

□ Norman Maclean

No single circumstance has focused attention on the Blackfoot River more than Norman Maclean's novella "A River Runs Through It and Other Stories," published in 1976 and nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. The notoriety was magnified when Robert Redford made a movie based on the title story that earned an Academy Award for cinematography in 1992. Maclean was born in Iowa in 1902 but grew up in Missoula, where his father was a Presbyterian minister. Maclean worked summers in the woods – for the Forest Service, for the Anaconda Company – from age 14 through his college years at Dartmouth. He received a doctorate from the University of Chicago and taught in the English department there until retiring in 1973. Maclean died two years before the movie was released. This scene, and much of the story, took place in 1937.

From "A River Runs Through It"

The canyon above the old Clearwater bridge is where the Blackfoot roars loudest. The backbone of a mountain would not break, so the mountain compresses the already powerful river into sound and spray before letting it pass. Here, of course, the road leaves the river; there was no place in the canyon for an Indian trail; even in 1806 when Lewis left Clark to come up the Blackfoot, he skirted the canyon by a safe margin. It is no place for small fish or small fishermen. Even the roar adds power to the fish or at least intimidates the fisherman.

When we fished the canyon we fished on the same side of it for the simple reason that there is no place in the canyon to wade across. I could hear Paul start to pass me to get to the hole above, and, when I realized I didn't hear him anymore, I knew he had stopped to watch me. Although I have never pretended to be a great fisherman, it was always important to me that I was a fisherman and looked like one, especially when fishing with my brother. Even before the silence continued, I knew that I wasn't looking like much of anything.

Although I have a warm personal feeling for the canyon, it is not an ideal place for me to fish. It puts a premium upon being able to cast for distance, and yet most of the time there are cliffs or trees right behind the fisherman so he has to keep all his line in front of him. It's like a baseball pitcher being deprived of his windup, and it forces the fly fisherman into what is called a "roll cast,"

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a hard cast that I have never mastered. The fisherman has to work enough line into his cast to get distance without throwing any line behind him, and then he has to develop enough power from a short arc to shoot it out across the water.

He starts accumulating the extra amount of line for the long cast by retrieving his last cast so slowly that an unusual amount of line stays in the water and what is out of it forms a slack semiloop. The loop is enlarged by raising the casting arm straight up and cocking the wrist until it points to 1:30. There, then, is a lot of line in front of the fisherman, but it takes about everything he has to get it high in the air and out over the water so that the fly and leader settle ahead of the line – the arm is a piston, the wrist is a revolver that uncocks, and even the body gets behind the punch. Important, too, is the fact that the extra amount of line remaining in the water until the last moment gives a semisolid bottom to the cast. It is a little like a rattlesnake striking, with a good piece of his tail on the ground as something to strike from. All this is easy for a rattlesnake, but has always been hard for me.

Paul knew how I felt about my fishing and was careful not to seem superior by offering advice, but he had watched so long that he couldn't leave now without saying something. Finally he said, "The fish are out farther." Probably fearing he had put a strain on family relations, he quickly added, "Just a little farther."

I reeled in my line slowly, not looking behind so as not to see him. Maybe he was sorry he had spoken, but, having said what he said, he had to say something more. "Instead of retrieving the line straight toward you, bring it in on a diagonal from the downstream side. The diagonal will give you a more resistant base to your loop so you can put more power into your forward cast and get a little more distance."

Then he acted as if he hadn't said anything and I acted as if I hadn't heard it, but as soon as he left, which was immediately, I started retrieving my line on a diagonal, and it helped. The moment I felt I was getting a little more distance I ran for a fresh hole to make a fresh start in life.

It was a beautiful stretch of water, either to a fisherman or a photographer, although each would have focused his equipment on a different point. It was a barely submerged waterfall. The reef of rock was about two feet under the water, so the whole river rose into one wave, shook itself into spray, then fell back on itself and turned blue. After it recovered from the shock, it came back to see how it had fallen.

No fish could live out there where the river exploded into the colors and curves that would attract photographers. The fish were in that slow backwash,

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right in the dirty foam, with the dirt being one of the chief attractions. Part of the speckles would be pollen from pine trees, but most of the dirt was edible insect life that had not survived the waterfall.

I studied the situation. Although maybe I had just added three feet to my roll cast, I still had to do a lot of thinking before casting to compensate for some of my other shortcomings. But I felt I had already made the right beginning – I had already figured out where the big fish would be and why.

Then an odd thing happened. I saw him. A black back rose and sank in the foam. In fact, I imagined I saw spines on his dorsal fin until I said to myself, "God, he couldn't be so big you could see his fins." I even added, "You wouldn't even have seen the fish in all that foam if you hadn't first thought he would be there." But I couldn't shake the conviction that I had seen the black back of a big fish, because, as someone often forced to think, I know that often I would not see a thing unless I thought of it first.

Seeing the fish that I first thought would be there led me to wondering which way he would be pointing in the river. "Remember, when you make the first cast," I thought, "that you saw him in the backwash where the water is circling upstream, so he will be looking downstream, not upstream, as he would be if he were in the main current."

I was led by association to the question of what fly I would cast, and to the conclusion that it had better be a large fly, a number four or six, if I was going after the big hump in the foam.

From the fly, I went to the other end of the cast, and asked myself where the hell I was going to cast from. There were only gigantic rocks at this waterfall, so I picked one of the biggest, saw how I could crawl up to it, and knew from that added height I would get added distance, but then I had to ask myself, "How the hell am I going to land the fish if I hook him while I'm standing up there?" So I had to pick a smaller rock, which would shorten my distance but would let me slide down it with a rod in my hand and a big fish on.

I was gradually approaching the question all river fishermen should ask before they make the first cast, "If I hook a big one, where the hell can I land him?"

One great thing about fly fishing is that after a while nothing exists of the world but thoughts about fly fishing. It is also interesting that thoughts about fishing are often carried on in dialogue form where Hope and Fear – or, many times, two Fears – try to outweigh each other.

One Fear looked down the shoreline and said to me (a third person distinct from the two fears), "There is nothing but rocks for thirty yards, but

don't get scared and try to land him before you get all the way down to the first sandbar."

The Second Fear said, "It's forty, not thirty, yards to the first sandbar and the weather has been warm and the fish's mouth will be soft and he will work off the hook if you try fight him forty yards downriver. It's not good but it will be best to try to land him on a rock that is closer."

The First Fear said, "There is a big rock in the river that you will have to take him past before you land him, but, if you hold the line tight enough on him to keep him this side of the rock, you will probably lose him."

The Second Fear said, "But if you let him get on the far side of the rock, the line will get caught under it, and you will be sure to lose him."

That's how you know when you have thought too much – when you become a dialogue between *You'll probably lose* and *You're sure to lose*. But I didn't entirely quit thinking, although I did switch subjects. It is not in the book, yet it is human enough to spend a moment before casting in trying to imagine what the fish is thinking, even if one of its eggs is as big as its brain and even if, when you swim underwater, it is hard to imagine that a fish has anything to think about. Still, I could never be talked into believing that all a fish knows is hunger and fear. I have tried to feel nothing but hunger and fear and don't see how a fish could ever grow to six inches if that were all he ever felt. In fact, I go so far sometimes as to imagine that a fish thinks pretty thoughts. Before I made the cast, I imagined the fish with the black back lying cool in the carbonated water full of bubbles from the waterfalls. He was backing upstream like a floating cafeteria coming to wait on its customers. And he probably was imagining that the speckled foam was eggnog with nutmeg sprinkled on it, and, when the whites of eggs separated and he saw what was on shore, he probably said to himself, "What a lucky son of a bitch I am that this guy and not his brother is about to fish this hole."

I thought all these thoughts and some besides that proved of no value, and then I cast and I caught him.

I kept cool until I tried to take the hook out of his mouth. He was lying covered with sand on the little bar where I had landed him. His gills opened with his penultimate sighs. Then suddenly he stood up on his head in the sand and hit me with his tail and the sand flew. Slowly at first my hands began to shake, and, although I thought they made a miserable sight, I couldn't stop them. Finally, I managed to open the large blade to my knife which several times slid off his skull before it went through his brain.

Even when I bent him he was way too long for my basket, so his tail

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stuck out.

There were black spots on him that looked like crustaceans. He seemed oceanic, including barnacles. When I passed my brother at the next hole, I saw him study the tail and slowly remove his hat, and not out of respect to my prowess as a fisherman.

I had a fish, so I sat down to watch a fisherman.

He took his cigarettes and matches from his shirt pocket and put them in his hat and pulled his hat down tight so it wouldn't leak. Then he unstrapped his fish basket and hung it on the edge of his shoulder where he could get rid of it quick should the water get too big for him. If he studied the situation he didn't take any separate time to do it. He jumped off a rock into the swirl and swam for a chunk of cliff that had dropped into the river and parted it. He swam in his clothes with only his left arm – in his right hand, he held his rod high and sometimes all I could see was the basket and rod, and when the basket filled with water sometimes all I could see was the rod.

The current smashed him into the chunk of cliff and it must have hurt, but he had enough strength remaining in his left fingers to hang to a crevice or he would have been swept into the blue below. Then he still had to climb to the top of the rock with his left fingers and his right elbow which he used like a prospector's pick. When he finally stood on top, his clothes looked hydraulic, as if they were running off him.

Once he quit wobbling, he shook himself duck-dog fashion, with his feet spread apart, his body lowered and his head flopping. Then he steadied himself and began to cast and the whole world turned to water.

