

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1988

The Promise of higher ground

Bruce Weide

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Weide, Bruce, "The Promise of higher ground" (1988). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 3859.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/3859>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

COPYRIGHT ACT OF 1976

THIS IS AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT IN WHICH COPYRIGHT
SUBSISTS. ANY FURTHER REPRINTING OF ITS CONTENTS MUST BE
APPROVED BY THE AUTHOR.

MANSFIELD LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
DATE: 1988

THE PROMISE OF HIGHER GROUND

By

Bruce Weide

B.A., Physical Geography

California State University Chico, 1979

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

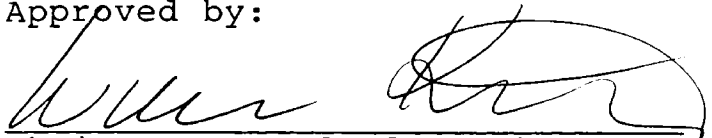
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

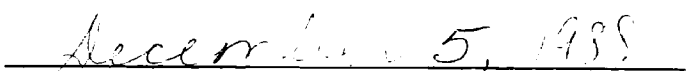
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1988

Approved by:


Chairman, Board of Examiners


Dean, Graduate School


Date

UMI Number: EP35004

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP35004

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SOLO	1
DISTANT THUNDER	26
BE QUIET, BE SILENT, BE CALM	
A One Act Play	42
THE NOVICE	72
THE PROMISE OF HIGHER GROUND	
An Essay	79
THE SMELL OF WOOD SMOKE HIGH ABOVE MONTANA	
A Parody	107
SALMON DREAMS	116
DIRECTIONS TO THREE FINGERS LOOKOUT	
A Poem	133
CLOSE TO THE ABYSS	
Another Poem	135

SOLO

Common to all advanced cultures is the belief that long ago there occurred a golden age in which Man lived the life of a noble savage. I am a bone hunter, or so my friends call me. Archeological research has shown me that humans have changed very little in the past 7000 years. We are a gregarious predator that, like the wolf, enjoys the company of its own kind. No race of Men has ever lived in harmony with anything, including themselves. However, bear in mind that I used the plural, and not the singular form of the word for Homo sapien. I say this because of a discovery I made while exploring a desert canyon in southeastern Utah.

I have always been fascinated by skulls, tracks, and buried treasure. In my study hangs the skull and massive antlers of an elk. From my desk, I can reach out and touch the skull of a wolf, sea lion, meadow mouse, and pelican. Skulls are the last and ul-

timate piece of evidence that an organism existed; they are part of a much bigger story. Unearthing a bone or artifact is like finding a few scraps from a shredded message. I have always enjoyed pondering such scraps and then speculating on what the missing pieces said.

I remember a scene from childhood, when I spotted the tracks of a squirrel in a snowy forest. At first the tracks appeared close together and then the distance between them increased. I saw where a pair of wings, most likely those of a goshawk, had brushed upon the snow. I saw one more set of wing prints. Beyond that, the squirrel tracks disappeared and drops of blood colored the snow.

As a youth, I envisioned myself an archeologist, an adventurer in exotic lands, the finder of bones from civilizations long past and the teller of forgotten stories. My high school counselor, whose common sense exceeded my own, guided me towards more marketable skills. I graduated from my first four years of college with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration.

At the age of 37, and after many detours, I returned to the world of academe and earned a master's and doctorate degree in archeology. Two things influenced my decision to conduct a doctoral study on the Anasazi who, from 1300 B.C. to 800 A.D., inhabited a portion of the Colorado Plateau province and then suddenly vanished. One was a book, "The Desert," by John C. Van Dyke, which I found on a dusty shelf in a cheap Phoenix hotel. "Life becomes simplified from necessity," he wrote. "It begins all over again, starting at the primitive stage. There is a reversion to the sav-

age. Civilization, the race, history, philosophy, art - how very far away and how very useless, even contemptible, they seem. The joy of mere animal existence, the feeling that it is good to be alive and face to face with Nature's self, drives everything else into the background." I wanted to know the desert that Van Dyke had described. The other thing that influenced my decision to study the Anasazi was a research grant from the University of New Mexico.

During my third field season, after a week of solitary exploration, I came to the confluence of Codee Gulch and Dead Horse Canyon. The sandstone wall, at the juncture of the two canyons, formed a prow that towered 1,200 feet above me. Upon this prow, I spotted a concavity, a large hollow that had been eroded by the wind. A prime place, I thought, for an Anasazi with any sense to live, or at least camp.

I ascended an alluvial fan to the cave and confirmed my intuitions. At the back of the hollow and beneath a panel of petroglyphs I found bones arranged in the shape of a human being. This puzzled me because the bones were those of a cow. Where the skull should have been, I found a 3 x 5 inch, spiral bound notebook that contained the journal of Clark.

I lifted the journal from the dust and read. After I had copied it (taking the liberty to add some much needed punctuation and a few editorial notes where necessary [which are marked by brackets]), I placed the journal back in the sand. Perhaps Clark will return.

I do not know Clark's last name, the company he worked for,

or where he lived. This information could be found. However, even though I'm a scientist, I don't really need nor do I care to know these things. All I know of Clark is what he wrote. That is enough.

On the inside front cover of his notebook are these words; I believe they were Clark's last entry:

Lie down beneath a salmon colored canyon wall
that arches up, over, and nightward
to where the moon glides
from one white rock rim to another
in her search for the sun.

A breeze has found its way down
twisting and turning
with these roots of stone
beneath the mesa.

The wind sweeps the moonlit sands
that whisper slumber
Slumber.

[The first entry in the journal begins:]

Day 1, 9:15 a.m.: Three days all to myself! Three glorious days in which I will be alone and can do whatever I want.

The desert that stretches out before me has the deceptive look of a plain. But all is not as it appears. I know that hundreds, maybe thousands, of canyons exist out there. I am about to enter one of them.

I slept in the car last night. This morning, I celebrated the beginning of my adventure with three cups of strong coffee and

a Sarah Lee Chocolate Cake. My doctor has forbid me such luxuries.

The backpack I bought last week is packed and I'm ready to go. Not much else to say at this point, as nothing has happened.

12:30 p.m.: The shallow drainage I started down has turned into a canyon. The red sandstone walls stand a couple hundred feet tall and 50 feet apart. I can never see much farther than a quarter mile ahead or behind me because the canyon twists and turns as it descends deeper into the earth. I watched a raven fly to a spot next to the canyon rim where an updraft hurled him skyward for a hundred feet. He did this over and over.

6:10 p.m.: The canyon is now about 300 feet deep. I stopped near the entrance of a side canyon and said, "I'll make camp here." After a day of silence, my voice sounded very loud. At first I was going to set up camp beside a large boulder but then I thought about scorpions and how they live beneath rocks and come out at night. I moved my things to an open sandy area and gathered firewood. Now I have a fire going and am heating a can of Franco American Spaghetti, my favorite food when I was a kid.

About a mile back, I came to a place where the canyon had been scoured clean, the floor was just white sandstone. It reminded me of the huge cement culverts I played in years ago. A little way farther, the canyon floor dropped abruptly for ten feet. The shelf was made of white sandstone that overhung a lower layer of red sandstone. Apparently the red sandstone, which had

been undercut, is less resistant to erosion than the white sandstone. After making sure I could get back up, I jumped down onto a small sand dune.

Dinner is heated and it's beginning to get dark. I'm glad I'm here. I appreciate that Rene encouraged me to make this trip.

Day 2, 7:25 a.m.: I haven't slept that good in a long time. Woke up in time to see a thin crescent moon drop behind the canyon rim. Before I fell asleep, I saw three shooting stars and five satellites. I thought about the kids and Rene and how they were probably playing monopoly with her parents, all of them oblivious to the beauty of the night sky.

I'll bet they are eating scrambled eggs, with ham or sausage, and hashbrowns and orange juice for breakfast. I just ate a bowl of instant oatmeal. But I wouldn't trade places with them for all the world. The quiet and beauty of this canyon is incredible. Am going to explore the side canyon now.

10:50 a.m.: I've never been alone like this before - no TV, no radio, no telephone - nothing but me and the canyon. And the animals.

The side canyon I just hiked up has been narrower than the main canyon I came down yesterday. In one place I had to turn sideways in order to pass through. As I continued on, the canyon became shallower until it was no more than 50 feet deep. I found a place that provided easy access to the rim and scrambled up. Far in the distance, I saw the sun reflecting off of what must be

my car. I wished I hadn't seen that and descended back down into the canyon.

Wind and water have sculpted strange shapes in the sandstone. Right now, I'm sitting beside a gargoyle and across the canyon from me is a dinosaur.

1:30 p.m.: On my way out of the side canyon, I found a spring that isn't far from camp. Will return later and refill my water bottles. Right now, I want to explore farther down the main canyon. I have a couple hours and then I'll return. Tomorrow, I think I will just lie around camp and read a book called "Desert Solitaire." Rene gave it to me. Actually though, it seems a little silly to read about things I could be doing. Tomorrow will tell. If I start out for the car by two, I should get back to Rene and the kids before midnight.

2:45 p.m.: A mile or so below camp, I came to another shelf. I stepped out to the edge and saw a bluish-green pool 25 feet below. The scene looked like it came right off of a travel poster, except that I'd bet no one has ever seen this spot. I'm hot and sweaty and a swim would be refreshing.

At the moment, I'm sitting on the edge of the overhang, debating what to do.

Con - Don't do it; the canyon walls are vertical and there's no way back up to the top of the shelf.

Pro - Down from the pool, I can see the entrance of another side canyon.

Con - Never go somewhere that you can't retreat from.

Pro - I can go out the side canyon, circle back, and return to camp via the canyon I explored this morning.

Pro - I need to be more bold. I'm always too cautious!

Pro - I just thought about Wayne and how he might be hot-stuff at the office but what would he do here? I bet he wouldn't have the balls to jump.

Around 3:30 p.m.: I ruined my watch. I bundled up my clothes and tossed them to the edge of the pool, but I forgot to remove the watch. Just before jumping, I thought of one more con: People get paralyzed by leaping into water they've never been in before.

I climbed down a narrow slot that years of erosion had cut into the shelf. The sandstone felt cool and gritty against my skin. I came to the end of the slot and was still 15 feet above the pool. I pushed off and dropped into the water.

I swam and went underwater and turned somersaults. I felt as if I were a boy and had done something my mother would've cautioned me not to. Afterwards, I stretched out on a slab of sandstone and the sun dried me.

Time to get a move on or it will be dark before I reach camp. It's great getting out like this.

Evening: The side canyon was blocked by a shelf, this one even higher than the one above the pool. I tried to find a way up, but none existed. Light in the canyon had dimmed and something flew

close to my head. I looked up and, silhouetted against the strip of sky above me, I saw bats. A chill ran through my body.

I headed back to the main canyon. From inside my stomach I felt panic spread. My pulse increased until my temples throbbed. My breath was rapid and I fought the urge to run. I stopped for a moment, took a few deep breaths, and told myself to calm down. So what if I spend the night without a sleeping bag or fire, Big Deal.

I returned to the pool and thought, maybe if I stacked enough rocks I could reach the rim. The idea is ridiculous; to stack that many rocks would take forever. I decided to remain by the pool tonight. It is getting too dark to write. Tomorrow I will find a way out.

Day Three: Nights can be incredibly long if you don't sleep through them. When the sky turned grey, I started down the canyon. The next side canyon ended in a huge amphitheater, the roof of which jutted out at least 50 feet. Again, I returned to the main canyon and continued down. This fucking place is toying with me.

The walls must be 500 feet high now. Sunlight has finally found its way into the canyon and the air is warm enough to stop for a rest.

I dozed off and woke up with the sun beating down on me. My mouth feels as if I ate a brick of chalk. I need to find water. [Editorial Note: Clark scrawled out his next entry in big letters, that in places tore through three pages of the journal.]

I AM A DEAD MAN

Day Five, Early Evening: I finally reached the reeds and found water. My thinking is clearer now, though I am still in a bad way. Yesterday, in the late afternoon, I sprained my ankle.

