***Hatchet***

***Chapter 6***

***Summary:***

Brian explores the area around the lake and finds a natural bowl-shaped impression in the side of a ledge where he decides to make a shelter for himself. As Brian gathers wood to make the shelter, he sees some birds eating berries from a bush. Brian thinks if the birds can eat them, the berries must be safe, so he gorges himself on the berries before picking more to take back to his shelter.

Brian remembers a time when he and his friend [Terry](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Hatchet/character-analysis/#Terry) played in the park two years earlier. They found a thickly wooded place near the river and pretended they were lost and had to survive. He recalls that they assumed they would have all sorts of supplies. After wishing Terry were with him, "with a gun, a knife, and some matches," Brian remembers how they decided a lean-to was the best type of shelter to build, and he decides to try to build a similar shelter in the wilderness. An indentation in the stone near the lake offers some protection from rain. After inspecting it, he sees that all he has to do is build a wall on one side to create a dry shelter.

Now he turns to the next challenge: finding something to eat. He remembers television shows he has seen about people living in the desert, including one that showed a pilot cooking lizard stew in a can. He knows there are no lizards here to eat, but he wonders if there might be something else. Suddenly he decides to look for berries. He walks slowly through the woods and ends up following birds to a berry bush. The berries are tart, but he eats a lot of them. He picks more berries and makes a pouch out of his windbreaker, then carries the berries back towards his camp. There he starts gathering wood to build a wall. By the time the sun sets, he has formed a room about 8 feet by 15 feet with one three-foot-wide opening. His stomach feels a little upset from gorging on the berries, but Brian goes to sleep.

Brian recalls the time he spent playing in the city park with his best friend Terry, who he suddenly wishes were with him. Together they had pretended they had gotten lost in the woods. They had built a lean-to for a shelter, which inspires Brian to seek out an ideal spot to build one himself. Finding a perfect overhang and gathering the materials to enclose the lean-to, Brian realizes the gravity of his weakness and hunger. He decides he must seek out food and compares the customary facility of finding food with the challenge of his current situation. Still dwelling on his parents' divorce, he decides he will tell his father "The Secret" as soon as he returns home. Brian finds some unfamiliar bright red berries to eat, which turn out to taste very bitter. However, left with little choice, he eats them until the pangs of hunger subside. Since Brian has no matches he must think hard about how to start a fire; for now, he works to improve his shelter by interweaving sticks into the walls. Although he feels sick from eating too many berries, sleep nonetheless comes to him.

***Analysis:***

[Paulsen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Hatchet/author/) continues to interweave the novel's significant themes as Brian takes his first steps toward survival. This chapter quietly dramatizes one of the shifts Brian must make in order to survive. When Brian remembers his conversation with his friend [Terry](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Hatchet/character-analysis/#Terry) about being lost in the wilderness, he again reviews past knowledge to try to apply it to his present situation. He does this again as he remembers various television shows he's seen about survival. In both cases, Brian recalls genuinely useful information, such as the inspiration for the shelter he creates later in the chapter. Even information that is not directly useful can lead him in a helpful direction, as when the idea of cooking lizard stew spurs him to consider his environment and search for berries.

To survive, Brian must focus. He culls the information he recalls down to two core needs: food and shelter. He also realizes he must use reasoning and observation of the natural world rather than memory alone. He realizes he cannot depend on what he has learned from adults, the educational system, and the media with its romanticized view of nature. In the city an upset stomach rarely carries any risk. Here, where Brian is alone in the wilderness, it might cost him his life. And though he does not know it yet, Brian is learning to pay attention to what matters most. His observation of the birds in the forest does more to show him how to find food than anything he learned in the past.

Analysis(Ch 5-6):

Brian has been in the wilderness for nearly a full day. Hunger is beginning to set in. Brian has also come to realize that rescue will probably be a few days, or even weeks, off. For this reason, Brian knows he must find a way to survive on his own. This is a daunting idea, however, and he becomes emotional. However, much to Brian’s credit, he gets control of his emotions quickly and begins thinking about what he must do to survive.

Brian begins to work toward survival. He finds a suitable place to make a shelter and begins gathering wood for a door. Brian also finds some berries he can eat. However, in his haste to satisfy his hunger, Brian eats all the berries, those that are ripe and those that are not. This could come back to haunt him. However, Brian has found a source of food, giving hope that he will not die of starvation.

Analysis (Ch 4-6):

In this part of the novel Paulsen introduces one of the primary themes in this work: the contrast between urban and wilderness environments, and the effects of this contrast on man. In Chapter 4, Brian, a city boy, marvels at the novelty of the natural environment. Paulsen writes, "The scenery was very pretty, he thought, but it was all a green and blue blur and he was used to the gray and black of the city, the sounds of the city. Traffic, people talking, sounds all the time—the hum and whine of the city." This contrast between city and wilderness also becomes clear in Brian's search for food, when he recognizes the conveniences of city life, which he had previously taken for granted.