Below him was the multitudinous river, and, where the rock had parted it around him, big-grained vapor rose. The mini-molecules of water left in the wake of his line made momentary loops of gossamer, disappearing so rapidly in the rising big-grained vapor that they had to be retained in memory to be visualized as loops. The spray emanating from him was finer-grained still and enclosed him in a halo of himself. The halo of himself was always there and always disappearing, as if he were candlelight flickering about three inches from himself. The images of himself and his line kept disappearing into the rising vapors of the river, which continually circled to the tops of the cliffs where, after becoming a wreath in the wind, they became rays of the sun.

The river above and below his rock was all big Rainbow water, and he would cast hard and low upstream, skimming the water with his fly but never letting it touch. Then he would pivot, reverse his line in a great oval above his head, and drive his line low and hard downstream, again skimming the water

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with his fly. He would complete this grand circle four or five times, creating an immensity of motion which culminated in nothing if you did not know, even if you could not see, that now somewhere out there a small fly was washing itself on a wave. Shockingly, immensity would return as the Big Blackfoot and the air above it became iridescent with the arched sides of a great Rainbow.

He called this "shadow casting," and frankly I don't know whether to believe the theory behind it – that the fish are alerted by the shadows of flies passing over the water by the first casts, so hit the fly the moment it touches the water. It is more or less the "working up an appetite" theory, almost too fancy to be true, but then every fine fisherman has a few fancy stunts that work for him and for almost no one else. Shadow casting never worked for me, but maybe I never had the strength of arm and wrist to keep line circling over the water until fish imagined a hatch of flies was out.

My brother's wet clothes made it easy to see his strength. Most great casters I have known were big men over six feet, the added height certainly making it easier to get more line in the air in a bigger arc. My brother was only five feet ten, but he had fished so many years his body had become partly shaped by his casting. He was thirty-two now, at the height of his power, and he could put all his body and soul into a four-and-a-half-ounce magic totem pole. Long ago, he had gone far beyond my father's wrist casting, although his right wrist was always so important that it had become larger than his left. His right arm, which our father had kept tied to the side to emphasize the wrist, shot out of his shirt as if it were engineered, and it, too, was larger than his left arm. His wet shirt bulged and came unbuttoned with his pivoting shoulders and hips. It was also not hard to see why he was a street fighter, especially since he was committed to getting in the first punch with his right hand.

Rhythm was just as important as color and just as complicated. It was one rhythm superimposed upon another, our father's four-count rhythm of the line and wrist being still the base rhythm. But superimposed upon it was the piston two count of his arm and the long overriding four count of the completed figure eight of his reversed loop.

The canyon was glorified by rhythms and colors.

I heard voices behind me, and a man and his wife came down the trail, each carrying a rod, but probably they weren't going to do much fishing. Probably they intended nothing much more than to enjoy being out of doors with each other and, on the side, to pick enough huckleberries for a pie. In those days there was little in the way of rugged sports clothes for women, and

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she was a big, rugged woman and wore regular men's bib overalls, and her motherly breasts bulged out of the bib. She was the first to see my brother pivoting on the top of his cliff. To her, he must have looked something like a trick rope artist at a rodeo, doing everything except jumping in and out of his loops.

She kept watching while groping behind her to smooth out some pine needles to sit on. "My, my!" she said.

Her husband stopped and stood and said, "Jesus." Every now and then he said, "Jesus." Each time his wife nodded. She was one of America's mothers who never dream of using profanity themselves but enjoy their husbands', and later come to need it, like cigar smoke.

I started to make for the next hole. "Oh, no," she said, "you're going to wait, aren't you, until he comes to shore so you can see his big fish?"

"No," I answered. "I'd rather remember the molecules."

She obviously thought I was crazy, so I added, "I'll see his fish later." And to make any sense for her I had to add, "He's my brother."

As I kept going, the middle of my back told me that I was being viewed from the rear both as quite a guy, because I was his brother, and also as a little bit nutty, because I was molecular.

□ John H. Toole

In 1937, the same summer Paul and Norman Maclean went fly-fishing on the Blackfoot (see previous selection), 19-year-old John H. Toole was fighting fires for the Blackfoot Forest Protective Association. Toole related his experiences in "The Baron, the Logger, the Miner and Me." As he explained, the BFPA was financed by taxes in the Blackfoot Valley. Since the Anaconda Company owned most of the land, the Company was the primary supporter of the BFPA and in essence ran it to protect its timber interests. Kenneth Ross, manager of Anaconda's mill in Bonner and Toole's grandfather, started the BFPA. in 1920 and often called on lumberjacks working for Anaconda to fight fires.

BFPA boss was Les Tarbet, a Marine in both World Wars who once held the Marine light-heavyweight boxing title. BFPA headquarters were originally in the two-story Bonner Hall at the north end of Bonner (a vacant lot now) that had housed Bonner's first school until 1907. Also known as the Masonic Lodge and the Odd Fellows Lodge, it was torn down in the early 1940s. BFPA offices moved across the river to the brick building that had housed the office of the Western Lumber Company. It's occupied in 2001 by the River City Grill.

1937: Fire and Temptation

From "The Baron, the Logger, the Miner and Me"

One day in June, Les came charging up in a pickup and said: "Come on, Johnny. We're going to string a telephone wire into old lady Potter's ranch. The old gal doesn't deserve it but she's goin' to pay us through the nose for the service and make our bank account a little fatter! Ha!"

I climbed into the back of the pickup, which was filled with spools of wire and rope. As usual, Les charged up the road at full speed. Mrs. Potter's ranch was the E Bar L, a beautiful, well-managed dude ranch overlooking the Blackfoot Valley near Clearwater. A magnificent place.

We headed down for the river below the ranch, toiling under the spools of wire and rope. Tom Harper was with us. The Blackfoot was at full flood. The muddy water boiled and roiled with a tremendous roar, pouring its cascades over huge rocks. Les reached down and picked up three twigs.

"Now, boys," he said with an evil leer, "one of us is going to swim that river with a rope tied to him. Then we'll hook the wire to the rope and pull it across. Frank

Inman has brought up the wire on the other side of the river in a speeder on the Milwaukee tracks." I looked across and there was Frank standing on the opposite bank. Les went on and grasped three twigs in his fist.

"Now the guy that draws the short twig of these three is gonna swim the river with the rope tied to him. Here, Johnny, you draw first." I drew a twig and Les threw the other two twigs away. He laughed and leered at me again: "You got the short one, Johnny! Peel off your clothes." What a lousy deal, I thought. Les and Tom never intended to swim that river! I stripped to my trunks.

The river looked formidable. I stood uncertainly on the bank. Les wasted no time. He tied the rope around my waist and commanded: "O.K., boy. Dive in!"

I have never been a particularly strong swimmer, but I dove. The river was ice cold, freshly melted snow. The plunge was a shock.

I closed my eyes and flailed madly. The big rope was a burdensome drag that got worse as water soaked it. The current hurtled me downstream, and I banged my arms and legs on rocks. Already, I was 75 yards down from my starting point, but I was making it across. The rope pulled me under, but I gave a mighty heave and felt sand in my hands. I opened my eyes. Les and Tom were way back up the river paying out the rope. Frank Inman came running down to give me a hand, and I crawled out on the bank like a gasping porpoise.

Big joke! They were all laughing to beat hell. Frank gave me some dry clothes, and I lay down gasping for breath. Frank busied himself tying the wire to the rope and Les and Tom pulled it across. I thought: "I hope Mrs. Potter appreciates her telephone."

Frank and I were to return to Bonner on the railroad speeder, but first we ate our lunch. We watched the roaring torrent of the Blackfoot River, the blue skies, the huge pines, and the tiny figures of Les and Tom as they toiled up the slope to the E Bar L ranch. It was pure adventure, adventure tinged with danger, accomplishment, and all in the midst of magnificent beauty.

"Well, come on, Johnny," Frank said. "Let's get that speeder loaded."

We climbed up to the tracks and put our gear on the speeder. Frank cranked it up, the little gas engine coughed, and we were soon clicking down the tracks of the Blackfoot branch of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railway Company, headed for Bonner, Montana.

Frank drove the speeder at a leisurely pace, and all I had to do was watch the great wild beautiful country go by as we went around and around the curves in the tracks. Then I thought of something.

It was Friday afternoon. The Milwaukee logging train would be heading up the valley late this afternoon and we were heading down. I hollered at Frank:

"Frank, that train is coming up the canyon today."

"Yeah, I know. But we'll be in Bonner before she even starts."

He took a drag on his cigarette, giving me a snag-toothed smile.

I was uneasy now. All these curves, that huge locomotive. I peered ahead but all I could see was miles of track, twisting and turning as it paralleled the river. Frank didn't seem to have a care in the world. He sang lustily and kept the speeder put-putting along at medium speed.

We met the train below McNamara's Landing. First I saw the white plume of steam, then I heard the roar of the great steam whistle. The train was thrusting along at top speed. I hollered at Frank:

"There's that goddamn train, Frank! Let's get the hell off this vehicle!"

He shook his head and advanced speed to high, heading straight for the oncoming train.

I shouted: "What the hell are you doing?"

But he just held the throttle open, and the gap between the train and the speeder narrowed rapidly. The engineer spotted us and laid on the whistle, and the colossal noise filled the canyon from rim to rim. Then he dynamited his brakes, and the big drive wheels on the engine locked, spraying sparks from the track. I was getting ready to jump. Frank was obviously insane, racing into the path of the locomotive. But no. He stopped the speeder with a jerk and piled off, yelling at me: "Get off quick, Johnny, grab the handles and wrestle this thing off the track!" Now the locomotive was bearing down on us, wheels locked, brakes screaming. And I saw what Frank had in his head.