What happened is, I came to another one of those damned shelves that form where white sandstone gives way to red. Thirty or forty feet below me, I could see a depression that had recently held water. Beyond the depression, I saw a small cottonwood tree and some reeds. Maybe it's water, I thought, or maybe its another trick. This place promises nothing and gives even less.

The decision of what to do was easy because I didn't have a choice. I had to go down. I rolled onto my stomach and eased myself over the edge. I searched for handholds and wormed my way down. When the angle of the rock became too steep to hold myself in, I closed my eyes and fell.

I hit the sand and heard a tearing sound in my right ankle, followed by pain that made me nauseous. I curled into a ball, hugging my knees. My stomach convulsed and I bit down on my lip. Nothing came up when I vomited. I lay on the sand and, for the first time in ten years, I cried.

The sun had fallen below the canyon rim before I sat up. I unlaced my boot, removed it slowly, and slid the sock down. My ankle had ballooned to twice its normal size and it hurt bad when I moved my foot. I stood up on my good leg and tried to walk. As soon as I put pressure on the right foot, the pain returned. I collapsed onto the sand and passed out.

The sun was high in the sky when I woke and my lips were parched. I started to crawl towards the reeds. I had to stop often and close my eyes. When the bright lights inside my head died down, I tried to focus on the reeds and began crawling again. Dehydration and pain must've made me delirious because the reeds appeared to be receding away.

I remember these thoughts: "I've moved, so I must be getting closer. Even if I'm not, I must appear confident. Never let them see you sweat. I am getting closer. I am. Am I?"

I laughed at the way words fluttered around in my head. Then I thought, "I must be serious and patient and trustworthy, loyal, friendly, and above all else, calm. I must confront this crisis calmly..., calmity..., calamity!" I burst out laughing again. "Calmly and calamity, so close... And I am close, though I have miles to go before I drink. Not miles, just feet. But I have no feet."

Before I passed out, I saw a raven. What impressed me about his flight was the way he glided through the air and never once moved his wings.

By the time I reached the reeds, only a narrow band of orange sunlight remained on the canyon rim. I dug down into the sand until it felt moist. With a flat piece of sandstone, I scooped out a hole. Water appeared in the bottom and the sides caved in. I dug deeper and drank.

This morning I watched the swifts fly. They fly with tremendous speed and grace, and come dangerously close to the canyon wall. Two swifts came together in mid-flight. They coupled and

fell towards the ground. Just before the birds smashed into the rocks, they let go of each other, and soared into the sky. What a way to have sex!

Rene must think something has gone wrong by now. I should've been back last night. I wish I were with her and the kids right now. But I won't see them for awhile. I may never see them.

I shouldn't think that way. I have water. But I don't have food and I can't move. I think a person can last three days without water and two weeks without food. What is it like to starve? I wonder how it feels to be one minute from death? Is there any warning, some kind of signal to take one last look around? Would I be able to kill myself if it got really bad?

My sister committed suicide ten years ago. She was 24 and had moved just north of us because she liked the ocean and redwoods. She had a boyfriend who drove an ambulance and all I know about her suicide is what he told me. He said that he had wanted to breakup with her but every time he talked about it, she threatened suicide. It's hard to be certain with people who make such threats; are they being serious or manipulative? Finally, he broke up with her. A few days later she called him and said that she needed to talk. He walked into her living room. She sat on the couch wearing a white negligee that he'd bought for her. She smiled at him and said, "Come closer. I have something for you." As he walked towards her, she pulled a gun out from beneath a pillow, stuck it in her mouth, and pulled the trigger.

It is too dark to see.

Day Six, The Hot Time: Death has preoccupied my thoughts. This morning I saw a repulsive and yet fascinating sight. I had been watching sunlight descend into the canyon when, from the corner of my eye, I noticed movement. A lizard held a pale yellow grub in his jaws. The grub wiggled back and forth in an effort to escape. Even after the grub had been swallowed, I could still see it move within the lizard's throat.

I heard the hollow creak of raven wings. The lizard dashed beneath a rock. Two ravens flew up canyon and disappeared around a corner. The lizard ran out from beneath the rock, climbed up the vertical sandstone, and crawled into a crack. I looked up at the canyon rim and thought, that's what I need to get out of here - wings or claws.

Day Seven - Morning: I dreamed about Rene last night. I sat at the dinner table with her and the kids. They ate hamburgers. Catsup and grease ran down their chins. Rene said, "Your father is dead. You must adjust." I tried to tell them I was alive but couldn't talk. Rene took another hamburger from a silver platter. She opened the bun and spread mayonnaise over a bunch of squirming grubs. She walked towards me. I closed my eyes. When I opened them, we were in the canyon. Rene had the face of a lizard. As she squatted down in front of me, her tail brushed my leg. "The things you know are useless," she said. "Soon you will be our meat."

"I will not die," I shouted.

"Only if man sees through the eyes of an animal shall he be

saved."

"I am not an animal."

"You must blind those eyes so that you may see anew."

I looked down at my hands; claws extended from my finger tips.

"Only if you see anew," she said and I drove the claws into my eyes.

I awoke with one thought running through my mind, "I will not die." Morning came and I crawled over to the water hole and drank. I ate the soft white roots of some reeds. They were not very satisfying and only served to awaken the pain of hunger.

To be truly absent from pain is to be dead. I can give up and be consumed or I can live. The only real failure is to give up. I've been whining for too long.

This makes me think of the conversation I had with Wayne. I'd been waiting in his office, which is bigger than mine. He wanted to discuss an insurance company we were going to insure. Wayne's uncle owns our firm, so Wayne has always had an advantage. They gave him a new desk last month and he got first pick of the art prints and here I am whining again.

The door opened and Wayne stepped in. He leaned back out the door and said, "Finish typing those reports, Sheila, and you can go." Wayne started to close the door and then leaned back out. "See you at the Edgewater," he added and closed the door. He winked at me and said, "A good secretary is an invaluable asset."

Wayne unlocked the liquor cabinet and pulled out a bottle of Johnny Walker Black. We talked some business and then he asked

about my vacation. I told him we were going to visit Rene's folks in Provo and that I'd spend a few days hiking.

"By yourself?" he asked. I nodded. He refilled our glasses. "You and the little woman not getting along?"

"No, that's not it at all. Haven't you ever wanted to spend some time alone?"

"Not three days worth. I'm a social animal, Clark." He grinned. "But it takes all kinds."

My nose felt numb and I knew I should stop talking or I'd make an ass of myself. I also knew I'd plow on ahead. "Do you ever feel like things have gotten out of hand."

"How so? Everything around here seems pretty shipshape to me."

Here's one of my problems - because I know that very few people take the time to listen, I get in a rush and don't always chose the right words to match the idea I'm trying to express. "I don't mean at the office. I mean life-in-general. For instance, the average American spends six months of his life waiting for red lights to turn green."

"I'll speak to the city council about abolishing stop lights."

"Don't you see, it's a symptom. That's mass craziness to spend half a year waiting for lights to change." I kept telling myself to stop, but of course I didn't. "Are you content with your life?"

"Basically, yeah. Oh sure, I could use a little more money and a little more sex, but who couldn't?" he said and laughed.

Like an idiot, I kept on talking. "Here's what I'm getting at; when we were kids we couldn't wait to grow up. And then one day, whammo, you're an adult and it's not all it was cracked up to be. Do you know what I mean?"

Wayne wiped a smudge of dirt from his shoe. "I guess I never let it bother me."

"Com'on Wayne! We're in our early 40's, we've got kids but no time for them, houses that are unpaid for and look alike... People say they have 25 per cent less money than they need and yet the average person will spend one year of his life looking for misplaced stuff. That's crazy! People have too much stuff and they still want more."

"Sounds to me like you need to have a yard sale." Wayne put the bottle back in the cabinet and locked it. "As for me, I'm a happy man." He straightened his tie. "And in a few minutes I'm going to be even happier. Enjoy your vacation, Clark."

Evening: I have eaten the meat of a lizard. He had stopped in the sand beside me and bobbed up and down as if he were doing push-ups. My hand shot out and he darted beneath a rock. I crawled over, pulled the rock back, and grabbed the lizard. He wiggled around in my hand and his skin felt dry, soft, and cool. He tried to bite my finger. For a moment, I watched the loose, blue skin of his throat move with each breath. I closed my eyes, and bit the lizard in half. I chewed rapidly and swallowed. The lizard's hind quarters and tail continued to move. I stuffed the remainder into my mouth.

I caught two more lizards. I am no longer a tourist down here. I have been naive, but now I will live.

The Day of The Helicopter: I am not certain which day this is, eight or nine? It must be day nine. I have found a hollow in the sandstone wall that is not far from the water hole. My ankle has grown less tender though it still hurts when I try to walk. This afternoon I heard a helicopter fly over. By the time I reached open ground, the helicopter had passed.

As the noise faded and silence returned, I felt two conflicting emotions:

1. I felt anger, fear, and frustration at having missed a chance to be rescued. Will they return? Had they spotted me, I could've been with my family tonight or tomorrow.

2. Overriding that feeling was one of apathy, or an acknowledgment of 'what is,' or whatever you want to call it. What could've happened doesn't matter because it didn't. The helicopter came, passed over, and I am still in the bottom of a canyon 500 feet below the rim. That's the situation. It is easier to deal with the way things are than to sort through an endless list of 'what if's.'

I'm no longer scared of the desert. I can make it out on my own.

Day of the Rabbit: The moon has returned. I have mastered the

art of lizard hunting. This morning I threw a rock and managed to stun a rabbit long enough to limp over and break its neck. I skinned it with a sharp black stone and laid the meat out to dry. I cut the skin into strips, that I soaked, and used to tie a cross piece on top of a stout stick. When the lashing dries, I will have a crutch. In a day or two I should be able to continue down canyon.

Day of Leaving: I can hobble along fairly well and will leave my hollow soon. I know how to find food. All I need is luck in finding water. I can not be in a hurry.

Evening: The sun had almost reached its high-point when I found a puddle. I cleared the oily surface of dead insects and drank. Damp sand clung to the knee of my pants and I brushed it off. The coolness at my knees made me laugh because it showed how much I had left to learn. I splashed water on my shirt and pants, soaked my bandana, and tied it into a skull cap. Air conditioning.

Day of the Coyote, The Hot Time: Half moon last night. A few days ago, I would've been walking at this time. Am now sitting in the shade of a juniper tree. Saw a coyote pissing on rocks and bushes this morning, probably marking his territory. Nothing moves out there now, not even the wind. Any animal with sense would escape the sun's heat. Do animals possess a sense of identity?

Why continue to write in this journal? Three answers come to

mind:

1. Writing gives me something to do. This is a stupid answer because the days are full enough. Writing is the product of leisure or neurosis.
2. I will be interested in the details of this experience [and here Clark scratched out the words, "should I ever return," and replaced them with] after I return.
3. Should I die, this journal found among my bones will be proof that I existed as long as I did. However, I'm not quite sure why this should be important. It comes from the fear of dying alone; thus the neurosis.

Day Of The Full Moon, Evening: Found a spring. It seeps down from ferns that grow between two different layers of sandstone.

Watched a raven playing on an updraft. In school, children are taught that animals do things because of instinct. The raven was playing, nothing else! A full moon is rising above the canyon rim.

Day After The Deer: Rounded a sharp corner in the canyon yesterday morning and was startled when a vulture flew a couple feet overhead. It had been feeding on the carcass of a doe. A few flies buzzed around the deer's glazed eyes but there was no smell of decay. Perhaps the deer fell from the rim this morning. Hopefully she had no young. Seems a little strange to think of an animal making a mistake like that.

Used the black stone to cut into the deer's hindquarters and

pulled the skin back. Bit into the meat which was still warm and moist with blood. Hacked more meat off with the black stone and ate. The vulture circled overhead.

A thumping sound vibrated through the canyon and grew louder. It was a helicopter. Suddenly thought of how I would look - hunched over the carcass - hands and face caked with blood. The noise grew louder. Scurried over to a boulder and crawled beneath it. The sand felt cool.

