. Normally the season would have gone to mid-April in the northern part of Vermont. “We lost about two weeks. This was a good year for vacuum, not for buckets.”

The warm period came before Maple Weekend, when sugarmakers opened up their sugarhouses to the public. Some sugarmakers called Bruce, asking if they could buy some sap to boil, but Bruce said he didn’t sell sap. Some sugarmakers boiled water that weekend. As a result of the 2010 short season, the date for Maple Weekend was moved to an earlier date, from the fourth weekend in March to the third.

As Tim Prescott said, 2010 was a good year for vacuum, not for buckets. Bascom’s held on as if they were a hundred miles farther to the north, with their high vacuum and tight tubing systems, and their colder lots. Unlike many others, Bascom’s didn’t shut their vacuum pumps off, which made the trees produce for a longer

period. Bascom's boiled until April 3.

On March 20 when Peter shut down, he was quick to say that every season was different, and told me when I talked about the character of the 2010 season, that "In 1925 my grandfather and his brothers made all their syrup in February."

But Peter worried about climate change and the effect it would have on maple syrup production. He had been to a conference on climate change a few years ago, where he heard that at present trends there would be no maple syrup production in southern New Hampshire by the end of the century. "And possibly within the next fifty years. It seems to be accelerating."

In 2009 the state of New Hampshire had issued a "Climate Action Plan," with some dire warnings.

"Changes are already occurring to New England's climate, including warmer winters, reduced snowfall and snow-on-ground days, increased rainfall, rising sea level, and more severe weather events that result in increased risk of flooding. These changes are projected to grow in severity and could include other impacts such as a decrease in the abundance of sugar maples, stresses on our fisheries, more widespread occurrence of insect-borne diseases, and an increase of heat-related illnesses. Although the extent and timing of these potential impacts is uncertain, the costs of inaction could be large. The Stern Review found that failure to take actions to avoid the worst effects of climate change could depress global gross domestic product (GDP) by as much as 20 percent below what it otherwise might have been. On the other hand, avoiding the most severe impacts of

climate change would require the investment of just 1 percent of global GDP per year. As a small state, New Hampshire is responsible for only a minor fraction of emissions contributing to global climate change. However, the actions identified in this plan will enable New Hampshire to continue to do its part to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and prepare for a changing climate."

Another paragraph stated:

"On a regional scale, the 2007 Northeast Climate Impacts Assessment (NECIA) concludes that if greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase at current rates, by late in this century New Hampshire's climate will more closely resemble that of North Carolina."

Such a change would reduce the viability of New Hampshire's ski areas, a \$650 million industry in the state; drastically reduce the snowmobiling economy, already almost eliminated in southern areas due to a lack of snowfall; increase the frequency of heavy, damaging rainfall events; increase the frequency of summer droughts; increase coastal flooding and property damage from an estimated rise in sea level; increase human health problems due to extreme heat; bring change and extinctions to forest species.

Peter Rhoades, as the chairman of the planning board in Alstead, already knew the danger of heavy damaging rainfall events. In 2005 when 10 inches of rain fell in a single day the Cold River flooded, took out bridges, washed away homes, and killed 5 people. A photograph of one of the destroyed bridges appeared in

chapter three, “Adapting to Climate Change,” of *The New Hampshire Action Plan*. Included in the chapter was this statement:

“In 2005, forest based manufacturing and forest-related recreation and tourism in the state contributed over \$2.3 billion. These industries will face significant challenges as the climate continues to change. Climate models project decreases in the number of frost days, where temperatures dip below freezing, and increases in the length of frost-free growing seasons. Tree species composition is likely to change. . . . The eventual changes in forest composition and function could profoundly alter the scenery and character of New Hampshire, as well as the ecosystem services our forests provide.”

“A climate like North Carolina?” I asked Peter after he’d told me about the “Climate Action Plan.”

To which Peter responded, “We want to give this to our grandchildren, but we can’t give them something that isn’t there.”