Next to the track was a mound of earth, and on top of it were two parallel railroad ties placed at right angles to the rails. It was the only place where you could pivot a speeder off the track. I swear that engine would have busted us into little pieces in another five seconds if we hadn't reached that haven. I looked up just in time to see the locomotive engineer shouting at us and shaking his fist. I'll bet *he* had a good scare too.

Frank sat down on the speeder and lit a cigarette, saying, "You see what I was aimin' at, Johnny: I knew what I was doin.' We save a B.F.P.A. speeder!" I was irked and replied: "That's bunk, Frank! If you'd stepped on it a little, we'd have made Bonner before the train left!"

Now he was really angry.

"Listen, pretty boy! We damn near had to buy a new speeder for the B.F.P.A. and who would of paid for it? Not me. You woulda paid for it 'cause your old man's got a lot of money and I ain't got a Christly cent!"

July brought hot weather and sultry nights, and the skies lit up in brilliant, eerie flashes, with thunder rolling off in the distance like the boom of huge guns. Tom Harper, our boss at Bonner, said, "All hell's gonna break loose any time. Nobody leave the building."

In the middle of one night, Frank Inman awakened me by shaking my shoulder. "Get up, Johnny. There's a fire at Potomac!"

I staggered out and jumped into a pickup. Frank drove east up the river over the gravel road to Potomac. When we broke into the Potomac Valley, the fire was in full view. It was nothing but a brightly burning blaze in the top of a big ponderosa pine that had been struck by lightning.

"This'll be easy," Frank said.

The pine was not far off the road. As we gathered up a saw and two axes, Frank said:

"Now, kid, we've got to cut that pine, and the top might come down any minute. While you're workin' keep your eye cocked over your head so you won't get conked."

As we eased the saw into the wood, flaming branches kept coming down, and we hopped here and there to avoid them. No hard hats in those days. We made our undercut, then moved back of the tree. Our saw was sharp, and pretty soon Frank hollered, "Timber!" The pine came crashing down, and the top scattered burning wood all over the forest.

"Get on them little blazes quick, kid!" Frank shouted, and we attacked the small fires with shovel and pulaskis (a fire fighting tool with an axe for one blade and a hoe for the other, developed for the Forest Service by a man named Pulaski). We had everything smothered in short order, then we went down to the creek, got 80 gallons of water and put it out but good.

I said, expansively and authoritatively, "Well! That wasn't much!"

Frank said, "Kid, you talk like you knew all about fightin' fire. Fact is, you don't know nothin'!"

A few nights later our dispatcher, old Frank Shaeffer, answered the phone. He turned to us and said, "A lady in Missoula says there's a fire burning on the top of University Mountain."

This mountain is the next big hump behind Mount Sentinel, just back of the University of Montana. It is brutally steep, rising over 2,000 feet from the valley floor. Tom Harper said he was too old and tired to make that climb and told me to take a couple of men up and put out the fire. It was long before the days of smokejumpers, but we were young and we raced down the streets of Bonner, crossed the Milwaukee Railroad Bridge and went up on a bee line to the top. We pawed the trees aside,

slipped on the big clumps of grass, and after two hours clawed our way into the clearing on the mountain's top. We couldn't believe what we saw. There was a huge steel tower on top of the mountain and on top of it was a brilliant white and red light slowly revolving.

One boy said, "I'll be goddamned, what the hell is that?"

I watched the tower for a while, then it suddenly came to me, "Hell, I know what it is. It's a beacon to guide airplanes."

He replied, "What the hell are you talking about?"

I said, "Call up the airport and ask 'em."

Frank made the call, then turned to me: "By God, you're right. They just installed it yesterday. What's the world coming to? Think of the cost of that light, and all at the taxpayer's expense!"

The rest of us were all mad about our wild goose chase, and plumb worn out. We slept the rest of the day.

□ Richard Hugo

Richard Hugo was born in Seattle in 1923 and died in 1982, after 18 years of teaching at the University of Montana. The following essay appeared in "The Real West Marginal Way" (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986) and was reprinted in "The Last Best Place: A Montana Anthology" (Helena: The Montana Historical Society Press, 1988).

The Milltown Union Bar: You Could Love Here

From "The Last Best Place: A Montana Anthology"

My life was turning to shit. My marriage was breaking up. I was drinking, unable to control my outbursts of anger and my fears that I had become too difficult to live with. What's worse, I was too blurred to know my wife was about to leave me.

We had come to Montana almost directly from Italy. At the age of forty, I was about to start teaching. I knew nothing about Montana, had only been there once, nearly twenty years before had passed through on a troop train. I remember stopping somewhere, and lovely coeds from a college I could see on a hill across the valley handed each of us a basket containing fruit, candy, and magazines. It seemed idyllic that day, the fresh young girls, the innocent looking school in the distance. It seemed like some America that G.I.s imagined overseas in a World War II movie. I don't know where it was. I've never seen that place again. Of if I have, I didn't recognize it.

I was frightened. I had never taught and didn't know if I could do it. Dean Robert Coonrod of the College of Arts and Sciences, first person I met at the University, said, "The letter from Sol Katz did it." The implication was clear. I nearly didn't get the job. Good old Sol Katz.

When you are as insecure as I was that fall of 1964, everything, including Coonrod's remark, seems important, takes on some extra dimension it shouldn't. Good things and bad things. And nearly everything happening was bad. My wife and I had grown apart in Italy. The fault was mine. I couldn't hold myself together that far from friends, that uncertain of ever finding employment again. I drank too much, sullen the last two months, walked the streets of Florence in a hopeless state of depression that bordered on psychotic withdrawal.

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Bad things. Warren Carrier, my new boss, the new chairman of the English Department, said, "By the way, you're Leslie Fiedler's replacement." Jesus, God. Leslie Fiedler's replacement! One of the most famous teachers in the nation. I hadn't read a book in years. Except for books of poems. I'd never been much of a reader and didn't feel capable of analyzing anything I'd read. I was certain I'd fail.

I made the mistake of trying to teach the survey lit course as I thought someone should teach it. Hard as I worked, I'd overlooked the dictionary as a source, and one day I got hung up on the phrase, "Fierce tiger fell." A student with pointed sarcasm and obvious disdain read the possible meanings of "fell" from the dictionary aloud in front of the class. He had no idea how very close he came to driving me out of the academic world for good. I was about to apologize to the class, to explain that I wasn't qualified, was sorry I'd wasted their time, and walk out. My teaching career came that close to lasting about three weeks.

The house we intended to rent in Missoula was still occupied and typically we found a funny rundown apartment in a place called Milltown. It was in an old frame apartment building run by Goldie and Chuck Towne. Within a week Chuck Towne died. Goldie pounded on our door at 5 AM, yelling that something was wrong. He was almost gone when we got to him. I called an ambulance and tried mouth-to-mouth. I remember I had the irrelevant thought that this was the only time I'd ever kissed a man and he was dead.

There was a long, dreadful scene in the Missoula railroad station when my wife left for good. We sat and cried for hours. We had been close and it was over. The Missoula railroad station is so cheerless, you'd weep there saying goodbye to Hitler. Then she was gone and I was walking alone down Higgins Avenue, for some reason unusually aware of my shoes each step I took. Then, I was sitting in a bar near the station, tears pouring down my face, and the bartender sophisticated enough to say nothing. He'd seen drunks cry before.

I was naive about English departments and didn't understand the animosity of some of the staff. I didn't know that some professors hate you for being a poet. (Not only do I understand that very well now, I can walk into any English department and in a very short time tell you exactly who those professors are. When it comes to spotting them, I'm as sensitive as a candlefish.) Every rude remark, every disdainful look was magnified by my situation and my insecurities. I was on the verge of going under and I didn't know where to turn. I was drinking so heavily that my voice caught and betrayed my shaky emotional state in class. Sometimes I broke into tears.

There were kindnesses, too, and they magnified themselves. Carrier telling me he understood what I was going through and that he had enormous faith in me as a human being. Walter Brown, the Chaucerian, and his wife Mackey, having me over

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several times for dinner. The late Vedder Gilbert, always the gentleman, offering help in small but generous and important ways. And John Herrmann, then director of creative writing, sensing one day that I was far too upset to meet classes and sending me home, telling me not to worry, that he would cover for me.

I moved into the house in Missoula alone when it vacated. I made it clear that students were welcome, that there would always be a drink or a beer when they came by. Since the house was across the street from the school and since students were favorably disposed to free liquor, I guaranteed myself company during this lonely, empty time.

But of all good saving things from that time, one place and one group of people, one man and one woman. Across a small dirt roadway from Goldie Towne's apartments was a frame bar, the Union Milltown Bar. As I write this, I remember how I felt in those days and I hope you heard the trumpets when I put the name of that bar on the page. Trumpets, too, for Harold Herndon, the first man I met in Montana, the owner of the Union Milltown Bar.

A girl was tending bar the first time I walked in. There was one customer and a man I took to be another who came to me, put out his hand and said, "I'm Harold Herndon. I run this bar. I'm glad you came in." He could not have picked a better time and I could not have picked a better bar. I fell in love with Harold Herndon and that bar from the very first.

Everything seemed right. The animal heads on the wall – goat and ram under plexiglass domes; the habit of the bartender to buy every fourth or fifth drink; the clientele – workers from the Bonner Mill, the railroad and the woods; the funny old tongue-in-groove lumber walls; the strange, not really good but for that bar perfect, paintings of western scenes and events – buffalo hunts, a lynching, and one man alone waving hello to anyone who might be there across the void of the uninhabited plains – oh, aren't we all, buddy, aren't we just fucking all? And isn't this the right bar, this warm, homely bar where people know that waving to be the human condition, and know it better than anyone any place else knows it?