The helicopter appeared above the canyon rim. Sunglasses covered the pilot's eyes. Then the helicopter was gone and the noise gave way to silence.

Ate until full and hung some meat to dry. The vultures, coyotes, ravens, and ants can have the rest.

The Day Of Fire: After much trial and error, have learned how to make fire. No more cold nights! Made a bow from a tamarack stick and narrow strip of deer hide. Wrapped the leather strip around another stick and, by pulling the bow back and forth, drilled at a piece of wood. The friction brought a spark to life. Blew on it until the tender ignited.

No longer sleep as before. Naps or just being still is enough to feel rested. Sometimes thoughts are as loud as words. Living takes time, time to find food, to find water, to move down canyon.

The Day It Rained, evening: Just before dawn, a quarter moon rose. Have fashioned a bag from the deer's skin to hold the fire

making tools and black stone. More stuff. No longer need the crutch but it is a good walking stick.

Dark clouds moved over the canyon in the late morning, followed by the distant rumble of thunder, and the smell of moisture carried by the wind. The thunder grew louder and lightning flashed down. A few minutes after the rain started, muddy waterfalls shot over the canyon rim. Counted seven waterfalls. They started one after the other, not with a trickle that grew into a waterfall but as if someone had opened a flood gate. A reddish brown stream now flows down the canyon.

- Have thought about abandoning the journal.

- Went up a very narrow side canyon to where it ended in a huge rounded chamber. Magnificent! Water fell through a crack in the roof. Watched as the breeze carried dust particles round and round the chamber. Thought about the thousands of years it would've taken to form this chamber.

- Responsibilities = self-imposed limitations.

- The creek is gone. The only sign of it is damp sand and a few puddles. The sun is hot again. The shade of this cottonwood tree is pleasant. The leaves are no longer a brilliant green.

- The moon is no more than a sliver of light in the morning. Passed through a narrow section of canyon today. Had to climb

over, under, around, and through a pile of immense boulders. The canyon opened up again after that. It must be a couple hundred feet wide and a thousand feet deep.

- Saw cow shit today. Have dismantled the crutch. Fashioned a spear tip from a sharp stone and lashed it to the end of the pole. The air is still. The sun is very hot.

- No more moon.

- Killed a cow. Doing that with a spear is difficult. The meat is good. Can carry a lot of dried meat in the deer skin bag.

- The smell of water is in the air but no clouds. The lake [Powell] must be near. Have come to the confluence of a major canyon. Appears to be as large as this one. It is the hot time. No need to move.

- Saw a deep hollow in the wall above the confluence. Went up to explore. Found an Indian house made of sandstone blocks. Pictures of men and animals and horned gods are chiseled into the rock. Whoever lived here kept a journal.

- A new moon appeared this morning. Found a good spring below the hollow. Half way up the canyon wall is a nest of young ravens. The mother and father flew back and forth to the nest with food.

- Traveled a short ways up the new canyon. Killed another cow. Dried most the meat and stored it in the Indian house. A quarter moon last night. Glad it will soon be full again.

- Started down the canyon this morning. Stopped beside a large pool. Heard someone singing and saw a young girl. Probably the same age as Timmy.

Asked her why she was out alone. She and her family are on vacation in a houseboat. She showed off the rocks she'd found. Asked if she was running away. She said that with all the gold in her rocks, she could take care of herself. Asked if her family wouldn't miss her and wouldn't she miss them. She said, maybe but it's not the same anymore. Convinced her to go back.

- Have bathed and washed clothes in the pool. Will now head down to the houseboat.

- Saw the light of a television on the houseboat's back deck. Crept up closer and listened. A football game was on. Must be Monday night. Am back in the hollow right now.

- Magnificent sunrise this morning. Tonight the moon will be full. The ravens are teaching their young to fly.

* * * * *

And so the journal ended. Pages had been torn from the back. Whether Clark wrote anymore or used those back pages for fire starter, no one will ever know.

A much bigger question remains unanswered; did Clark return to his family or did he journey up the unexplored canyon? I have spent a good deal of time pondering that question. The clues found in his writing can point either way. Towards the end of his journal, there is a conspicuous absence of the word, "I," and no mention of his family. From this, I would surmise that he had begun to lose a sense of personal identity, that his existence had started to merge with that of the land surrounding him. However, this supposition could have been influenced by my own unconscious desire to believe in the Noble Savage.

Clark could just as likely have returned to his family. They, and especially Rene, seemed to provide the inspiration he needed to survive, following his accident. Other entries show a focus on the young of a species. He expressed concern over the dead deer's offspring. He seems to have been quite interested in the raven fledglings. And his conversation with the little girl hints at the importance of family.

The journal written by Clark chronicles the events of some seven weeks. He must have realized, given that much time, that his family thought him dead. Though all of us can at any given moment start anew, Clark's opportunity to do so was undeniable. Did he go home or continue the new life he had found in the canyons? What would you have done?

The answer I come up with changes according to my mood.

Whenever I am called away from my family to search for artifacts, I realize the importance that my husband and children hold in my life. They provide a nest of acceptance. I can not imagine being irrevocably separated from them.

However, when the stress of everyday life builds to a crescendo, when I waste time looking for some lost possession, when the kids become unbearable, or I find myself drumming my fingers on the dashboard as I wait for the light to turn green, I like to picture Clark wandering through a canyon, sitting out the hot time in the shade of a juniper, spearing cattle, and keeping track of the moon.

DISTANT THUNDER

I will save this one, he thought and put the last bullet in his pocket. From beyond the door he heard, "Tom, what are you keeping yourself cooped up inside for?"

He stood up from the rocking chair. "Is that you Amy?" He cocked his head to the side. "You've come back?"

"I only went to the barn to check on the colt," she laughed. "It's beautiful outside. The sun is shining, the air is warm. And I just saw my first buttercup."

He looked down at the rifle in his hand. Why was I loading this, he wondered. He set the rifle on two wooden pegs above the fireplace. A fire burned beneath a cast-iron pot that filled the room with the smell of beef stew.

"Com'on out, Tom," she called. "We'll take the day off and ride up to the high meadow." He smiled and reached for the brass door knob.

"Com'on out, Tom!" The voice sounded electric. "You know you're surrounded." The voice came from a bullhorn. "I don't want you to get hurt, I don't want me to get hurt, I don't want anyone to get hurt."

Tom backed away from the tarnished door knob. Pieces of shattered glass grated beneath his boots as he limped to the window. Three sets of head lights glared at the house. He took the rifle down from the pegs. Beside the fireplace, where a few red embers glowed, sat a can of baked beans with the lid peeled back. Tom stood beside the window and wiped his runny nose on the sleeve of his sheepskin mackinaw.

"It's cold out here, Tom. Let's call it quits." Bret McLavish set the bullhorn down on the front seat and exhaled into his hand. A white cloud rose through his cupped fingers. No response came from the log house. He walked back to the deputy's car.

"So you didn't think we could handle this ourselves?" said the deputy. His hand rested on his pistol.

"It's colder than a witch's tit out here. Pour me a cup of that coffee, Ted," Bret said to the man inside the car. He turned to

the deputy who had spoken. "Now what's eating' at you, Doug?"

"Why'd you call the Feds in?"

"I didn't," said Bret.

Ted sucked in his stomach to get past the steering wheel but then scooted out the passenger side. "There's two 'specialists' from the Treasury Department being choppered in. They're supposed to help us...."

"You mean they're going to fuckin' take over," said Doug.

Ted continued, "E.T.A. - 2200 hours, no wait a minute, that'd be 2300 hours. Anyway, in about 30 minutes." He reached inside the car for a box of donuts.

Doug grabbed a shotgun. "We can finish this ourselves. We don't need no fuckin' specialists." He worked the pump. "We haven't seen or heard the old fart moving around in there for over an hour. It's my bet he's asleep. This is the third night; he can't stay awake forever."

"You're eating this up like a tall dog in a meat locker, aren't you Doug?" Bret drank some coffee and spit it out. "Ted, make a note to buy a thermos that keeps things warm."

"Me and one of the guys can move up on the place," said Doug.

"This isn't a movie. Tom is a real live man with real live ammunition. All we have to do is wait him out."

"You don't have the balls for this job, McLavish. You're just a nice town constable." Doug grabbed a box of shells and walked away.

"In a couple weeks, after the election is over, we'll know if the people of this fine county agree with you, Doug. Now put the

toys back in the car."

The deputy continued to walk away. Ted ate a jelly- filled doughnut. "You just going to let him walk away like that?"

"No, I'm ordering you to shoot him in the knees," said Bret. "Do you want to get up on my back too?"

Ted shook his head. "Have one of these," he said and offered Bret a donut. "It'll make you feel better."

"I need a donut like I need another hole in my head." Bret took his Stetson off and sat down in the car. "Look, I'm tired. Doug's tired. Everybody is tired. I'll give Doug a little time to cool off and then talk to him. He was too young for Vietnam, that's his problem. He thinks he missed something." Bret picked up the radio microphone. "I'm going to find out what's going on." Ted ate another donut.

Bret slammed the car door. "Here's the story. The media has caught wind of our little incident; they love this kind of thing. There's a news team on the way out. And since it's election time, the Governor thinks his ass is in the wringer. He's the one who called..."

"Over there," Ted pointed.

Bret saw Doug hunched close to the ground, moving toward the house. As the sheriff ran for his car, he heard glass being broken. "Tom's not asleep," he muttered.

When Doug heard the window break, he turned to run, tripped over a branch, and fell to the ground. His shotgun went off and the windshield of a truck shattered. A dozen guns opened fire.

"Hold your fire," Bret screamed into the bullhorn.

Tom watched the young deputy approach. With the butt of his rifle, he smashed a pane of glass. He laughed when the deputy tripped and the shotgun went off. Behind the headlights, he saw yellow flashes followed by gun fire. Bullets slammed into the log house. The remaining panes of glass exploded into the dark room. A bullet hit Tom low in the shoulder and he fell back onto the floor as if he'd been kicked by a horse.

"Caught you catnapping, didn't I?" she said. "No wonder you didn't hear me calling you."

He opened his eyes. Bright sunlight came in through the window. He saw her silhouette. "Come on out with me. Forget about the chores today." The breeze carried the warm damp smell of spring into the room and blew her hair to the side. "We'll go up to the meadow. Remember the first time we went up there and we made love?" She laughed. The sunlight warmed him and he thought it strange that he'd felt chilled. "Remember afterwards, when you made me that necklace out of lupines?" Her arm came through the window. "Take my hand, Tom." He started to push himself up from the floor.

The pain returned and he fell back to the floor. He opened his eyes and it was dark and quiet. They've shut off the headlights, he thought. Maybe they left.

He heard footsteps nearing the door. With his left hand he lifted the rifle and fired. Then he was sick.

Bret ran back to the cars after Tom shot the door. "Turn the headlights back on. And let's not be so trigger happy, got that? No one does any shooting unless I say so."

Doug motioned Bret away from the other men. "Look, I know I screwed up. When I heard that glass breaking, I got... It surprised me, I thought he was asleep."

"The mistake was going up to the house in the first place."

"I can make it up to you. Just let me have one more try. I'll go around from the back. I know I can take him."

Bret stared at Doug. "Take him? You just don't get it, do you? Tom isn't a murderer or rapist. He hasn't hurt anybody." Doug opened his mouth to speak but Bret cut him off. "You're getting on my nerves. I don't want you here anymore."

Doug took a step forward. "You know as well as me the county would be better off without him."

Bret pointed towards town. "I asked you to leave!"

"He's fuckin' useless, he's"

With a sudden motion, Bret slapped the deputy and grabbed the shotgun from his hand. Bret pointed the gun at Doug's belly and said, "You're fired. Now leave!" The two men stared at each other. Doug scooped his hat off the ground and walked away massaging his lip.

Bret's knees felt weak. He went to his car and sat down.

From the glove compartment, he pulled out a plastic bag labeled "Evidence: Item C." He took two capsules and swallowed them.

"Fringe benefits?" said a voice behind him.