However, the feeling that day in March, 2010 was only that the season was coming to an end, and not the industry. Peter was the welcoming host, as was Deb. It was a beautiful spring day, the brook was flowing, the sugarhouse was running, even if it was a quick season, and all seasons were different—1925 had been a quick year. Deb took off some syrup—it was dark and chocolaty with an orange hue, richly flavored, not something you’d see in a pancake restaurant or even on a grocery store shelf, but something almost enchanting for home use, especially if you knew where it came from and how it was made.

We left them to finish up. Later Peter ran water through the evaporator, and a cleaner to take off the burnt sugar and the niter, or sugar sand—the crystallized potassium nitrate. It was essential to get that off. Then he took down the smokestack. He closed the windows.

A year later on a Saturday night in 2011 my wife and I walked along the road to the sugarhouse, lighting our way with a flashlight. It was a cloudy and dark night, about 8:00, on March 12, a few days after the big ice storm at Bascom’s. A cold winter. When we got close I turned off the flashlight because we wanted to see what the sugarhouse looked like. The snow was piled high around this opening in the woods, and the trees rose all around us, while the brook roared from down below. Then a cascade of sparks rose from the stack, shooting high as the treetops. Peter was stoking the fire, and tossing more wood on. We could see the steam billowing through the vent windows and hanging over the roof, and we could smell the scent of maple sugar.

Peter was alone inside, making the first boil of the year. Deb had boiled earlier in the day and Peter had taken over after dinner. They hadn’t taken syrup off yet. The first boil was often slow, Peter said, and made even slower by the low sugar content in the sap.

This was a delayed season, not an early one. In the second week of March the trees were still relatively frozen. “The sap’s not really running,” Peter said. “Blah weather. Temperatures in the high thirties. Cloudy.”

“Some sunlight is needed?”

“Not just sunlight, but a change.” Something to trigger the run. That would happen, fairly soon, and the season would go on for a month more. Peter and Deb would have their best year, making 150 gallons.

We stayed about two hours, talking to Peter and watching the boil. The steam was hanging inside the room at different levels, sometimes around the waist, sometimes above the head. We left before Peter poured the syrup off, unfortunately. He said that a half hour later he had taken off five gallons. When we walked out, we did the same as when coming, turning off the flashlight to watch the sparks fly in the air, and see the rosy glow inside the sugarhouse.

On Sunday afternoon I returned again, and this time I meant to stay until they took the syrup off.

Petey was at the sugarhouse on this day, along with Peter. Deb was off running some errands. Petey had brought a stuffed animal, a dragon, and had placed it on the stairway above the evaporator. The dragon was on loan from his school, here to help him write a story about his adventures over the weekend. Petey figured he would get two pages out of today.

Peter was bringing the boil along slowly. When maple syrup boils it builds up foam, and sugarmakers use a defoamer—usually canola oil, a few drops at a time—to settle the foam down. By some mysterious process, three of four small drops of oil breaks the surface tension of foam over the entire boil, and chatter of the bubbles

settles down immediately.

“Why is foam bad?” Petey asked.

“It is when it comes up over the side. Otherwise it’s not,” Peter answered.

After an hour Peter’s mother, Ellie Rhoades, stopped by. She lived at the end of Rhoades Road in the house where Peter had grown up. She had done the boiling in this sugarhouse in 1948, she said, when Peter’s grandmother was away tending to a sick relative. She and Peter’s father gathered sap on weekends and at night.

After Peter’s mother left, a friend of Peter’s named Anton Elbers dropped by with two of his friends. He said he wanted to show them a real sugarhouse. Elbers was an original back-to-the-lander, a member of a commune that settled in this area in 1971. A local farmer had helped them begin, and for years he and Anton had sugared together. They had a sugarhouse in partnership and got up to 3000 buckets. Anton still did some sugaring on a small scale, he said, but it was impossible to continue at that level because you had to commit four weeks full time to it. He wasn’t a fan of plastic tubing.

“I wouldn’t do tubing,” Anton said. “I just wouldn’t go there. I couldn’t see putting tubing in the woods. I couldn’t do it.”

“I couldn’t see going back to buckets,” Peter said, laughing.