Harold is a short man, stocky, slightly and humorously sarcastic. His face looks like that of an ex-boxer, his nose broken, his jaw firm. He sees the world as the comedy it is and, when he was about to tell me something funny about one of the customers, he preceded his story with a little laugh, a sort of half-smile, half-laugh that signaled his good-humored vision of the world was at work again. For the most part, he enjoyed the people who came in.

Harold had spent some time in an orphanage. I couldn't miss the hard life behind his eyes, the sadness. But I couldn't miss his strength either. There's something durable about him. He is a survivor, an alder tree, a catfish. Sometimes, usually when

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he is worried about money, his view of his fellow man gets grim. He becomes distrustful, feels people have taken advantage of him. And they have because he has been generous with them for a long time. Harold might run a tab for several weeks for a truck driver and never ask for money. Then, when feeling the pinch, usually because he'd borrowed money from a bank to "improve" the bar (I begged Harold for years to leave that beautiful place alone), he would demand that the truck driver pay him back. Often there would be a scene since Harold, in his bad moments, forgets diplomacy.

Despite the kindness of Carrier, Herrmann, Gilbert and Brown, and the supportive company of Norman Meinke and Dave Smith, I did not feel I belonged in the English Department at the University. I was going back to an existence I'd known years before. I'd come from plain, naive working class (even peasant class) people, the kind of people who came into that bar, and it was in that bar I felt at home. With my wife gone, and seemingly much of my life a meaningless failure, I felt free to drink just as much as I wanted to – and that was a lot.

I suppose I felt the need to be with people who had their feet on the ground. Harold, despite his occasional flights of fancy about the bar, his dreams of turning the bar into a major enterprise, had his feet on the ground. Harold is also an engineer with the railroad and, when I first knew him, a train had derailed miles west of Missoula in the mountains. The engineer had been fired. When I asked Harold about it, he said, "Oh, shit. He was drunk." I needed those simple, factual explanations of things. They seemed very important. A down-to-earth attitude I could anchor on.

In those days a wall of tongue-in-groove lumber chopped the room off right where the bar ended. An old furnace stood against the wall. It heated the bar in the winter and the wall gave the bar a snug, comfortable feeling. To go to the bathroom, one had to go through a hinged door in the wall and make his way across a cold room furnished with booths that were seldom used. One thing I loved about the bar was that often I was the only customer, and for some reason being alone there was a good feeling.

Harold was pleased I was a poet. I think I was the first poet he ever met. One day he said, "Say. You like to write poems about ghost towns. You ought to go to Garnet."

"Where is Garnet?" I asked.

"Just go to Bearmouth and turn left." What a beautiful line. The certainty of place, the certainty that we are not lost, the certainty that the world and our lives have checkpoints with names and definite directions we can follow, the certainty.

And so the Milltown Union Bar became a home. Though I lived in Missoula, I headed east to Milltown every chance I had. I drank there so much that the telephone

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number was kept on file, along with my home phone number, in the English Department.

The first few months I found myself doing hateful things. For no real reason one night I became angry with a sad, embittered little mill worker named Johnson, and I started to yell at him. No real reason as I say. Just a lot of personal anger spilling over because the man bored me. "What did that guy say to you?" Esther the bartender asked. I told her I was sorry. He hadn't really said anything. In the years ahead I went out of my way to be friendly with that grizzled little man who had so little to show for his life. He was a regular and I saw him often.

But gradually I became a good heavy drinker. I took my favorite stool, drank to closing time, left quite smashed but without making a social mistake and drove home without incident. Over and over. From my favorite stool I could see myself in the mirror behind the bar. That was the man I must accept, the one I must make peace with, that big sad face in the mirror. Forty years old. Then another December 21. Forty-one years old. I'd probably never have another woman.

Though I'd had what I guess were good sexual relations with my wife, once she was gone, I was faced with my lack of experience. I had found my sexual adjustment with her and, in the thirteen years we were together, I had cheated but once, and that had been virtually inadvertent (I wasn't looking for anything at the time) and a dismal failure. In the bar of a small restaurant in Missoula, called The Shack, I tried to pick up the bartender one night. She was from Dillon, an attractive enough woman, but my conversation turned her cold. It came to me that I didn't know how to do this, I was making a fool of myself, and I left half a drink on the bar and went home.

No. The Milltown Union Bar was where I belonged, alone or with Harold, or with Jennie his wife who tended bar, or with Gene Jarvis from the mill who howled with animal pleasure when he felt his booze, or with Guy Weimer with his loud declamatory way of conversing with you and the whole bar at the same time ("Jesus Christ! The Goddam fishing isn't worth a shit this year."), or with friendless Johnson who mumbled the very little he had to say. But mostly alone. The sky could pour east forever.

Fred Miller is a man people like when they see him. He is very good looking, a bit like Tyrone Powers, but he has built into his face the look of a mildly mischievous boy who, like W.S. Merwin, is making it through life without the need or desire to use his intelligence, thank you. When you see Fred Miller, you feel better about things. When you talk to Fred Miller, you feel better about things. That Fred Miller is so instantly likeable probably saved his life.

Fred tended bar now and then for Harold. One cold night during a hard winter a mill worker named Scott came into the Milltown Union Bar. It was late, after 1:00

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AM, and the only other person in the bar was Fred's wife. Scott ordered a beer and exchanged a few words with Fred. As Fred turned to the cash register, Scott said, "You're a nice guy, Fred." Those were surely the most important words Fred has ever heard. When he turned back to give Scott the change, Scott was pointing a pistol at him.

Fred gave Scott the money, about 140 dollars, and Scott took off in his car while Fred called the cops. Scott raced to Missoula and headed south on Higgins Avenue. The broadcast had gone out and a Missoula policeman named Doug Chase heard it up Pattee Canyon where he was parked. When Scott's car, which seemed to fit the description, approached, Chase stopped it and radioed back to the station. He was instructed to wait for help which was on the way.

Doug Chase is probably the nicest cop in town, maybe in any town. He spends much time talking to school children because his role on the police force involves public relations work. Like a lot of nice people, he tends to trust humanity. He ignored his instructions and walked towards Scott's car, and Scott shot him in the stomach and took off up Pattee Canyon. The road brought Scott to the Clark Fork River where there was no bridge. In the zero weather, ice and snow, Scott swam the river. He was back in the Milltown area where he had started.

Fred was home by now, and when he heard over the radio that Scott had shot a cop, he realized Scott had been quite capable of pulling the trigger earlier in the bar. Fred imagined that Scott knew where he, Fred, lived, and he sat rigid in his kitchen with a shotgun waiting for Scott to come through the door. Though Fred's fear had obviously excited his imagination, and blurred his logic, in fact, Scott was close. Fred lived near the river where Scott had crossed in the freezing night.

At four that morning, Scott phoned the police from the Bonner Railroad station, a small building a quarter of a mile to the east of the bar on the tracks that pass close to the bar. He was freezing to death, he said, and would they come to get him. That night he slept soundly in the warm jail. The next day he didn't ask how Doug Chase was doing in the hospital.

One of the troubles with Freshmen in the comp class, I found, is that they feel they have little to write about. I got Carrier to authorize 50 dollars for Fred to talk to my class. That should give them all something to think about. Fred never showed. When I asked him why he hadn't – it seemed such an easy 50 dollars for less than an hour – he said he was too shy to talk in front of an audience.

Bill Stafford talks about the bonuses of life, things life gives us that trigger and fit into poems. I was drinking at the Milltown one afternoon when a crusty old man approached. He had been living in a cabin out somewhere in the remote countryside

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and the cabin had burned down leaving him homeless. Harold gave the man free lodging upstairs over the bar. Like many Montanans, the man, who had never seen me before, immediately started talking about his personal life. In Montana, many people assume that with the scarce population, 735,000 people in a state bigger in area than any except California, Texas, and Alaska, loneliness is the norm and when you meet someone else you have license to speak intimately simply because you are two people in a lonely, nearly uninhabited landscape. This luckless man whom Harold had befriended gave me one of Stafford's bonuses, a great opening line for a poem. The first thing he said was "Harold knew I'd been burned out in the valley." It was too good. I never could do a thing with it. I mentioned this to a class at the University of Washington years later and a young poet named Jim Matsui picked up the line and used it in a poem.

One night I was the only customer, sinking into the soft warm light of my new home, and feeling the soft warmth of the cold stinging bourbon, when two young men walked in, one in his late twenties, the other in his mid-thirties. Dale Paulsen was bartending.

The older man was fat and had a long, large nose that ran out of rigidity toward the tip. It wobbled and looked false. He sat one stool away from me and started to talk. He was terribly funny. The younger man played the electric slot machine.

The fat man broke us up, Dale and me. It seemed impossible that he couldn't have made it as a professional comedian. Not only was his patter hilarious, he was inherently funny as the great comics are. Perhaps it was his looks, his girth, and that unusual nose. Neither of us had ever seen the men before. During a lull the fat man asked me the direction to Drummond and how far it was. The young man hit the slot machine for 12 dollars in free games and Dale paid him off out of the register.

Then the younger man sat with us while the older man played the machine, which was down the bar toward the door. The younger man was more conventional looking. He had a round face and dark hair. His conversation was usual too. The fat man lost about five dollars to the electric slot machine.