"Right now, I feel like I've been rode hard and hung out cold, so I guess you could put it that way." Bret turned and looked up at a man who wore glasses and a yellow cap with ear warmers.

"And less fattening than donuts," said the man. He held out his hand. "Dirk Willis. Journalist."

"I've never seen you around. Who do you write for?"

"Whoever buys my stories." He lowered his hand, put it in the pocket of his down parka, and pulled out a small tape recorder. "This is a good story."

"A good story, eh?" Bret stood up. "We'll talk later."

Dirk turned the recorder on. "The man in the house, his name is Tom Riff?" Bret nodded. "And he's charged with tax evasion, parole violation, and assault?" Bret nodded. "Do you know Tom very well?"

"Shut it off."

Dirk put the tape recorder in his pocket.

"I don't like those things. And I said I'd talk to you later." Bret rubbed the back of his neck. "Right now I need to think, not talk to someone who wants to cash-in on something like this."

"Maybe what I'm doing seems mercenary to you, but..."

"Mercenary. That's a nice way of putting it."

"I'm humble, meek, and mild compared to the network news team

that's about to arrive. They'll interview you, edit it how they want, and have you saying things you never intended. You're going to come away from this looking like a fascist."

"And I suppose you're above that kind of thing?"

Dirk shrugged. "Not always. But I guarantee you this, I won't make you the bad guy. Unless you are."

"Why don't you get a real job?"

"Like arresting senior citizens?"

Bret shoved a finger against Dirk's chest. "Look, this isn't my idea of good time. If I had my druthers, I'd be ushering drunks off the streets right now. Tom brought this on himself." He lowered his hand. "Kind of."

Dirk took a step back and raised his hands. "Hey, I give up. I'm sorry; I got us off to a bad start," he said. "The old man means something to you, doesn't he?"

Bret shook his head. "Nothing."

"No offense, but I don't buy that."

Bret reached for his breast pocket and then the other.

"Out of smokes?" said Dirk.

"I quit awhile back."

"I've got a few cigars."

"That'll do." Bret lit the cigar.

"How long have you known him?" asked Dirk. Bret said nothing. "Someone's going to tell me, it may as well be you."

"I moved his irrigation pipes when I was a kid. He never had any. Kids, I mean. Turn the tape recorder off."

Dirk held the machine up for Bret to see. "Okay?" he said.

Bret nodded. "He took me on my first elk hunt. That was all before Amy, his wife, died. I was in Bozeman then, going to school. I went overseas for awhile and when I got back, I came home. That was a few years before things out here started.... getting like they are now. See that log cabin over there? That's where Tom was born." Bret pulled the collar of his jacket up. "I'm just rambling."

"Tell me about the tax evasion charge."

"Tom owns a few sections. Argone Corporation offered him, and a lot of other ranchers, big money for the mineral rights. Tom refused. Some of the others didn't and land values went up. So did the taxes. More ranchers sold. Why freeze your ass off delivering calves when you can live off the interest? Some bought winnebagoes and headed south for the winter. Most of them just moved into town. A few of those guys are the drunks I wish I was ushering off the streets right now." Bret reached for the bottle in the glove compartment. He offered it to Dirk. They both drank.

"Tom thought the taxes were too high and refused to pay. He was given an ultimatum; pay the taxes, that were somewhere around \$7,600, or go to prison. Tom chose prison. And as you may have noticed," Bret gestured towards the house, "he's got a stubborn streak. They gave him a five year sentence that was commuted to three."

"I couldn't help but overhear the run-in you had with your deputy," said Dirk. "The lad's a bit over-zealous about the situation, isn't he?"

"Doug watches too much TV."

"Seemed like there was more to it than that."

"There's some people, some real vocal people, who say Tom's blockin' progress. Doug's daddy is one of them. He owns a construction outfit and gets all the contracts for road building and repairs. The coal boom made him a rich man."

"Has Tom tied things up?"

"Tom's not standing in anyone's way," said Bret. "Those people resent him because they're all looking for a new tomorrow and he's satisfied with the way things were. You know how small towns are." Bret crushed the cigar with the heel of his boot.

"What about the parole violation and assault?"

"After two years at Deer Lodge, they gave Tom a parole. He couldn't get any good help and tried to run the ranch himself. I think he started drinking too much. When the taxes came due, he refused to pay them again. He also quit reporting to the parole officer, which was a stupid thing to do. It was just a minor formality. He burned the subpoenas and ignored the mail.

"A few days ago, Doug drove out here to serve Tom with an arrest warrant and papers that said his land would be sold for back taxes. I should've done it myself, but I was busy. That's always a good excuse isn't it, being busy?"

"Anyway, while Tom read he held a gun on Doug. He handed the warrant back to Doug and told him to use it for toilet paper. He blew a hole through the radiator of Doug's patrol car. And here we are."

"Not quite," said Dirk. "I heard something about the Gover-

nor applying pressure?"

"He wishes Tom would turn to dust and blow away. Argone probably convinced the Governor that he has to crack down or all the other rugged individualists in this state will ignore their taxes. On the other hand, with the upcoming elections, cracking down on a rancher isn't going to improve the Governor's public image. He's in a no-win situation, I'm in a no-win situation, Tom's in a no-win situation."

"So what're you going to do?" said Dirk.

"Tom will be taken into custody, his land will be sold, he'll be put back in prison, and he'll..." Bret shrugged his shoulders.

"Not a happy ending." Dirk looked at the house lit up by headlights. "Readers will love this story. It'll make them feel so wonderfully sad. That's not my fault, you know."

Ted walked up. "There's a call for you on the radio, McLavish. It's one of those guys in the helicopter."

Dirk followed the sheriff. "If you could, how would you end this?"

"All things considered, the best way to end this would be if Tom shot himself. But he won't. He's too stubborn." Bret laughed. "But if I was a writer like you and I was making this up, someone would hijack the helicopter, whisk Tom off to where a horse was waiting for him and he'd ride away into the sunset."

"Someone like you," said Dirk.

"Why not? If it was my story, I'd be the hero." Bret stopped beside the car. "But that's not how real stories end." He reached for the microphone. "This is Sheriff McLavish, over."

"Harold Wilson here, sheriff. We're five minutes away. Could you give me an update on the situation there?"

"Nothing new. We're waiting and will continue to wait and we don't need any help doing that."

"Have you tried tear gas?"

"No, but we lobbed a few grenades into the cabin. They didn't seem to have any affect. Maybe we should've pulled the pins." Bret turned the radio off. He looked north and saw a tiny red light that flashed in the darkness.

"You should eat something," said Ted. He held the last donut out for Bret.

Bret shook his head and walked away.

Tom had tried to stop the bleeding. From his rocking chair, he looked out the broken window and saw the flashing red light. He leaned back in the chair and thought of all the quick naps he'd taken in it between chores. Tom closed his eyes and tried to bring back the image of Amy. He couldn't.

Bret heard the helicopter approach. He pulled an old 22 pistol out from the glove compartment and started towards the house.

Dirk stepped out from behind the car. "I thought you found mercenaries distasteful?"

Bret stopped but didn't turn around. "The minute he's handcuffed, he's as good as dead." Bret flicked the safety off. "This way, everyone will say it was suicide, that he had no other way out, and guys like you can make him into a local legend."

"You're going to walk in and put the old man out of his misery. And I bet he gave you that gun when you were a kid. Maybe you're the one that's been watching too much television."

Bret said nothing.

"That's a beautiful ending though," said Dirk. "Only problem is that you're going to have to live with it."

"I'd hate to spoil things for you but it could be me that winds up getting shot. Then you'd have to make me the hero."

"What about the young deputy? When this is all over, you're going to have to deal with him and you bruised his tender ego pretty bad."

"His daddy has enough influence to get him reinstated and to see that I lose the election. That should satisfy Doug."

"And you?"

Bret shook his head. "Maybe I'll sell real estate." He turned around and looked at Dirk. "You know what's going to happen. What are you going to say?"

"My night vision is unreliable." Dirk removed his glasses and put them in his coat pocket. "And in the excitement of watching the helicopter with all the others, my glasses got knocked off."

"But what about the story?"

"I forget details unless I record them. Fortunately, I've got it all here on tape." Dirk pulled a cassette from his pocket. "With a story like this, I could afford to smoke good cigars for a few months." He tossed the tape to Bret. "Guess some of the story will just have to be fiction. But that's nothing new," he

said and walked towards the crowd of men.

Tom heard a meadow lark. Beyond the window he saw blossoms in the apple tree. He felt confused. Something's not quite right here, he thought.

A cloud moved in front of the sun. The light began to dim. Don't try to make sense of it, he thought. Outside, the fog rolled in.

Bret stood in front of the cabin and watched the helicopter begin its landing. The rotors sent up a cloud of dust. "Tom? It's Bret. I'm coming in." He reached for the door knob.

"Amy," Tom shouted, "help me!"

"I thought I'd never roust you," she laughed.

The cloud moved away from the sun. Tom sat up straight in the rocking chair. "I'm coming," he said. "Don't leave me this time."

"I'd never do that. I've been here all the time."

"It's just that..." The light began to fade.

"Don't do that," she said. "Let's just forget about the ranch today."

"You're right." He took the bullet from his pocket and dropped it on the floor. "We'll go up to the meadows."

Bret's hand rested on the door knob. He heard someone shout, "Get back you idiot, those blades could take your head off!"

Bret tested the door knob. It was unlocked. "Did you hear me, Tom? I'm coming in now."

"You're coming aren't you, Tom?" she said.

"Amy, take my hand. I need you to do that." He watched the door open. She stepped inside and walked towards him. He reached out and their hands met.

Bret cocked the pistol. He took a deep breath, exhaled slowly, and opened the door. Tom sat in the rocking chair staring straight ahead. "Are you there, Tom?" Bret opened Tom's jacket and saw the blood. "No, you're not." He ran his hand down over the old man's face.

Tom held her tight. "It's been so long," he cried.

"Don't be silly." Her laughter sounded forced. "I just went out to check the colt." She rubbed the back of his head.

"You're right." They walked outside. He heard a dull rumble and the wind came up. He gripped her hand harder. "Did you hear that?"

She looked up at the sky. "Probably just thunder somewhere off in the distance. For awhile I thought it was going to storm,

but it's past now," she said. "Com'on, I have the horses saddled. We're wasting daylight." She ran towards the barn and he chased her.

BE QUIET, BE SILENT, BE CALM

A One Act Play

CAST OF CHARACTERS

DAN - - - - The father of Denise and a communications officer
on a nuclear-powered submarine.

DENISE - - Ten year old daughter of Dan.

ALAN - - - Eight year old friend of Denise.

TIME: Three Day Prior to Christmas
A Year From Now

PLACE: The Seattle Area

(The stage is dark except for flickering Christmas tree lights, the glow of a television set and the silhouette of two children watching it. We can hear the tick-tock of a grandfather clock and the rain falling outside. On the TV screen we see Wile E. Coyote place a table cloth over a box of dynamite. He sprinkles bird seed on a plate, smiles, and holding a detonator in his hands, he tiptoes behind a rock. The Road Runner stops to eat the bird seed. Wile E. Coyote pushes the plunger down but nothing happens. The Road Runner says "Meee-meep," and takes off down the road. Wile E. Coyote walks over to the makeshift table and as he removes the table cloth, the dynamite explodes.)

As the lights come on, we see Denise, age 10, and Alan, age 8, in front of the television. A Seahawks pennant and other trivia indicates that they live in the Seattle area. On a book shelf there is a fairly large model of a submarine. Dan, her father, age 40, sits in the corner of the basement game-room or den with a ham-radio. A large set of headphones cover his ears and he has a look of concern. He removes the headset, turns the radio off, walks to a basement window shaking his head, and looks out into the darkness.)

DAN

Denise, turn off the television. (He unplugs the phone.)

DENISE

Ahhh, com'on Dad. The Funtime Hour isn't over yet.

(The children continue to stare at the TV.)

DAN
(With some impatience.) It's almost over. Turn it off.

(Neither of the children move and Dan becomes irritated.)

Now!

(Denise turns the TV off. Both children stand staring at Dan. The telephone rings.)