Anton explained the evaporation process to his friends, and Peter told them about sugar content in sap, saying he boiled an average of 57 gallons of sap to get a gallon of syrup. Anton explained the reverse-osmosis process, how it was

possible to filter out 80 percent of the water, so that a sugarmaker had only had to boil 4 gallons. Without reverse-osmosis, Peter's boils were much longer—Anton teased Peter about the syrup not being ready for his friends.

Good things come from waiting. They left as I had the night before, a half hour before the syrup was ready. Peter poured a few gallons into a steel bucket. He asked Petey to watch the float level while he tended to the syrup. The float level showed the amount of syrup in the flue pan, and Petey kept an eye on it, at one point opening the valve to let a little more sap flow in.

Peter brought the sap to the bench near the window, and poured the syrup through the layers of felt cloth. He then poured it into plastic jugs. A one-gallon container, a half-gallon container, seven quarts, a pint, almost four gallons altogether. He set the jugs on their sides to cool.

He poured some of the syrup into tea cups, and set one on a shelf by me. "Try some when it's cooled a bit," he said.

He poured some into the grading set and compared. An A-medium, he said. Peter labeled the jugs, wrote the date on them and the grade. He then stoked the fire, and the boil roared up again.

Peter asked me if I had ever heard of a man named Hemon Chase. He was a surveyor, Peter said, and wrote a couple of books about his life. "He was the person in the older generation I admired most," Peter said. "He and Ben Porter. Ben Porter was a surveyor too." And a sugarmaker, I had heard, someone who also refused to use

tubing, proclaiming he would never suck sap out of his trees.

Peter admired their character, and their honesty. "I don't know if it was their character that made them surveyors, or whether it was surveying that made them who they were. Maybe it was being out in the woods all day. I suppose that today surveyors don't even have to go into the woods."

"Thoreau was a surveyor," I said. "Henry David Thoreau, who wrote *Walden*."

"Hemon used to drink a shot glass of maple syrup every day. I used to bring him a quart now and then."

I had been and would go into the woods with Peter on occasion, and had also wondered how his life in the woods had influenced his development. Mostly I liked hearing his perspective, as I watched him work and listened to him talk about trees. I had watched him make choices as to which trees to cut and others to leave in a town forest in Walpole—he was making decisions that would bear out long after his lifetime, such as when he selected an oak tree, that would bear acorns, that would produce other oaks, that would also bear acorns, that would feed the wildlife that would find that particular spot a favorable place to be—150 years from now. It seemed to me that the mentality of ethical forest management was similar to the mentality needed to reduce the human effect—the mentality for effective forest management could be a guide for effective action for reducing climate change. The long view, 150 years from now.

Peter stoked the fire and it roared again, another stream of sparks soaring up the stack. I picked up the teacup and sipped. My words: "Oh my, this is amazing. Never have I tasted anything like this."

How to describe it? Caramel, some say. Chocolate, others say. Vanilla, one of the known flavor precursors. I couldn't stop sipping, light sips.

"I hope I don't get sick drinking so much of this," I said.

"You won't," Peter answered.

Just then Aunt Margaret came to get Petey, as it was getting dark. Aunt Margaret had been a teacher in Baltimore before she moved back to Acworth and into Peter's grandfather's house to take care of her parents. Peter handed her a teacup.

I said something that included the word amazing about the taste.

"The best," she said.

Petey took his dragon off the stairs and walked out, but Peter called him back. "Here, take a quart of syrup for Aunt Margaret," he said.

I soon left with a gallon of my own, enough to last for a few months. I stopped to look at the sugarhouse again, the steam still rising, clouding actually, as it rolled down the roof. I walked along the brook, passing through a pocket of cool air, carrying the jug that was so hot I had to keep switching hands.

When I got home I told my wife she should taste some while it was still warm. She made some toast. I opened the jug, and she bent down to it.

"It has the scent of the sugarhouse," she said.

I bent to take a whiff of the vapors. "You're right. It's not just the maple scent, but the sugarhouse itself."

"Yes," she said.

"It has the scent of the wood, the woodpile, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

That was it, the magic of this. Under the right conditions, the sweetness of the sap, the taste of the tree, and also the character of the place where it was made. It seemed so, on this particular day. 🌲