They traded places again. Now the fat man really turned it on. What a funny man and how odd that anyone this entertaining would come to this out-of-the-way bar. It was as if a traveling show had gotten off course. The young man hit the machine again, this time for 27 dollars, and Dale paid him and they left. The next day Harold found the hole drilled in the machine, where the young man had inserted the thin steel rod that kept free games already won from subtracting while they were being played on the machine.

"They asked the way to Drummond," I told Harold after he muttered things about relative intelligences of bartenders he had employed.

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"Sure," Harold said glumly, "and the bastards laughed all the way to Great Falls."

I tried other bars of course and enjoyed them, but never like the Milltown. That was love, love of home, love of the possibility that even if my life would never again change for the better, at least there, in that unpretentious watering hole that trembled when the Vista Dome North Coast Limited roared by, I could live inside myself warm in fantasies, or chat with honest people who were neither afraid nor ashamed of their responses to life. It wasn't the worst way to be.

Often friends went there with me, Dave and Annick Smith, Jim Welch, and later, Lois Welch. Alone or with friends, the charm of the place seldom failed me. I wish the following had happened in the Milltown because it and that bar deserve each other. But it happened at the Double Front, in Missoula, owned by Harold's brother Gene. That bar is gone now. Gene sold his liquor license and retained only the restaurant where he sells chicken and shrimp.

It was there that one night drinking alone I felt a hand on my face and whirled around, angry. It was an old woman next to me. She said, "Don't be mad, Mister. I just wanted to touch your face." I fell all over myself covering up, told her it was alright, that I understood.

I was in love less than two years after I started going to the Milltown, and I don't mean with just the bar. I was smack in the middle of a love affair and I was happy. But, although I intended to ask the woman to marry me, two children and all, I still couldn't shake the remorse of my divorce. I got that February, 1966. It was a breeze. I charged desertion and my wife in Seattle didn't respond or contest. So on February 10, 1966 at 1:56 PM an old judge signed the decree and said, "You are no longer obligated to this person," and I wanted to say, "How in the hell do you know, you old fart?" But I thanked him, took note of the time because it seemed like a dramatic moment in my life, and went outside and sat on a bench and cried for a while. I was never very good at letting things go.

No offense to my wife, now ex-wife, but that affair in '65-'66 was easily the best sex I'd had or would have for several years after. I couldn't believe how passionate it was nor how very easy it seemed each morning when she would drop by on her way to school – she was a graduate student – and we would spend an hour in the sack. I'd never been that good before. My timidity vanished completely.

But I was hard at the booze. Not that she was a model of sobriety. And I still held much affection for my ex-wife. My sentimentality wouldn't vanish despite the sexual satisfaction. What the hell, nearly fourteen years of a marriage where we had been unusually intimate and close even for man and wife, fourteen years of helping

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each other like man and wife, brother and sister, over some very rough terrain, those years didn't just go away even if I was very much in love now. It was love but it came at the wrong time and I blew it.

I got too drunk too often. I slobbered over my sad moments I had known in my marriage, leaving my lover to feel that I still loved my wife. I made too many demands when I got drunk, a sort of test I was putting my new love through to see if she really loved me because, after all those hours staring in the mirror at the Milltown, I still hadn't decided if that was the face of a man who could be loved. Finally, she took off when school was out in the spring of '66 and I spent the most depressing summer of my life.

Where had she gone? No word. I sat in the Milltown day after warm day, sullen, certain now that the face in the mirror was that of a man who deserved no love, and who would find none. It would have been easier if school had been in session. I had come to love teaching. It was the only job I'd ever had that I took seriously, and the affection I felt for students, and often could feel coming back in the classroom, was a salvation in those days. But this was summer and I had nothing to do but drink and stare at that loveless man in the glass.

When my ex-lover came back married in September, everyone knew about it but me. Finally, a grad student named Lahey came to my house and told me. My first reaction was to make an Alka Seltzer and drink it – my hand shook when I raised the glass – and to announce bitterly that I would never get entangled with another woman as long as I lived.

The next two weeks were ridiculous, but only in retrospect. I locked myself in the house for eight days because I broke into sobbing so suddenly and so frequently, I feared being in public. I wrote silly letters to friends and even people I didn't know. I declared a desire to die in my sleep. Richard Howard wrote back and said, correctly, that he thought I was fooling myself. David Wagoner did too and added, "What would W. C. Fields say to all this?"

It wasn't the loss of the woman, I realized afterward, that drove me to such absurd behavior. It was the fear that I was losing everything, that given my shrimpy sexual history, my timidity with most women, the ease with which I could return to my fantasies, there was a very good chance I would never have a woman again. That even if I could have, I might very well revert to an old self, the man who invited rejection and then retreated to his "cave of sorrow" to stare out jealously at the world of assumed normalcy.

I was bitter. For a short while I thought I'd kill her. How silly can you get? Then, a long period of resolve. It seemed that I had been treated rotten by women all my life. And it seemed that at my age I had to admit that either I was someone who

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deserved it or I wasn't, that I was either a shit or a good man. And if I was a good man, why then screw them. If there were to be any tears from now on, they would not be mine. All this infantile reasoning required sustenance with booze, of course. I wrote a poem called "The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir." That was as close to direct vengeance as I'd come. Earlier that year, after she had first disappeared for the summer, I wrote a poem called "Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg," anticipating the struggle I might have to go through, anticipating that I might never experience kisses like hers for years to come. "The last good kiss/you had was years ago." If a poet is supposed to suffer for his art, I felt I deserved at least the Nobel Prize.

By now Harold had the back wall torn out, the furnace replaced by a new one buried under the building, and the old booths replaced by new booths and plastic tables with chairs. This was the first big improvement. I fought Harold, though not significantly since it was his bar, on every one of them. "Stop," I pleaded. "Don't improve anything. This is a wonderful bar just as it is." But Harold is a determined man. "I'll get the overflow crowd from East Missoula if I fix this place up," he announced.

She came back to school with her husband who would visit when he could. His work kept him in Wyoming and she wanted to finish her degree. The day she came to see me we were in the middle of a melodramatic conversation when Kenneth Hanson called from Portland to tell me he'd won the Lamont Prize. It was good news and it was good coming in from the outside.

□ Jenny Herndon

A Celebration of Dick Hugo

From Cut Bank 20

Transcript from Memorial Service in Missoula, Oct. 31, 1982

Hello, everybody. My name is Mrs. Harold Herndon. Jennie is my name, but I am a widow now. Dick Hugo spent a lot of time at our bar – The Union Bar in Milltown, which is Harold's Club now – and I could go on and on and on and tell you several things, funny things, that happened, because when we first met Dick he was down, he was depressed, he was having one hell of a time. Richard and I, we got along real good, but there were times I would get down on him. And then that's where I got my nickname: The Bitch. He would get irritated with me and he'd say, "Harold, she's a bitch."

Well, I'll have to tell you how that all started because one Saturday afternoon I went to the Club to check the liquor inventory. I never worked on Saturdays and Sundays. So I went out there, to check the liquor inventory, to make sure that everything was there. Richard was sitting there, and this was the time we had the laundramat there. Anyway, he'd come out there on Saturday and he'd do his laundry and, needless to say, half the time he'd have a hangover. So he would drink his beer, and talk with all the millworkers and everything – which they dearly loved him ... very much. So this particular day, I walked in and he was sitting there, and he had this sweatshirt on. I talked to him from the side. I went around the bar and I got behind the bar, and I looked and said – excuse my French – "Jesus Christ, Richard, you look like a pig!" He said, "Oh, you bitch." And I ... anyway, I said, "Lord, y'got more ketchup and mustard on your sweatshirt than y'had on your sandwich!" And he said, "OK, I'll take the damn thing off and take it in there and put it in the laundry." And I said, "Oh, no, you won't. You're not gonna take that shirt off and sit in *here* like that." And he said, "Well, what the hell am I supposed to do?" And I said, "I don't know. Y'better figure out something, though, 'cause I don't like the looks of it." Well, pretty soon he got up and he went back to the restroom, and he came back he'd turned his sweatshirt inside out. Anyway ... after that any time anybody did come in and they had something on their sweatshirt, he would say, "Ya look like a slob. Go on back and turn it inside out!"

My husband and Richard were very, very close, because at the time that Harold met Richard they were both going through some pretty hard times, and that was they were both going through ... just past divorce. And this was the time I decided I was going to marry Harold Herndon. But they were very, very close friends, and he wrote a beautiful eulogy for my husband which was published in the *Rocky Mountain Magazine* and also *The Passage*, which I will treasure all my life. And after my husband passed away, Richard came out to see me, different times, and also he would call. Never say, "Hi, bitch," he'd just say, "Hi, gal, how ya doin'?" But anyway, I'm so happy for Ripley that she did have a part of him because he was so happy in the last few years of his life. Everything was going his way. He loved her children. He loved her very much. And I'm sure we all loved him, too."

The Milltown Union Bar (Laundromat & Café)

You could love here, not the lovely goat
in plexiglass nor the elk shot
in the middle of a joke, but honest drunks,
crossed swords above the bar, three men hung
in the bad painting, other riding off
on the phony green horizon. The owner,
fresh from orphan wars, loves too
but bad as you. He keeps improving things
but can't cut the bodies down.

You need never leave. Money or a story
brings you booze. The elk is grinning
and the goat says go so tenderly
you hear him through the glass. If you weep
deer heads weep. Sing and the orphanage
announces plans for your release. A train
goes by and ditches jump. You were nothing
going in and now you kiss your hand.