Do something. Play. Have fun.

(The children walk out of the room. The telephone rings. Dan looks at the clock but doesn't answer the phone. It stops ringing and he unplugs it. Alan runs back into the room shooting one of those annoying, battery-operated ray-guns behind him. He hides behind the couch. Denise sneaks into the room; she carries a toy uzi. While this is taking place, Dan is staring at a large red Christmas ornament on the tree. Alan stands up and blasts Denise, who falls dramatically to the floor. Alan walks towards her. She sits up and, making machine-gun noises, blasts Alan. He shoots the annoying ray-gun. They both keep shooting each other, making lots of noise, and shouting, "I got you," and "I got you first.")

DAN
That's enough!

DENISE
But I shot him and he won't die!

ALAN
I shot you first. I gotcha in the head.

DENISE

You only wounded me and I tricked you.

ALAN

(He throws his ray-gun on the floor.) You're cheating!

DAN

THAT'S ENOUGH! I want some quiet. (He says, nicely...)

Alan, time for you to go home.

ALAN

(He looks at Denise; she shrugs.) Why?

DAN

Because it's time for you to go home...because... I said ...
it's time for you to go home.

ALAN

Why?

DAN

Denise, talk to your friend.

DENISE

You have to leave.

ALAN

Why?

DENISE

Because my dad said and he's the communications-officer on
the biggest submarine in the world so he can tell people what
to do.

DAN

Thank you. Take your guns home with you, Alan.

ALAN

We're going to play tomorrow.

(He walks towards the door
without taking the toys.)

DENISE

And tomorrow you have to be the Arab and I get to be the
American.

ALAN
(Almost out the door.) Cause you always want to win.

DAN
(At the same time as Alan.) Alan, it's raining outside, are you forgetting something?

(Alan runs back. Dan hands him a raincoat and the toy guns. Dan's voice get louder as Alan runs out the door.)

You kids would lose your heads if they weren't attached!

(Denise sits on the couch sulking. Eventually, Dan walks over and sits beside her.)

If you could do anything right now, what would it be?

DENISE
Finish watching the Funtime Hour.

DAN
Besides that.

DENISE
Play Missile Command?

DAN
Besides that.

DENISE
What do you want me to want to do?

DAN
I'm talking about BIG things, not little things. What Big thing would you want to do.

DENISE
Who called?

DAN
No one. It was the wrong number. Now you have to answer my question.

DENISE
I'd pick.... going to that place where you get to dig for di-

dinosaur bones.

DAN

(Putting his arm around Denise.) We should've done that this summer, eh?

DENISE

Can we next summer?

DAN

Sure, we'll do it next summer.

DENISE

Do you really mean it? You said we could last summer.

DAN

I did say that, didn't I? (sighs) And I broke my word. I'm sorry.

DENISE

It's okay, I guess. You were busy.

DAN

With things that seemed important.

DENISE

That's okay, but you won't forget that we get to go next summer?

DAN

Adults could learn a thing or two from kids like you. You only stay mad for a little while.

DENISE

You won't forget?

DAN

(He ruffles Denise's hair.)

I'll make reservations right now.

(He walks to phone, picks it up and dials.)

Hello. I'd like to make reservations for my daughter and I for this coming summer. Since we'll be doing a lot digging,

we're going to need lots of chocolate cake and cream and cookies ice cream. And not the fake kind either. We want the kind that has real Oreos in it. Oh yes, and we'll want to bring a dinosaur skeleton home with us. Will there be any problem with that? Very good. (He hangs up.)

There, we're all set.

DENISE

You didn't give them our names.

DAN

Right. I'll call back and do that.

DENISE

You better plug the phone in first.

DAN

Pretty hard to pull one over on you. (He sits next to Denise.)

DENISE

Aren't you going to plug the phone in?

DAN

Not right now.

DENISE

Why?

DAN

You know how we unplug it when we don't want to be interrupted, like during dinner or when we're doing something special.

DENISE

Are we going to do something special?

DAN

My turn to ask a question. (Pause.) What did you want to be when you grow up?

DENISE

The same as I told you last week.

DAN

That's something else I could've learned from you, to listen better. Tell me again.

DENISE

I want to be a paleontologist and discover what made the dinosaurs go extinct. Or I want to be a fighter-pilot, like Tom Cruise was in "Top Gun."

DAN

He was just an actor playing pretend.

DENISE

I know that, but I'd be the real thing. Mom told me that a girl can be anything she wants. Maybe I'd be the first girl fighter-pilot.

DAN

Stick to dinosaurs. (Pause.) I think Mom would've agreed.

DENISE

Can I watch TV now?

DAN

No, it's all going to be the same thing.

DENISE

Naa-eh, Disney World is on next.

DAN

No TV. (Pause.) You ask me something.

DENISE

Did you want to be a submariner when you were a kid?

DAN

(Laughs.) No, at one time I wanted to be a forest ranger, then a journalist, then a geologist, and then I lost the big lottery and went into the Navy.

DENISE

And now you're an officer on the "Florida," the biggest missile submarine in the world.

DAN

Well, she's a boomer all right. She's not THE biggest anymore but no one with any brains would want to tangle with her.

(Dan walks over to a shelf and picks up a model of the "Florida" and what he says next, sounds like a commercial.)

For only one billion, ninety-five, you can be the first person in your yacht club to own a state-of-the-art, nuclear powered, Ohio-class, missile submarine.

(Denise giggles.)

This little beauty can cruise at a spirited 34 knots and dive comfortably to 900 feet. She comes with all the extras - noise-reduction, three crews of 165 men, four torpedo tubes, a rack full of Mark Four torpedoes, and a dainty displacement of 18,700 tons. Com'on down to the boat-lot and take a seven-week test drive.

(Dan's voice rises in intensity, Denise stops giggling.)

Dive down into the depths of blindness and play hide and seek. Be quiet, be silent, be calm. Come home and find out that nobody knows you. Call now and as an extra bonus, you'll receive 24 Trident One missiles complete with 192 feisty nuclear warheads that can carry your message to people 4,600 miles away.

(Dan slams the model into the wall and it breaks into pieces. He looks over at Denise whose eyes are wide with surprise.)

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you. I....

(He hugs the girl and holds her tight.)

I.. I don't know what got into me. I'm sorry.

DENISE

Is something wrong?

DAN

No, no, no. I was just playing pretend and it got too real.

(He lets go of Denise and holds her at arm's length.)

I won't do it again.

(Dan looks at the Christmas tree.)

Do you wanta open one of your presents?

DENISE

You'd let me! Isn't that cheating?

DAN

Opening one isn't really cheating. Wait! I'll make certain of that.

(Dan goes to the book shelf and pulls out a book.)

It says right here in Hoyle's Book of Holiday Protocol that, and I quote, "Under special circumstances, a parent, be it the mother or the father, may designate a said number of gifts to be opened by a child, if and only if, that child has been especially good during the past year." So there you have it. Open away.

DENISE

What's the special circumstance?

DAN

That we're only three days from Christmas.

DENISE

You made all of that up didn't you? You're playing pretend

again.

DAN

Yeah I did, but you can open a present anyway.

DENISE

(She opens a package.)

Oh neat Dad, a microscope. Let's look at something. I have a scab; we can look at white blood cells.

DAN

Not right now, okay? I just wanted to let you open a package and then I wanted ... to talk for awhile.

DENISE

I'd rather look in the microscope. Why'd you let me open the present if you weren't going to let me play with it?

DAN

That wasn't very smart was it? Look, just play along with me, okay?

(He sits on the couch.)

DENISE

What do you want to talk about.

DAN

Anything, I guess. Sit down here next to me.

(She sits down. Pause. He looks at the Christmas tree.)

Did you ever hear the story of the Littlest Angel?

DENISE

Miss Kilborne read it to us in Sunday School.

DAN

That's where I heard it too, in Sunday School. What a weird story to tell kids. Did you like it?

DENISE

I guess so, but not really.

DAN

What didn't you like?

DENISE

The little boy always had to do things like keep his halo shiny and go to choir practise. And he was lonely because he wanted to play with his dog but he had to be dead up in heaven.

DAN

It sounded pretty regimented to me too. Did I ever tell you I was suppose to play the part of the Littlest Angel in the Christmas pageant. I was just about your age. Yeah, I think I was ten. On the night of the play, I told my mom I wouldn't do it. And she said, "Are you sure about this?" And I said, yes. And she said, "Are you going to regret this later?" I said, no. She asked me why I didn't want to do it, but I couldn't tell her because I didn't have the words. All I knew was that I was scared. The heaven the Littlest Angel lived in, it didn't sound like a nice place to spend eternity. And I didn't want to go to hell. All I knew was that I was scared.

(Softly.)

I remember spending a lot of time staring at a big red Christmas ornament that hung on the tree and thinking about death and how I didn't what it to happen.

(Dan points at the Christmas tree and his voice goes back to normal.)

In fact that's the bulb right there. (Pause.) Thinking about all that kinda ruined Christmas for me; it was never the same again. But I've never regretted not doing the play.

DENISE

What do you think heaven is really like?

DAN

You tell me what you think it's like?

DENISE

Miss Kilborne says it's paved with golden streets and the buildings are made of abalaster and everybody is happy.

DAN

I'd agree with that last point, but I don't know about that golden streets stuff, at least in my version of heaven. You remember when Mom and I took you up to that fire lookout.

DENISE

Three Fingers. And we were way up high.

DAN

Right. Remember how the clouds rolled in from the Sound that night and in the morning they looked like a fluffy-white sea? And the radio said that it was raining in Seattle and there were traffic jams... and we were above it all, up in the sunshine, as if none of that other stuff existed and Mom said that she wished we could stay there forever. I think heaven is like that, but even more so.

DENISE

Mom was sick when we went up there wasn't she.

DAN

That's why we went. The doctor had just told her she had six months to live. (Pause.) But we crammed a lot into that time, didn't we? Her dad used to take her there when she was a little girl, littler than you.

DENISE

I'm not a little girl now.

DAN

You're right, you're a big girl now. But the first time that your mother went up there, her dad carried her in his pack; she was that little. Three Fingers was always her favorite place.

DENISE

It's my favorite place too. Except when we were up there, I was a little scared of falling.

DAN

You wouldn't have to worry about that in heaven because you could fly. You could fly wherever you wanted and you'd always be above things and you'd be able to see forever.

DENISE

Would Mom be there?

DAN

Of course. We'll all be together and happy. It'll feel like home.

DENISE

Like here?

DAN

I mean you'll feel comfortable there, like you belong.

DENISE

What about Miss Kilborne?

DAN

She'd be there too, in the part of heaven that has golden streets.

DENISE

So heaven could be whatever we want it to be?

DAN

Yeah, something like that. Only it's even better than we could imagine. You'd be free.

DENISE

Would you be able to play video games without having to pay?

DAN

If that's what you wanted.

DENISE

Like Missile Command.

DAN

(Sighs.) I don't think there'll be any computers in my part of heaven.

DENISE

Can there be some in my part?

DAN

Sure, why not? If that's what you want.

DENISE

I bet St. Peter has a computer by now. He has to look up a lot of people's names. (Long Pause. Dan appears to be intent on some thought.) Dad?

DAN

I was just thinking about what St. Peter would call up if he entered my name on his computer. (Pause.) I've spent my life trying not to be found. I go down into the ocean in a quiet ship. And we hide -- being quiet as a church mouse -- hiding with our missiles to keep the world safe.

DENISE

Something's wrong, isn't it Dad?

DAN

(Pause.) I just decided something. I'm not going back to the submarine. You and me, we'll just do what we want to do. We'll go on an adventure.

DENISE

Won't you get in trouble?

DAN

Not if they don't ever find me. (Pause.) Would you be able to keep that a secret?

DENISE

I guess so.

DAN

You know the best way for two people to keep a new secret is for them to tell each other an old secret. Have you got a secret, something you've never told anyone else?

(Denise looks nervous, she squirms around some.)