As a result of this contrast between city and wilderness, and as a result of his lack of experience with nature, Brian initially uses knowledge he has gathered from the media to brainstorm about what action he must take. When he attempts to estimate the date of his rescue, he refers to searches he has seen on the local news and to movies he has seen about lost planes. When he considers the necessary approach to finding some food, he thinks, "What did they do in the movies when they got stranded like this? Oh, yes, the hero usually found some kind of plant that he knew was good to eat and that took care of it." Of course Brian quickly realizes that the rules of the civilized world often lose their relevance when applied to the natural world. As he gains more experience in the woods, his basis of knowledge shifts from the media to his own personal experience.

In these early stages of Brian's stay in the woods, he still remains very aware of his home and of the routines of the outside world. He remembers his friend Terry with fondness, and at one point tries to imagine what his mother would be doing at that moment, recalling her daily routine. He actively misses both his family and friends and the conveniences of the life he had led. As the story progresses, however, the reader sees that his thought patterns become increasingly self-contained and he no longer places emphasis on societal influences. Rather, the surrounding natural environment governs his behavior and his patterns. Brian undergoes a period of disbelief when he awakes after the crash. The reality of the plane crash and of his presence in the middle of a harsh wilderness leaves him dumbfounded and overwhelmed. Finding few elements of certainty, he feels the need to establish those few facts of which he remains certain. He thinks, "My name is Brian Robeson and I am thirteen years old and I am alone in the north woods of Canada." These simple statements provide some reassurance to Brian at a time when he has no idea what action to take or what kind of hope to hold out for his rescue.

In these chapters Paulsen begins to employ with some regularity a certain stylistic nuance that persists throughout the book. That is, combining words that do not customarily go together and connecting them with hyphens. Such words include "hot-hate," "all-over pain," and "stagger-tripped." This unique technique provides the author with an opportunity to enhance his descriptive language.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part***

***Summary Part 1:***

[Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) thinks back on a time when he and his friend [Terry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/terry) pretended to be lost in the woods, making fire and hunting with a gun. Brian wishes that Terry were with him and, inspired by the memory, decides to try to build a lean-to for shelter. He walks around the stone ridge he saw earlier and discovers an overhang in the rock that forms almost a cave. Brian thinks that finding this shelter is his first good luck, but then decides that surviving the landing was actually lucky as well.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Although Brian misses Terry and the security of home, he allows the memory to inspire him rather than drag him into despair, again showing a new skill at drawing strength from something that might seem negative. Brian’s new interpretation of the concept of luck is also a key change for him, as he uses the definition of “good luck” to frame his situation in a more positive light.

***Summary Part 2:***

Brian sits in the shade of his new shelter and wonders how to find food, feeling too weak to improve the shelter until he has eaten. He reflects on how easy it has always been for him to have food, remembering the delicious meals that his [mother](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-s-mother) and [father](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-s-father) used to cook before their divorce. Brian thinks back on survival shows he has seen on television and decides that there must be berry bushes nearby. He almost starts thinking about his mother’s affair again but decides that he must “stop that kind of thinking,” resolving instead to find berries before dark.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Thinking back on the ease of his old life, Brian’s experience again underscores the sheltered, unnatural reality of urban living. Here, he also takes another step toward the independence that he needs to survive, consciously separating himself from the idea of his mother so that he will not be distracted from finding food.

***Summary Part 3:***

Trying to keep his thoughts focused on the task at hand, [Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) walks slowly along the edge of the lake. He sees a flock of birds land in the undergrowth and follows them, discovering that they are eating berries that look almost like grapes. Overjoyed, Brian eats the berries but discovers that they are oddly tart, with large pits like cherries. Still, he continues eating them until he is completely full and then carries more back to his shelter in a pouch made from his windbreaker.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Even in his newly independent mindset, Brian ends up relying on birds, one of the most prevalent parts of his new environment, to lead him to the berries. Paulsen shows that even at this early stage, independence must balance with connection to the rest of the world. The crucial role of natural resources is also underscored here, as Brian gains new strength from the berries.

***Summary Part 4:***

Back at his camp by the ridge, [Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) tries and fails to make fire by rubbing sticks together. Giving up, he decides to try to close in part of the overhang to make a better shelter. Using interlaced dead branches, he spends the afternoon covering the front of the overhang to make a wall and doorway. As the sun goes down, Brian begins to feel sick to his stomach and is again attacked by mosquitos. Although he is very tired, he struggles to fall asleep until night falls completely.

***Analysis Part 4:***

This scene illustrates the limits of Brian’s sense of independence and the way that the order of the natural world continues to impose itself on him. Despite his commitment to providing for himself, Brian cannot make fire easily, and the insects still torment him even though he has begun to understand the assets of the world around him.