When mills shut down, when the worst drunk
says finally I'm stone, three men still hang
painted badly from a leafless tree, you
one of them, brains tied behind your back,
swinging for your sin. Or you swing
with goats and elk. Doors of orphanages
finally swing out and here you open in.

For Harold Herndon

– *Richard Hugo*

From "The Lady of Kicking Horse Reservoir"
1973, W.L. Norton & Co.

To Die in Milltown

is to have an old but firmly painted name
and friends. The Blackfoot stops, funereal
and green, and the eagles headed north
for sanctuary wait for our applause
to fly them home. At 6 A.M.
the fast train east divides the town,
one half, grocery store and mill,
the other, gin and bitter loss.

Even the famed drunk has begun to fail.
His face, fat yesterday and warm, went
slack thin color, one more eerie morning
off the river, bones of ugly women
in his bed. The timber train at noon
divides the town an hour into dying cars.
By four, all bears in the protective hills
hum the air alive. And should the girl
all drunks recall, the full one filled with sun
return, her teeth intact and after 40 years
her charm preserved in joke, the aging drunks
will claim they cheated death with mash.
Death, the Blackfoot says, but never snow.

To die in Milltown, die at 6 P.M.
The fast train west rattles your bourbon warm.
The latest joke is on the early drunk:
sing one more chorus and the nun you love
will dance here out of habit. To live
stay put. The Blackfoot, any river
has a million years to lend, and weather's
always wild to look at down the Hellgate –
solid gray forever trailing off white rain.
Our drinks are full of sun. These aging eagles
climb the river on their own.

For Gene Jarvis

– *Richard Hugo*

From "The Lady of Kicking Horse Reservoir"
1973, W.L. Norton & Co.

□ Michael E. Moon

Michael Moon's 1979 novel "John Medicinewolf" tells of the grandson of a full-blooded Lakota Sioux living with his wife and young son on "Porcupine Creek" across a dam from Milltown. It was published by the Dial Press of New York. Moon grew up in Missoula. He died of cancer in 1986.

From John Medicinewolf

Friends

It seems like every time Lucinda gives me a gift, it ends up having significance. The gift itself, I mean. She seems to have a knack for that. Either the gift itself has significance or it leads into some kind of adventure that ends up being a story, and then of course the story has significance.

For example, one time she gave me a knife. It was a beautiful knife, handmade by an old man who lives in Milltown. His name is Ruana, and his knives are world famous.

Our house is about four miles from Milltown, which is the place where Ruana lives. But Milltown is on the other side of the Clark Fork River, as well as the Blackfoot River, because the two rivers come together just below our place.

You can walk to our house from Milltown, but you have to walk across the railroad trestle that comes from the sawmill and crosses the reservoir above Milltown dam and then joins the railroad tracks that go past our house. Still, that's easier than driving. If you drive, you have to go clear around through Matthewburg. Which would be about twenty miles. The railroad was built first, so it took the smartest route.

Well, Lucinda gave me this knife, which had a handle made of antler, and a blade about eight inches long. You need a heavy blade, to cut open the ribcage on an elk. Many people even use hatchets. This blade was heavy and made of very fine steel. And it was perfectly balanced against the handle. This means you can balance it on one finger by holding your finger at the point where the blade goes into the grip. All *Ruana* knives do that.

Ruana once told me that the best steel he's ever found for making knives comes from the leaf springs of old Studebakers. For second best he uses old discarded planer blades, from the sawmill. That's why he lives in Milltown. The knife Lucinda gave me was from a Studebaker series.

John Medicinewolf

It was probably the most beautiful knife I had ever seen. I think it is even nicer than my grandfather's hunting knife. His knife, he claimed, was made from a broken sword of a blue-coat killed with Custer. It was one of his stories. He would tell about how his father killed the soldier, at great danger, and then claimed the broken sword. Then my grandfather would take out the hunting knife and say, "In fact, here's the knife that my father made from that sword." As if the fact he had the knife somehow proved the rest of the story.

He did that a lot with stories. He had a story about catching an eagle with his bare hands, to obtain a warrior's feather. He said the eagle was so powerful it picked him up, as he held fast with a warrior's grip, and carried him through the air a few feet. Then he plucked a tail feather and dropped to the ground. But when he fell, he fell on his back and broke an arrow in his quiver.

At the end of this story he would search through his belongings and bring out an old broken arrow. "Here," he would say, "is the broken arrow – to prove the story."

Anyway, the knife Lucinda gave me was of high quality, and beautiful. The only problem was that it didn't have a sheath. And in the end that turned out to be quite a problem.

I wanted to go see my friend, Justin Thundergun. My son is named after Justin Thundergun, who was a Pikunis, but a friend anyway. A good friend. He would appreciate the knife, so I went to show it to him.

It was a dark and rainy night in late autumn, and the wind was cold.

I knocked on Justin's door. He was home, but he was with Isobel, and he wasn't answering. So I decided to go see this girl named Carol Lodgegrass. She's a little strange, but her house was only a couple of blocks away, and I was cold.

I was still carrying the knife around in my hand because it didn't have a sheath, and the steel was reflecting bursts and flashes of light onto the wet pavement. Cars driving by on the street had their windows fogged up and left little rooster tails of mist behind the tires.

I felt funny just carrying the eight-inch knife around in my hand that way, but I couldn't figure out what to do with it. Finally, in desperation, I tried to slip it down inside my boot. I tried that, but after a couple of steps I decided the knife was too sharp and might cut my ankle. So I pulled out the knife and turned around.

I hadn't noticed him before but there was a man walking along the sidewalk in a trenchcoat. He looked like a foreign student. When he saw me pull out the knife and turn around, he screamed and started to run.

"Wah!" he screamed.

I hollered "Hey, wait!" and I sort of accidentally shook the knife in his direction.

John Medicinewolf

"Wah, Wah!" he screamed, and he lowered his head and ran just about as fast as anyone I've ever seen run. I even think he might have been running as fast as a healthy whitetail deer.

So I continued on my way to see Carol Lodgegrass. I knew I had to get off the streets with my knife, before I gave someone a heart attack.

I got there, but Carol wasn't home. However, the guy she lived with, whose name I never did manage to figure out, was. He was writing a term paper on Bertrand Russell. At least I think that's what he was doing. I'm not positive, but that's the sort of thing he used to do a lot.

I showed him my new knife, which he disliked, and I told him the whole story about the guy in the trenchcoat and what happened and everything. He thought it was funny, which was my intention, and he laughed.

Then he told me, in a roundabout way, why he hated me, and he kicked me out. It turns out this was mostly because of Carol, although he had a difficult time putting that notion into Bertrand Russell-type words. It also was because whenever I told a funny story it would make him angry, as he had no innate sense of humor of his own, and he was jealous of mine.

I used to feel sorry for him sometimes.

He and Carol lived in an upstairs apartment of a house by the Clark Fork River. If you took a stick and threw it in the river where we live at Porcupine Creek, and if the stick made it over the Milltown dam right away, which it probably wouldn't, it would still take three or four hours to make it down river to where her house was.

There was a porch up on the second floor, where you could sit and pretend that you were a captain far out at sea. So I sat there a while, pretending that I was a captain far out at sea. Maybe the skipper of an ocean-going tug, towing a raft of spruce logs to Japan. I would sit up there on the bridge judging the weather. The mate comes up to me with a big white cup full of black, steaming coffee, and it smells delicious. "Well, Skipper," he would say, "how do you judge the weather?"

I was also watching the river and the cottonwood trees and sort of hoping that Carol Lodgegrass would come home.

But she didn't.

So I finally went down the wooden stairs, and as I came around the corner of the house I saw a police car, patrolling slowly by like a minesweeper in the night, idling down the dark street and shining its spotlight into dark corners. Out of instinct I ducked back behind the house.

I suddenly realized they were probably looking for me. After all, I still had the knife in my hand.

I snuck along a hedge, starting to tremble. Pretty soon I could see another police car sitting at the end of the block with all his lights out. The weather was cold

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though, and the car's exhaust was steaming up into clouds and giving him away. So I got down on my stomach and crawled into the brush along the river.

I realized how it would look if the police caught me, sneaking along the river with the knife in my teeth. I thought about just going up and explaining the situation, telling them the truth. Just me and the policeman, human beings talking together.

But I knew what would have happened.

When Justin Thundergun finally opened the door, the first thing he did was offer me a cup of coffee. I was soaking wet from crawling through the brush, and he could tell I was cold. "You look pretty cold," he said, with a twinkle in his voice.

Isobel was still there, and he was painting a portrait of her, I think.

He had tins of blue and yellow paint scattered all over the floor. And he always used blue and yellow for the things he loved.

I told them the police were looking for me.

"The police are looking for me," I said. I tried to make my voice completely noncommittal. No humor, no sarcasm, no fear, no confusion. Just simple fact: "The police are looking for me," the same way you would say: "Someone stole the lawn sprinkler."

They didn't say anything about the knife, which I set down on a pile of *National Geographics*. Justin offered me some wine. I happened to notice that Isobel looked uncommonly beautiful.

"Would you like some wine?" Justin asked, as if he'd suddenly thought of it. Which he probably had.

I said: "Yes, of course. Thank you."

"I've been painting Isobel's picture," Justin went on, pointing to the canvas.

What he meant was that he had been painting a picture of Isobel.

It was impossible to tell from the painting itself. It's always impossible to tell what Justin's paintings are of. About all you can tell, after some experience, is whether it's of something he likes or not. You can tell that from the colors. Oddly enough, he will paint things he doesn't like from time to time. Not like most artists.

Justin had a habit of constantly tugging at his gray beard. He had very black hair, but a gray beard.