If we're going to be partners in the big adventure we're about to set off on, you're going to have to trust me all-the-way. (Pause.) I'll go first. I never even told your mother this. It's kinda funny that I never did. It's not like something that's really bad; but for some reason I've never told anyone. (Pause. Dan assumes a storytelling voice.) When I was a boy, me and two other kids, Annette Miamoso and Larry Hornacamp, we'd go off during recess and play by ourselves. All the other kids were playing on the jungle-gyms or the swings, playing tetherball or four-square, but Annette and Larry and I would go off into the far corner of the school yard and play by ourselves. We had a game where you'd take your partner's hands and spin around and around. Then you'd let go and both people would shoot off and crash on the ground.

(Dan's storytelling voice fades and he sounds increasingly reflective.)

I have no idea why that seemed fun to us, but apparently we liked the game because we played it a lot. And one time, when I did it with Annette, she hit the ground and started crying. I tried to get her to stop crying. I was scared the

teachers would see and I'd get into trouble for hurting her. (Pause.) This is something. I hadn't remembered all of this until right now. She was wearing a red dress that day.

(Dan is captivated by the memory.)

I liked Annette about as much as a grade school boy can like a grade school girl. I knew Larry liked her too. And I made sure I did the game with her first that day. When she fell, her dress came up and I saw... (Dan catches himself and comes back to the present.) I saw that she was hurt. The next day she came to school with a cast on her arm. I asked her if she'd told anyone how it happened. She said no, that it'd be a secret between her and me and Larry. And up until right now, that's how it's been, at least for me. (Pause.) I've told you a deep, dark secret, now it's your turn.

DENISE

I've never hurt anybody like that.

DAN

It's not like I tried to break her arm; it was an accident. I didn't do anything bad.

DENISE

Then why didn't you ever tell anybody?

DAN

I guess I was scared. Like I said, it seems kinda silly that I kept it a secret, especially now that I've told it. So tell me your secret.

DENISE

Promise not to get mad or make fun of me?

DAN

Promise.

DENISE

(She hesitates and then blurts out..) Jimmy Henderson kissed me.

DAN

(Surprised.) You kissed a boy?

DENISE

He kissed me first. It was just a little kiss.

DAN

How old is Jimmy Henderson?

DENISE

Twelve.

DAN

You're a ten-year-old-little girl and you kissed a twelve-year-old boy!?

DENISE

It's bad isn't it?

DAN

No. (Short pause.) Did he kiss you... on... the lips?

DENISE

Yes. I shouldn't have let him kiss me, should I? Is something bad going to happen to me because I let him kiss me on the lips?

DAN

No, no, no. It's ahhh.. I was just making sure I got the facts straight. It's not bad, at least I'm not saying it was bad, how was it for you?

DENISE

It was okay I guess. At first it was kinda like when you kiss me...

DAN

I don't kiss you on the lips!

DENISE

Noooo, but it was kinda like that kind of kissing, you know,

the dry kind, except until Jimmy tried to put his tongue in my mouth.

DAN
(A look of amazement.) He tried to French-kiss you?

DENISE
He's American, he just tried to put his tongue in my mouth.

DAN
What did you do when he did that?

DENISE
That part was gross, like I knew I could get germs. So I bit his tongue. (Pause.) Was I bad?

DAN
(Trying to suppress a smile.) No, I wouldn't say you were bad. Does Jimmy still have a tongue or did you bite it off?

DENISE
YUCK, I didn't bite it that hard.

DAN
Would you kiss him again?

DENISE
Only if he doesn't try to put his tongue in my mouth.

DAN
I doubt that he'll try that for awhile.

(Dan is trying to think of more to say.)

Would you kiss Alan?

DENISE
He's a little boy!

DAN
He's just two years younger than you. Same difference as between you and Jimmy Henderson.

DENISE
It's different.

DAN
Seems the same to me but I'll keep that in mind for future

reference, that there's a difference. (Long Pause.)

DENISE

Dad? Something bad is going to happen, isn't it?

DAN

No, you didn't do anything wrong by kissing Jimmy.

DENISE

I don't mean because of kissing. But something's really wrong, uh?

DAN

(A long pause ensues; Dan is obviously uncomfortable. He walks over to the Christmas tree.)

Do you want to open the rest of your presents?

DENISE

Dad, you have to answer because we're partners now. (Pause.)

We're going to die, aren't we?

DAN

Some day.

DENISE

I mean right now? Tonight?

DAN

(Deep sigh.) Yeah, I ... I think so.

DENISE

(Denise sounds as if she's on the verge of crying.)

Are we going to get blown up?

DAN

Yeah.

DENISE

Why?

DAN

(Dan holds her tight.) I don't know, honey. It wasn't suppose to happen. Something went wrong.

DENISE
Can't you call them and fix it.

DAN
They wouldn't listen to me.

DENISE
But you're the communication-officer of a submarine.
DAN
(Softly.) And I thank God I'm not down there right now.

DENISE
(Pause.) Dad, I don't want to die.

DAN
I don't either.

(Another long pause. Dan is looking out the window. A car engine can be heard starting up. The engine revs, there's a quick screech of tires and then the noise fades.)

DENISE
Who's that?

DAN
Alan's family. They're driving away. (Pause.) But there's no place for them to hide.

DENISE
Can't we go away. Wouldn't we be above it all in the look-out.

DAN
We might. But what would happen to us after the blast would be even worse. The extra week or two wouldn't be worth it. We would die very slowly and horribly. It's just be a matter of time. (Pause.) Do you remember how it was for Mom right before she died? The pain she was in and how no one could do anything for her and that all we could do was wait?

DENISE
You're scaring me Daddy.

DAN

I'm not trying to do that, Denise. But we have to decide what we're going to do.

DENISE

You said that there's nothing we could do, that we're going to die no matter what.

DAN

We can choose how we die.

(Denise looks puzzled.)

We don't have to die slowly. At the end, I helped your mother.

(Dan goes over to the desk, opens a drawer, pulls out a little golden box, and walks back to the couch.)

DENISE

What's that?

DAN

Two little pills. Mom and I got them a long time ago, when you were a baby. There were three then. They make people fall asleep and wake up in heaven. I gave one to your mother.

DENISE

(Amazed by this information.) You killed Mom?!

DAN

She asked me to give it to her. She was in pain and she knew there was no hope. (He opens the pill box.) We can take them and when we wake up, we'll be with Mom.

(Denise covers her mouth and shakes her head violently.)

I'm just showing them to you, they can't hurt you in here.

(Denise begins to hum loudly with her hands over her mouth.)

Okay, okay.

(He tosses the pill box aside.
Denise continues to cry. He
grabs her hands.)

Listen to me, Denise. Listen! There's nothing we can do to
make this go away. It's going to happen.

(She continues humming with her
eyes closed.)

Don't do this, I'm scared too.

(Denise buries her head in his
lap, crying.)

DENISE

Don't make me take a pill.

DAN

I won't.

DENISE

But you'll take one and then I'll be all alone again.

DAN

No, I won't ever leave you again.

(Long Pause. Denise is in
Dan's lap. As he strokes her
head, he gazes into the red
Christmas ornament. She begins
to calm down and as she does,
Dan opens his mouth as if he
wants to say something, but he
ends up saying nothing. He
does this a couple times and
finally....)

DAN

Denise, are you ... are you all right now?

DENISE

(She's trying not to cry.) I guess so.

DAN

I want to talk to you about something, okay? But first, you
know that....

DENISE

I don't want to take one of those pills.

DAN

I know. And I wouldn't force you to do something you didn't want to do.

(Dan appears to be thinking of how he wants to say what he'll say next.)

Those pills.., they don't hurt you. I know, I watched your mother after she took one. You just go to sleep.

DENISE

But you never wake up again. Mom never did.

DAN

You have to understand that by the time your mother took that pill she was... The only things keeping her alive were machines and other kinds of pills. She was basically already dead. What I mean is, there wasn't any hope for her and everything inside her hurt.

DENISE

How do you know it's going to happen? How do you know there's no hope for us?

DAN

I have a friend who's stationed up in Alaska. He works with a system of radars, the D.E.W. line. I talked to him over the radio. There's missiles incoming and outgoing.

DENISE

Who did it first?

DAN

I don't know and it hardly matters now.

DENISE

How long before... (Pause.)

DAN

Ten, maybe fifteen minutes. And when it happens, the best place to be would be ground-zero, right where the missile

hits. But we don't know how accurate those things are; no one's ever done this before.

DENISE

So they might not hit here and we'd be okay.

DAN

No, we wouldn't. We might not get hit directly but there'll be a lot of missiles that will at least come close. This area is too important. There's companies here that make things for the military. And there's the sub base. (Pause.) I don't want to die slowly. I watched your mother. I don't want that to happen to us. When we dropped the bomb on Japan, there were people who survived the blast who shouldn't have.

DENISE

But they survived.

DAN

Only to die from burns or radiation poisoning. I'm scared of that, Denise; very scared.

DENISE

You told me once, that when we did it to Japan, the men in the plane didn't really know what they were doing and that one of them went crazy because of it later. Maybe because they know what will happen, the men won't do it this time.

DAN

Denise honey, it's not the same men this time and it's not a plane with a bomb that's headed here, it's missiles. Missiles don't have any brains or consciences, they don't change their minds.

DENISE

But men made the missiles go and maybe they'll change their

minds and make the make the missles go away. Maybe they'll be scared of going crazy later.

DAN
They're already crazy. And there's not going to be a later to worry about.

DENISE
But they might explode them in space before they get here.

DAN
That only happens in movies, Denise. What I'm trying to say is that... with the pills, it's us who decides. It's not someone else deciding for us.

DENISE
But if we take the pills, we'd be deciding to be ... to not be alive.

DAN
One way or the other, that's how it's going to end up.

DENISE
But we don't know that for certain sure.

(Dan doesn't know what to say. He sighs and shakes his head. Neither of them say anything. Dan takes the red ornament from the tree.)

DAN
(Slowly.) No, we never know anything for certain sure.

DENISE
(Long Pause.) If you want to do it, you can.

(From outside comes the distant sound of air-raid sirens. Dan appears visibly shaken.)

DAN
Why'd they have to turn those things on?

(His breathing is rapid.)

I hate those fucking siren.

(He stands up and the blub
falls from his hand.)

They made us crawl under our desks. Duck and cover, duck and
cover. (He paces.)

Don't they know?! THERE'S NO PLACE TO HIDE.

(He laughs.)
Under our little desks, with our little hands over our little
heads... She made me the window monitor.

(His voice goes high and he
pulls the drapes closed.)

Close the curtains, Danny. It'll prevent the glass from cut-
ting us.

(More laughter.) Worried about a little bit of glass when we
were going to be fucking vaporized!

(More sirens join in and the
wail grows louder. Dan claps
his hands over his ears.)

Turn them off! Turn them off!

(Denise stands up.)

DENISE

Don't Daddy! Don't!

DAN

The last Friday of the month, ten a.m., the sirens. People
will panic. I hated them. Couldn't breath! (He screams.)
IT'S TOO LATE FOR SIRENS! Five minutes. Maybe five. WHY DO
THEY WANT TO KILL ME!?!

(Denise throws herself at him
and holds him around the
waist.)

DENISE

Daddy, don't leave me alone!

(Dan calms down some but his breathing is still rapid.)

You said you wouldn't leave me!

DAN
I won't... I won't leave you.

(They hold each other. There is still a frantic tone to Dan's voice.)

I wanted to see you grow up, honey. I wanted to see you do all the things and... We saved money for college. I have stories I wanted to tell the grandchildren. I wanted to take you sailing... on top of the ocean. Stay deep and be quiet. Don't make noise and they won't find you. Be quiet. We have to be silent.

(Dan begins to sing Silent Night. Denise joins him. He calms down. The sound of sirens fades away and they stop. It is apparent, that of the two, Dan is now the weaker. He whispers...)

There's no place deep enough to hide.

DENISE
Let's go outside.

DAN
We'll go for a walk. I'd like to be outside. Is that okay with you?

DENISE
I'd like that.

(Pause.)

When it happens, what will it be like?

DAN
There'll be a bright light and then it'll be over.

DENISE
Will it hurt?

DAN

(He has gained control of his fear and appears, somewhat stronger.)

I don't think so; we're close enough to the base. Com'on, let's go outside.

DENISE

Should we put on our rain coats?

DAN

We probably should.

(Denise gets their rain coats from the closet. Dan kneels and buttons her coat.)

Don't want you catching a cold.

(He starts to stand and Denise pulls him back down.)

DENISE

Should we shut off the Christmas lights?

DAN

We'll leave them on. I like Christmas lights.

(He picks her up and walks toward the door.)

DENISE

I want to walk on my own.

DAN

Okay.

(He kisses her and then puts her down.)

DENISE

I love you, Daddy.

DAN

I love you too, honey. I love you more than the whole world.

Here, take my hand. We're going out now.

(As they walk out the door, Dan automatically reaches for the wall switch and turns the room light off. For a few moments the stage is empty, dim, and

quiet. There is only the clicking of the clock and the Christmas lights flickering on and off. A bright light floods the theater. It fades and the audience is left in complete darkness.)

THE END

TECHNICAL NOTES

The stage should be dimly lit while the audience is being seated. (The level of light should be the same as when Dan and Denise exit.) It is important that the audience hear the ticking of a clock (and that they are able to hear it whenever there is silence on stage). If you can put together twenty minutes worth of cartoons that play during the seating period, that would be a nice touch. (The cartoons should depict violence; in other words, normal cartoons.)

The Wile E. Coyote scene is important to the play and could be shown on a big-screen television so that the audience can see the images. (Big screen TV has become increasingly common in households, so it won't seem out of place.) If you can't beg, borrow, or rent a big screen TV, and a regular television won't do the trick, then record a soundtrack with the "Mee- Meep" of the Road Runner and an explosion so that the audience knows that Wile E. got his just-dessert. Most people are familiar with these two cartoon characters and the imagery will play in their heads.

In the final scene where Denise and Dan exit, it is important that an appropriate amount of time pass before the flood lights flash on. The audience must be in total darkness after the floods lights fade out.

THE NOVICE

Deep within the desert, a day's walk from the nearest road, there is a canyon. The stratified walls stand vertical, the bottom buried in pink sand dunes that shift with the wind. The canyon's rim forms the boundary between rock and sky. I had come to collect and catalog ferns for a paleontological project sponsored by the Museum of Natural History. Now carbonized silhouettes trapped for some 200 million years within the Chinle Formation, the ferns grew when reptiles and amphibians crawled through lush vegetation along the coast of a shallow Permian sea.

I started down a dry wash that became a canyon and followed the sandstone passage as it twisted and turned and descended deeper into the earth. By the end of the third day, I traveled

with a quiescence usually found only at the edge of sleep. A destination no longer seemed important.

The sun's light reflected off both walls. Heat waves rose from the canyon floor. I smelled water up ahead and smiled. I saw the pool before I saw the man. He sat beneath a large boulder and had nearly melted into the rock shadows. He waved me closer. I felt like a trespasser in another person's dream. The man straightened the collar of his dirty white shirt. A faded silk tie served as his belt. "It's okay," he said. "I've heard you coming for some time now."

I walked into the shadow of the boulder, removed my pack, and sat down. The sand felt cool. He dipped a hand into the pool, brought it to his chapped lips, and drank. "It's good water," he said. "Take what you need."

I cleared dead insects and an oily film from the pool's surface, filled my bottle, and drank. The speckled greyness of his beard and the deeply creased skin above his cheeks gave him the appearance of a man far removed from his youth, though not yet old. His eyes looked distant. But that may have been due to the black smudges beneath them. From the dead campfire, he picked out a piece of charred wood. "Rub it under your eyes," he said and held it out for me as if it were a diamond. "It cuts the glare." I thanked him. "Just charcoal, but its yours now." I remember thinking that if Navaho sandstone could speak, it would've sounded like him.

"In the desert, it is not to be treated lightly when men

drink from the same waterhole," he said. I felt the need to offer him something and dug into my pack for a bag of nuts, dried fruit, and M&M's. He ate a handful of the trailmix as if being polite.

"You are new here?"

"Yes, this is my first time in the canyons. I like it, very much."

He looked at my eyes for a while. "I can see that. I too was quite taken by all of this when I first came here." He shrugged. "That happens."

"I've been out for six days and haven't seen a soul."

He chuckled softly, clicked his tongue, and pointed skyward. A raven floated on the thermals above us.

"They're my favorite bird," I said.

"They know how to have fun."

Perhaps it was the time I'd spent alone or maybe something else, but I felt a sense of ease in the presence of this stranger. I attempted to describe the intimate nature of my feelings for the land that surrounded us. "But to you that must sound foolish, coming from someone who has spent only a short time here. Maybe I'm just being overly romantic. What I mean is...it's hard to pinpoint. This kind of familiarity is usually the result of time."

"That happens." He shrugged and scratched the side of his nose. Some dried skin flaked off.

It seemed as if he'd brushed my words aside far too casually. I felt embarrassed and upset at the same time. "How could you know?" I demanded.

He looked at me and raised his eye brows. "I'll tell how," he said.

"I was the vice-president in charge of sales for National Screw, Bolt, and Bearings. One day while I stood before a group of fellow executives and presented a promotional campaign for teflon coated ball bearings, I heard the rustle of mesquite branches grated by a parched breeze. I dismissed it as the shuffling of papers being released from a briefcase. Another sound caused me to cock my head in much the same way that uncertain puppies do. Perhaps it was only someone swallowing coffee, but for a moment I thought I'd heard sandstone letting go of its solidness to a silt-laden river. I looked across the polished expanse of a large mahogany table and tried to locate the noise. But it was lost to quiet whispering.

"A long time prior to those quiet whispers, I had been down in a desert canyon. The company had offered me a promotion if I transferred to Los Angeles. The journey west was interrupted when my vehicle lost interest in the trip and broke down. Repairs would take a few days. Oddly, I felt no pressure to hurry.

"In a cafe, I met an old man. He washed dishes, mopped the floor, and walked with a faintly discernible limp. I mentioned that I would have to become a Dodgers' fan. He sat at my table and we talked about baseball. The dishwasher used his hands when he spoke. His hands were calloused and cracked, yet they held a grace and lightness often possessed by artists and surgeons.

"'What keeps you here in Green River?' I asked him.

"'The canyons.'" With his hands and words, he went on to create images so vivid, they drew me down into dimly lit passages of sandstone. The old man had spent much time exploring the canyonlands. When I call his face up from my memory, I can see all that time etched in his eyes. As a young man, however, such subtleties escaped me.

"I requested directions. The dishwasher pointed out the cafe window. I pressed for more definitive directions. He spoke of his constant battle with flies in the kitchen. There was a long pause. He sighed and pulled a napkin from the chrome dispenser. He reached across the table and took a pen from my suit pocket.

"'In the past, I told no one of these places. But that was before construction started on the new dam. You can't harm what will soon be destroyed.'" He drew lines, straight and curved, that at times tore through the thin paper. 'Maps are not always reliable. Remember that.' He cleared the table and walked back into the kitchen.

"I found the canyons. A week later I came out, climbed into my vehicle, and drove to the west coast. I had felt the rough heat of sun-baked sandstone. I appreciated the gift of midday shade provided by a pinion pine. I had learned the value of water.

"For years I kept the napkin-map in a desk drawer, sandwiched between the pages of a thick grey book concerned with antitrust laws. This sentimentality made me feel foolish. I was, after all, a grown man, not a child in possession of a treasure map.

"One day while cleaning my desk, I decided to be sensible. I

crumpled the yellowed napkin and tossed it in the waste paper basket. Then I removed it and placed it in an ashtray. As it burned, I felt an awkward sense of reverence coupled with absurdity. To attach so much memory to the events of a few days, experienced so many years in the past, seemed unbecoming for a man of my position.

"I never spoke of the cremation. I had no family and my friends would never have understood. I didn't. Slowly, the day-dream images faded. When I washed, I no longer found sand in my hair or behind my ears. And the canyons spoke to me no more.

"Until that day in the boardroom. After that the avenues between monolithic skyscrapers became river beds where I stepped with care to avoid quicksand. The ocean, viewed from my Palisades home, froze into a stony silent mesa land. I began to find red sand in my shoes when I removed them at night. To see someone waste water made me nervous.

"Then one morning, in the greyness of dawn, I awoke to the call of a dove and found a rattlesnake curled upon my chest. I lay perfectly still and waited for the sun. The same heat that parched my throat, drove the snake to shade. I knew I was home."

He chuckled lowly at times, while relating this to me. His hands moved with gentleness. His eyes matched the narrow strip of blue sky harbored between the canyon rims a thousand feet above us. The color of his skin blended with the rock, an ancient red, much like that of the lizards I'd seen bobbing up and down in the sun. "I have carried on too much, but sometimes I hunger for my

words to be heard." He made an imprint of his hand in the sand and brushed it away. "That happens."

I offered him more trailmix. He declined but then reached into the bag and picked out a red M&M. "I'm glad to see they've brought the red ones back," he said.

I told him I had to leave and that I preferred loop trips. Could he suggest an alternative route? "You will find the journey out of this canyon much different than when you traveled down it."

He had been sitting cross legged, his feet beneath him. He stretched out and I saw that his feet were bare, dry, and cracked. He laughed as he caught me eyeing them and held up a pair of useless dress shoes as if to assure me that he traveled like most men.

THE PROMISE OF HIGHER GROUND

When ex-Outward Bound instructors get together in the presence of a campfire and drink a few beers, invariably someone brings up the subject of nightmare courses and problem students. The storyteller usually begins with, "Once, I had this student who...."

I have three such stories. Jim's is one of them. The story begins, "Once I had this student named Jim who wanted off the course so bad that he downed a bottle of aspirin..."

* * * * *

The rain poured down from a greyness that could hardly be called sky. Jim hurled an small bottle at me and screamed,

"There! Now what are you going to do?" I stared at the empty aspirin bottle floating in a muddy puddle. I had checked the patrol's supply of aspirin earlier and the bottle had been half-full.

Mist hid the mountains and the tops of Englemann Spruce, Douglas Fir, and Western Hemlock. For the past seven days and seven nights, my Outward Bound patrol and I had lived with rain in the Glacier Peak Wilderness of the North Cascades - a land formed by volcanoes and cataclysmic movements of the earth, a land where rain has fallen for longer than the memory of man can recall. Can rain cause madness, I wondered?

Jim stood on the other side of the puddle. His fists were clenched. He was crying, I think, though I couldn't be certain because his horn-rimmed glasses were fogged. Drops of water trickled from his hair, down his narrow face, converged at his pointed chin, and fell into the puddle where the empty aspirin bottle floated.

Outward Bound instructors are trained to lead people through the wilderness, to extract them from crevasses, set broken bones, avoid avalanches, cross dangerous rivers, and even to work with the physically impaired. The instructor's manual said nothing in reference to suicide. Everything inside my head said panic. I tried to appear calm. "You just ate a bottle of aspirin?"

"You're god-damned right I did. What are you going to do about it!"

I would like to have hollowed out a log, floated away, and ended up on the shore of a new world. Second to that, I remember

thinking that I would've settled for some sleep.

* * * * *

Change, for the most part, occurs in degrees. Once in a while however, an event takes place that forever changes how you view the world and the things you feel are important - the things that make you happy, sad, intolerant or content. Afterwards, you may be unable to define the transformation; you know only that something is different.

I experienced such a change ten years ago while instructing an Outward Bound course. Jim, the student who staged a suicide, contributed significantly to that change. He was 16 at the time. I will never fully understand what motivated him to act as he did. I was 26 and about to come to grips with a messiah complex.

* * * * *

"Of all the areas that N.O.B.S. (Northwest Outward Bound School) runs courses in, the Glacier Peak Wilderness is the most beautiful," said Eric. He wore a yellow, student-issue, rain parka. Though the wet cowlicks of hair plastered to his forehead gave Eric the appearance of a naive young boy, I knew he was a seasoned mountaineer. "It's also the toughest and most demanding course area." As the chief instructor, Eric was responsible for the four patrols that made up the August, O.B. Course #NCl25. I was a senior instructor and responsible for a patrol of eight students. Eric had teamed me up with an assistant instructor, Trish,

who wore her hair in a pony tail and played the guitar beautifully.