Justin tugged on his gray beard and gradually got drunk. We drank that bottle and started on another. Isobel fell asleep.

Finally he got too drunk to paint, and he accidentally stepped in a tin of daisy yellow, getting his sock wet. Everywhere he walked he left little splotches of yellow on the floor.

I imagine those little splotches of yellow are still there if you ever want to check up on this story.

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After we had been drinking wine for about three hours, Justin leaned over and looked me in the eye.

He tugged on his gray beard.

He looked me in the eye and tugged on his gray beard.

Finally he asked: "Do you want to talk about why the police are looking for you?"

"If you don't, that's all right too," he quickly added.

I told him the whole story about the knife, the guy in the trenchcoat, and the policeman. I showed him my new knife. Isobel was still asleep. Justin picked up the knife and laughed and laughed his incredible laugh.

Suddenly he grasped it by the blade and flipped the knife across the room, sticking it in the wall. He did that because he was drunk and he felt like it; and after all it was harmless.

I left it there that night because it didn't have a sheath, and I didn't want to carry it home anyway. A week or so later I came back to get it, but by that time Justin had started hanging one of his hats on the blade, where it stuck through into the next room.

That knife stayed stuck in the wall for three-and-a-half years. I finally took it down after Justin died.

Since that time my wife has made me a sheath. It is a beautiful tooled leather sheath with designs etched on it to match my quiver. She also made the quiver. Both of them are made from the hides of elk I shot and are beaded with porcupine quills. The designs are prairie Lakota, as I have taught her.

The reason I'm telling you all that, in this particular chapter, is because she is a friend too.

In fact, one of the best.

Talking about Justin reminds me of something else he did one time. Halloween was coming, and Justin wanted to do something for the trick-or-treaters.

Now, Justin considered himself to be an artist. But obviously you can't sell many pictures of stuff that people can't tell what it's a picture of, so he didn't, and consequently he was very poor. Sometimes the only thing he would have to eat for days would be oatmeal. Oatmeal and ketchup and maybe some homemade beer.

Anyway, he didn't have much money, but somehow he scraped enough together to buy a small box of Butterfinger candy bars. For the trick-or-treaters. He set them by the door and made sure his porch light was on to let them know he was home. He lived in a basement apartment, and you had to walk down a short flight of stairs to get to his door.

Only one thing went wrong: Justin had managed to get the days of the week

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mixed up in his head, and this was not Halloween, but the night before. So nobody came.

Justin was crushed.

The next day he told some friends who came over to visit about his experience. Then he was informed that the night before hadn't been Halloween and that the present day was Halloween. Justin smiled like the trick-or-treater that was secretly in him.

But things were still going wrong.

These so-called friends of Justin's were mostly art students from the university, and as such they were mindless and selfish and inconsiderate and a little stupid. Riffraff. Anyway, they ate all the Butterfingers. Justin was too polite to stop them.

A couple of hours later Justin told me the whole story over a strawberry milkshake that I had brought to him because his house was close to the Tastee Freeze. I had accidentally won it in a minor contest that I didn't even know I was in until after I had won, and I'm allergic to strawberries.

Anyway, he told me the whole story.

I felt so sorry for him I gave him enough money for another box of Butterfingers. I told him he could reload some shotgun shells I had in return for the money. He knew it was slight charity, because I am perfectly capable of reloading shotgun shells myself, and I never use them anyway. But he let me get away with it for the sake of the children.

The children came in droves, dressed like witches and goblins and ghosts and vampires and rabbits and ballerinas and hoboes and cats and cowboys and supermen and phantoms and skeletons and Batmen and devils and pirates and soldiers and circus performers. One kid even came dressed up like Charlie the Tuna.

It was great.

The Murderer

One day my wife captured a murderer.

Well, I mean she helped capture a murderer. Obviously she couldn't have captured him all by herself. In order to "capture" a murderer by yourself, you still need the Force of Society behind you. In fact, in this case she didn't even know he *was* a murderer.

She was what the newspapers called "instrumental in his capture."

The whole thing happened by accident; it was just one of those things. I was away at the time splitting cottonwood down in Smiley's lower meadow. The wood

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I was splitting was from a log I had bucked into stove-length pieces the week before. That was done, and now I was merely splitting up the roundwood, using a hammer and wedge. It was a pleasant summer morning, and I could smell the fresh wood and hear the meadowlarks.

The meadowlarks are awfully nice down there, and the cottonwood smelled good too, because it was so green.

Of course, with cottonwood it's better not to split it green. You should really cut it in the winter, and then split it up during the summer. It's a lot more difficult the way I was doing it, and I was sweating. In fact, I tied a handkerchief around my forehead to keep the sweat out of my eyes.

Since I didn't have the chain saw going, I couldn't help but notice the helicopter flying low, up and down the river. I could hear it skudding low behind the trees, and then get a glimpse of it flashing between them. It was working back and forth, sort of lazily, and it looked like a giant noisy dragonfly with TV-camera eyes.

It's a funny thing about those TV-camera eyes. That's the feeling I got. You see, the people in town have a river race once a year, where different people who have boats and rafts and canoes (even teams do it like the Milltown Volunteer Fire Department) have a race from the Milltown dam to town. I thought maybe they were having the race that day. If you live on Porcupine Creek and you don't have a radio or TV, you hardly ever get the news; so I thought, well they *could* be having that river race. It was too far to the river and too many cottonwoods and brush for me to tell for sure.

That would explain why I thought of the TV-camera eyes. If they were having the river race, the helicopter would have been the local news station, filming shots of guys sneaking drinks from beer cans they had stashed in the bottom of the raft or maybe some athletic college guys falling out of their canoe, and of course a couple of shots of girls in bikinis. Maybe THE VOICE could be saying something like "this is the third year now that women have entered the race, and it looks like this might be the girls' lucky year," and other things like that. You know what I mean.

But it turned out to be different.

It turned out that the helicopter was the police, looking for the murderer. There was no river race that day.

The whole thing is strange, because even while I was thinking about the river race, I was having a vision of police cars parked in the driveway of our cabin. Just sitting there quietly, like the policemen themselves were all down by the river checking for dead fish, and every once in a while you would hear something on the radios – all of them at once – but you wouldn't be able to hear it very well because policemen always leave their windows rolled up and their doors locked, even on very hot days.

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But anyway, I was having that vision. I guess it was mental telepathy, like my wife and I sometimes have.

Although I didn't know it at the time, the whole thing had begun earlier that morning, right after I left to go split wood. About nine o'clock my wife saw a young boy walking along the railroad line that runs past our shack. "He had an old black dog with him," she said, "and a small gray traveling case, like the ones they give you when you ride on an airplane."

It said "TWA" on each side, she told me later. He was also wearing a funny green stocking cap.

At first she thought nothing of it, figuring he was out for a hike. People use that section of track once in a while when they want to reach the river. To fish or whatever. But later in the day she saw him walking back toward town.

"He looked weird," she said, "limping and disoriented." She actually talks like that – it's one of the things I like about her. "The weather is beautiful ... gray and drippy," or "the tree looked funny ... leaning and laughable." She commonly uses that construction in her speech.

She said the boy was extremely weary and could hardly stand. He was walking along the tracks like his legs were sore and his feet were blistered. He had lost his traveling case, or at least he wasn't carrying it anymore. He was just a tired, defeated adolescent. She said the old black dog was following along, but about twenty feet behind. The dog's tongue was hanging out, and he looked like a dog looks when he's had a long, hard chase.

Somehow that picture always hurts me.

I just think of this kid with a funny green stocking cap, limping along the railroad tracks with the faithful dog behind him; and the smell of creosote from the tracks, and the weather turning hot.

Then the worst thing of all.

My dog saw the boy's dog, and my dog started to raise hell, barking and trying to get at it. The boy had been staring down the railroad tracks, limping toward town. But the barking made him stop, and he sort of stood there looking confused; my wife was struggling to keep our dog under control. He just stood there and stared at her for a long time.

Then he started to cry.

Standing there in the sun crying, and shoulders heaving, and lost. He was crying.

Naturally Lucinda felt sorry for him and wanted to ask him what was the matter and invite him in and give him something cold to drink. He was staring at our cabin and weeping, tears running down his face like hot candle drippings.

She started to say something to him, to invite him in, but our dog – Half-Coyote – was acting up so bad, and she couldn't find a rope to tie him with, so she

decided not to. Besides, she was alone with the baby, and the boy was actually a little bigger than she was, although of course he was probably harmless and she always had Half-Coyote. But it was hot, and she couldn't tie up Half-Coyote and she didn't know what to do.

After a long time the boy finally left, limping slowly along the rails toward town, with his old black dog behind him. The boy's shoulders were still heaving in sudden fits.

By this time the weather was very hot.

My wife immediately walked down to the ranch buildings where Curley our neighbor lives. She wanted to use Curley's telephone, and since Curley's wife was there, my wife called the sheriff.

She thought maybe the boy with the old black dog and the funny green stocking cap was a runaway who wanted to get found.

The sheriff sent all his men out at once, although my wife had a hard time explaining to him where we live. They found the boy hiding in the shade of the old railroad tunnel. The tunnel is only about half a mile from our cabin, although I've never been in it and I forbid my son Justin to go in it. I'm always afraid it could cave in. But I imagine the temperature is a lot cooler in there. The boy was in there resting when the sheriff's men caught him.

It seems that the boy with the funny stocking cap was a murderer, and they were looking for him.

They said that he murdered his babysitter the night before, by beating her over and over with a sock full of flashlight batteries. My wife hadn't heard about it, because if you live on Porcupine Creek and you don't have a radio or TV, you hardly ever get the news.

But then again it happened in Town. That sort of thing is always happening in Town.

Most of the sheriff's men that arrived were not regular policemen, but "Special Deputies." They are special deputies mostly because they own four-wheel-drive pickup trucks, and they like uniforms. They call themselves the "4 x 4 Patrol," and they participate in searches for lost hunters and safety patrols during river races and crowd control at the County Fair to keep the teen-agers in line and raids on hippy communes and once in a while a real manhunt.

This was a real manhunt, and they were "combing the area." But of course they never left the roads, because then they would have to leave their four-wheel-drive pickup trucks.

It was mostly special deputies that arrived on the scene. In fact the sheriff himself didn't arrive until it was all over. Sometimes the sheriff is like that. After all,

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he has to run for reelection, so he's more careful.

The special deputies figured the murderer might be in the tunnel, so they split up into two groups and drew their guns and sealed off both ends of the tunnel, being careful not to step into the light at the entrances. Then they fired tear gas into the tunnel and drove him out that way. It sort of reminded me of the time my brother and I used a burning tire to drive a bear out of his den during the winter. We felt terrible about it afterwards. After they had driven the murderer out of the tunnel with tear gas, they handcuffed him to a spruce tree. It just so happens that it is the very same spruce tree under which I proposed to my wife the second time, while we were out gathering pine cones to sell to the Forest Service to get seeds from.

I have no doubt that you will think I intend some sort of symbolism or something by having it be the same spruce tree that they handcuffed the murderer to, but it just isn't that way. I admit that it is an extraordinary coincidence, especially considering the very large number of spruce trees even within a mile of our cabin, but I can't help it. That's just the way it happened. The spruce tree is right next to the road, if that makes it a little easier to believe.

One of the special deputies had a Kodak Instamatic, so they each took turns, one at a time standing beside the murderer – handcuffed to the tree there – and had their picture taken with him. The murderer just stood there blinking his eyes, either from the tear gas or the hot sun. Maybe he was blinking his eyes because of the flashcubes. Anyway, he just stood there, and they took pictures. He wasn't crying anymore, but he looked terribly confused.

They took the pictures one at a time, to show that each special deputy himself had participated in the capture of a murderer.

The Deer – One

One time while at the sawmill I witnessed a strange occurrence with a whitetail deer.

The bull chain had broken and the entire sawmill was shut down. Some people call the bull chain a "log haul." It's a very large conveyor chain with steel dogs that carry the sawlogs up out of the log pond and into the mill. Ice had frozen on some of the idler sprockets, and finally one link of the chain slipped off and the whole length of chain got hung up in the iron frame and broke. So the mill was down, waiting for us to fix it.

I had just taken the truck up to the shop to get another bottle of acetylene. We had to cut some of the channel-iron to free the chain, and we had run out of acetylene.

I got back down to the log pond and was standing there by the truck when I saw

these two deer. They were running toward us down the river on the ice. All the other guys were paying attention to their work and didn't see the animals.

The two deer immediately struck me as being peculiar, because one was a whitetail and one was a mule deer. I had seen that in my dream, and that's part of what made me feel peculiar. Most people never see it at all in their whole lives. It is very, very rare that a whitetail and a mule deer will run together.

The one in front was the whitetail. You can tell them apart by the way they run, with the mule deer sort of hopping like a kangaroo.

As they got closer I could see why they were running together. It was fear. They were being chased by two men on snowmobiles, far up the river on the ice. When the snowmobiles came within sight of the sawmill, they turned off abruptly and ducked into the timber. But the deer came running on, terrified.

There was a wooden dam about twelve feet high that was originally built to back up water for the log pond. The lumber on the sides of the dam had worn smooth by generations of water flowing over it. The deer were headed more or less toward that dam.

Suddenly they each demonstrated the difference in their kind. The mule deer cut across the river to the north and ran up the bank and back into the woods through a patch of timber too thick for snowmobiles. This is because when a mule deer is in trouble she'll always head for the high ground and timber. The whitetail deer, on the other hand, broke to the south and ran toward a channel of open water between the ice and the mill. When a whitetail is in trouble he'll always try and cross open water. In this case, to actually cross the open water, the whitetail would have had to swim across and climb up the bank and then negotiate its way through the sawmill.

I'm sure she would have done that, though, being more afraid of the dogs than of the buildings and humans of the mill.

But she didn't make it.

She jumped into the water and swam across; a distance of about thirty-five feet. But she couldn't get out of the water on the other side. There was a fairly thin sheet of ice about five feet out from the bank on the water, and she couldn't get up on it. Every time she put her front hooves up on the ice for footing it would break. She couldn't get out. She was just swimming around about seventy-five feet from me, trapped in open water.

I didn't quite know what to do. Finally I yelled at the rest of the guys to come and look at the trapped deer. It was swimming around out there, frightened and fatigued.

When he saw the deer, Joshua French immediately put down his welding rod and ran into the boom shack. It surprised me to see him move so fast. He emerged carrying the rope they throw to a guy if he falls off the boom and into the pond.

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Carrying the rope in great loops over his shoulder he ran back down the gangway to the edge of the ice.

Joshua was born and raised on a ranch, of course, but I was still fairly impressed. He fashioned a lariat on one end of the rope and edged his way out onto the ice. The rest of us held the trailing rope in case he fell through. He twirled the rope three times and threw the noose neatly around the deer's head. Then we all pulled together and dragged the deer up onto the bank.

It just lay there, utterly exhausted. Joshua sat beside it, petting it and scratching it behind the ears, and telling her to take it easy.

It was a pregnant doe, so actually Joshua had rescued two deer.

Joshua always did have a thing for deer. Of course he hunted them in the fall like everybody else; but during the winter he would go up Spruce Creek on snowshoes and cut down aspen and lay them out on the snow to provide the deer with some feed. Not too many people know that.

Anyway, she lay on the ice, just lying there and breathing hard. Pretty soon we could tell that she was starting to revive, and we finally backed away and let her get to her feet. She stood up and shook off the water and began to walk away kind of shaky down the river on the ice. It was then that we realized our mistake. She started to run toward the dam again.

Looking at it in retrospect, we should have thrown her in the back of the pickup at the very beginning and taken her clear to the end of the dike. It was frozen solid up there, and she could have recrossed the river on the ice and gone back into the woods. But we didn't.

What was causing the problem was this: We had a footbridge that hung from cables above the dam. Twice a shift, three of us would go out on the bridge with long-handled spuds and chip away the newly formed ice in the water below. The result was a channel of open water about six feet wide along the top edge of the dam. We had to keep this channel free of ice or it would have expanded and broken the dam.

Anyway, the deer headed for that channel of open water. I ran for the end of the bridge, figuring I could get up on it and scare her back the other way. But I had to go clear around the pumphouse, so I was too late. She jumped into the open water and began to swim.

The current from the river immediately swept her over.

There was a pool of rough water on the bottom side of the dam because the continual current from the waterfall would not let the river freeze at that particular point. But the water was pretty turbulent, and the current was swift. There was nothing we could do. It made me sad to see her swim around out there, but I was

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forced to agree that the life of a deer was probably not worth the life of a man.

Water is more durable than rock. *Mini sanpa suta imnija.*

We watched her swimming around in slightly inclined circles, like the circles of a raven. She swam for about half an hour fighting the current. Finally she went under the ice, together with the fawn inside her.

The day following our unsuccessful rescue, all of us that participated were given three days off without pay, as a disciplinary action.

We had left our work to rescue the deer, and that had cost the sawmill money.

I don't know – sometimes I think maybe we should move; up to Alaska or British Columbia or somewhere.

The next week we saw the snowmobilers a couple of times crossing some high open ground above the mill. Joshua would curse the snowmobiles each time, and the evil of them began to grow and enlarge itself in Josh's mind.

Finally, one day he smuggled in a carbine that he owned, a .220 Swift. He placed it under a piece of canvas in his operator's shack and waited.

Joshua operated the debarker at that time. The debarker was a fairly large structure about twenty-five feet above the log pond, and it dumped peeled logs into the pond day and night. Situated as it was it provided a good clear shot at the hillside across the river.

Naturally, after he brought in the rifle the snowmobiles ceased to appear. We didn't see them for several days, although Joshua occasionally lost a little time watching for them. I almost forgot about the rifle. Or maybe I simply hoped Josh had forgotten about it. The life of a man is not worth that of a deer.

Then one day toward the end of the shift the snowmobiles reappeared, pursuing a deer high up the hill at the edge of the timber. They were about three hundred yards away and running fast. Joshua ran bowlegged to the shack, retrieved his rifle, and laid it across a steam pipe on a line between his cheek and the lead snowmobile. For some reason I remember that it was the steam pipe on the south side, the one that drives the log loader from the deck onto the cutoff chain. I was scared. I couldn't believe that Josh was actually going to shoot.

He squeezed off a shot and the gun roared.

The roar of the rifle was returned by an echo along the river, and then there was a small popping sound from the lead snowmobile.

It stopped suddenly, and a curious whine came from its engine cowling. Josh laughed and fired again. The second snowmobile, which was turning back toward the wounded one, began to sputter. The operator jumped off and ran into the woods, and

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his snowmobile gradually slowed to a rather ignoble halt.

Joshua French rubbed his nose, nodded curtly, and went back to work.

The sheriff was out the next day to investigate, naturally. In fact one of the men on the snowmobiles turned out to be a special deputy.

But there were no witnesses to the shooting in *that* sawmill.