Eric put Trish and me in charge of the youngest patrol, a coed group of 16-year-olds. "I have a bad feeling about this," I told Trish.

"Why? They're just kids."

"Last summer, I had a group of 15 and 16 year old boys. They made that book, Lord Of The Flies, sound like a Sunday School picnic."

On the first night, I committed a major error in judgment; it happened like this. As rain fell, Trish and I helped the students set up their tarps. After they were all in their sleeping bags, I checked on them. "You guys need to dig a shallow trench around your tarp or you're going to have a small stream running through here. Chip, since your bag will be the first one to get wet, why don't you dig the trench."

Chip's head remained inside the drawn-up hood of his sleeping bag. "I'm almost asleep, man. Get someone else to do it." I told him the job was his, went on to the next tarp, and repeated the instructions. I stood in the rain and waited. No one came out to trench the tarps. Okay, maybe there's a lesson in this, I thought. At the debriefing that had followed the Lord-Of-The-Flies course, the chief instructor told me, "You should've been tougher on those guys."

The next morning four students crawled out of wet sleeping bags. "You guys should've trenched," I said. "Chip, grab the end

of your bag." I took the other end and we twisted in opposite directions. Water poured down from the bag in a steady stream. The rain showed no signs of clearing. "Let's get a fire going and dry these out."

Eric walked into camp accompanied by Vic Walsh. Vic, an Englishman and the school's director, looked around and then motioned me off to the sidelines. "Didn't you check your students last night?"

"Yes, once, and I advised them to trench. They didn't," I said. The greyness of Vic's beard and the lines etched in his face from years of outdoor activity, gave him the appearance of a patriarchal mountaineer. "I realize it was a bad decision not to check on them again, but at the time I thought that if they got a little wet they might listen better."

Vic shook his head. "Poor timing." The British are famous for understatement, I thought. He continued, "The purpose of Outward Bound is to build confidence. You don't do that by setting your students up for immediate failure. Let them get used to being out here." I felt like an errant child who had fallen short of expectation. Vic started to walk away and then turned around. "A little wet? These people are soaked. Make sure the bags get dry; you're in the North Cascades." His last statement translated into, "This area isn't as forgiving as the Sierra that you're used to instructing in; a screw-up out here can be serious."

So began the second day of my first course with Outward Bound, the organization that to me represented the creme de la

creme of outdoor programs. Years earlier, I had instructed rockclimbing courses to pay for college. Later, as a partner in a ski and mountaineering shop, I guided trips up the Grand Teton. I spent 106 days in the field during my first summer with Summit Expeditions, an outdoor school that operated in the Sierra Nevada.

On night two, I spotted a small orange coal that floated in the dark woods at face level. "Chip, is that you sucking on a joint?" He coughed and a cloud of smoke rushed from his lungs. Chip tossed his head back to get his long blond hair out of his eyes. He took another hit and offered me the joint. "Not now, thanks." I gave him credit for playing it cool.

He blew the smoke in my face. "Does this mean I'm busted?"

"That depends on if I think you're going to be a problem. Do you want to stay?"

"Yeah, I guess."

"Such enthusiasm. Why did you sign up for this course?"

Chip shrugged. "My parole officer recommended it. You know, build character and make me more responsible. I saw it as a chance to get away from my parents. How about you? Did you wanta be a cop when you were a kid - does tellin' people what to do get you off?"

"Is that just a bullshit question or are you interested?"

"That depends on if I think you're bullshitting me." He grinned and I said nothing. "Okay, I'm listening."

"No, I never wanted to be a cop. But I'll admit that part of me likes the power you get from being an instructor. For the most part though, it scares me."

"Right. You scared of warpin' our impressionable little minds."

"No. I worry about one of you ending up dead. A friend of mine told me how he lost a student once. They were doing an early morning dip in the river. There was a calm spot and beyond that the current ran pretty swift. Just to be safe, my friend went out into the pool and had the students walk in one at a time and duck under the water. This one student, who didn't like to be told what to do, waded into the pool and then dove. My friend tried to grab him. But the kid's foot slipped through his hand. The kid surfaced out in the main river and the current pulled him under. He never surfaced again. My friend said he nearly quit instructing after that. He says he still has dreams where the kid's foot slips through his hand. I'm not interested in living with something like that."

Chip stood with his arms folded across his chest. "A little bit of dope isn't going to kill me."

"I need all of you guys to be on your toes all the time. You never know what's going to happen out here."

"Aren't you the one who's supposed to protect us?"

"I'm supposed to make sure that you learn and that you stay alive doing it," I said. "But this ride isn't on tracks."

"I'm scared," he said and laughed. "So what's really going to happen? How's this gig work?"

"During the first week of 'the gig,' Trish and I keep a close eye on everybody and teach you how to do things like navigate with a map and compass and build a fire in the rain and splint a broken

leg, things that'll keep you alive in case something goes wrong. Every once in a while there'll be what we call initiative-tests to see how you guys do as a group and on your own. During the second week, we back out of the picture some and you guys put into practise the things you learned because in the third week you're really going to be out on your own.

"I can handle it."

"Good, I like confidence. There'll probably be a time or two when you think it's getting pretty tough and you'll be feeling sorry for yourself."

"I quit doing that a long time ago." Chip tossed his head back. "That old guy who came into camp this morning, he gave you shit because we got wet didn't he?"

"Yeah, I screwed up. It's not going to happen again," I said. "But you don't learn much unless you fail some. Now, give me the dope."

"Do I have a choice?" He took one last drag and popped the roach into his mouth.

"Sure. You can give it to me or go home to Mom, Dad, and your parole officer."

"Some choice," he said and handed me a baggy with a couple of buds in it.

"This isn't enough to get you through 23 days. Is the rest in your pack?" He shook his head no. "Do I have to go through your pack?"

"That'd be illegal search and seizure, man. You got a warrant?"

"I don't need one out here." We walked over to his pack and he handed me another baggy. "Do me a favor, stay dry tonight. I'm going to bed." I checked the tarps first.

I lay in my sleeping bag with the hood open. A couple feet away, Trish slept. I felt the breeze across my cheek and heard the wind pass through branches as a new wave of rain arrived. A blend of forest smells, mixed with the damp breeze and the creak of a weak tree lulled me into a shallow half-sleep.

At 1 a.m., I checked the students. A couple hours later I checked them again. During the intervals I listened to rain against the tarp shift from a steady rattle to the hiss of fine mist. I drifted into rain-sleep, an island of arrested time where there were no students to worry about, no packs to shoulder, no brush to fight, and no route to find - just the wilderness, the darkness, and the rain.

Late in the afternoon of Day-Three, we made camp at Indian Pass. I told everyone to put on dry clothes. Pam announced that she wanted to abandon the course. A long discussion ensued. Trish and I tried to convince her to stay. She wanted out, no-two-ways-about-it, and finally we gave in.

I had lost students in the past and each time it happened, I was left with a feeling of frustration. Had I been a better instructor and done things differently, maybe the student would've stayed. What act had gone undone that might have changed things? I took the loss of a student as a personal insult... But looking back, perhaps the word threat would be more accurate.

Trish and Pam disappeared into the mist. I turned around and noticed that the students had not set up camp. I counted heads. "Where's Jim?" I asked Chip.

"I think I saw him behind those trees. He's been acting kinda weird."

"Did he change clothes?" Chip didn't know. "Why didn't you tell me any of this?" I felt irked.

"You and Trish were busy talking to Pam. Besides, he's kinda weird anyway; like I think he's a computer-whiz or something like that." Chip tossed his head back. "Why'd Pam leave?"

"We can discuss that later. I'm going to check on Jim. Today isn't over and you're still the group-leader. Get these people moving."

I found Jim huddled beside his pack. "You okay?" I said. He looked up. His skin was pale and his teeth chattered.

I ran over to Chip. "Jim has hypothermia. We need a tarp set up. Put a ground cloth, pad, and dry sleeping bag under it. Get two people on that immediately. Get some water heated on the stove for hot chocolate. We need to start pumping hot liquids down him. Have someone start a fire. And check to make sure everyone is wearing dry clothes. You got that? Tarp, sleeping bag, stove, hot chocolate, fire, and dry clothes."

"Right!" Chip nodded his head rapidly. "I got the picture."

I grabbed his arm. "Don't fuck up. This isn't an initiative test; it's real."

I helped Jim into dry clothes. "You're going to be all right, Jim. Com'on, keep moving, keep those legs moving up and

down. Eat this candy bar."

"I want to lie down."

"Keep moving." I broke off a square of chocolate and put it in his mouth. "Chew, com'on eat that thing, you need fuel."

"The tarp is up," shouted Chip.

I rushed Jim beneath it. "Get out of those clothes and into the bag." He did. I unzipped the bottom and held his feet against my belly. Chip handed Jim the first cup of hot chocolate.

"The other two tarps are going up," he said. "They had a little trouble starting the fire so I poured some white gas on it. And there's a couple people putting dinner together."

"You perform pretty damn good under pressure."

Chip smiled and tossed his head back. "Right." He turned to leave.

"Hold on a sec. I may need some more help." I pulled the thermometer from Jim's mouth. "Ninety-four point six. He's not producing his own body heat. Take your clothes off and get in the bag with him."

"I ain't no fucking homo!"

"Okay, then leave your shorts on."

"You get in the bag, man."

"Don't do this right now, Chip. Just move!" Chip wiggled into the bag behind Jim.

I placed plastic bottles full of hot water at Jim's neck, groin, belly, and under his arms. He drank two more cups of hot chocolate.

I left the tarp to check on the other students. When I came

back, I remember Jim and Chip talking about their fathers. "What would your dad say if he saw you like this," said Chip.

"He'd say I was stupid for letting it happen in the first place. How about your dad?"

Chip laughed. "My dad would say I was a faggot. If he said anything at all. He'd probably just laugh at me."

Jim's temperature returned to normal. He ate with the group. Over dinner, I congratulated everyone for a good team effort, especially Chip. Jim stayed under my tarp that night.

"Tell me Jim, what made you want to sign up for an Outward Bound course."

"My parents. I'd have stayed home easy."

"Where you from?"

"The Big Apple. I like the city. I like wearing three-piece vested suits."

"What other kind of things are you interested in?"

"I have a computer. It cost my dad plenty," said Jim. "I like mathematics. You can make numbers do whatever you want. I'm going to major in economics when I go to the university."

"So you spend a lot of time with your computer and your parents thought you ought to get out and be more physical?"

"They're spending the month in the Bahamas. I had a choice, this or a military academy."

The next morning we broke camp in the rain. On the way up Indian Head Peak, the clouds parted. For a moment, through the mist, I could see black spires and ridges and blue-white glaciers

beneath distant summits. By the time we reached the top of Indian Head Peak, the clouds had closed ranks and we couldn't see beyond 50 feet. During a rest break, I wrote in my journal, "I think this area must be beautiful."

We traversed heather slopes on the way down. Chip had offered to bring up the rear and keep an eye on stragglers. Jim walked behind me; he hadn't said much since the summit. As we dropped beneath the cloud level, he said, "All we do is walk around in the rain."

"You're staying dry aren't you?"

"If I wanted to get wet, I could do it in Manhattan."

"The sun has to come out eventually," I said.

"I want off the course."

"The weather has everybody feeling a bit gloomy, Jim. It'll get better."

"It's not just the weather. I hate it out here. The packs are heavy. There's no toilets..."

"You can pull it off. And after you have, you'll be glad you did."

"I'm not cut out for this stuff."

I thought about the instructor who had gained legendary status after he finished his course with only three of his original nine students. I didn't want to break his record. "Trish is out with Pam, I can't leave the patrol, and you'd never make it out on your own."

"Call a helicopter."

"I don't think they'd hear me."

"My parents told me that instructors carried walkie-talkies so they could call in a helicopter in case anything went wrong," he said. "Don't worry about the money; they got enough to pay for it."

Part of me wanted to put the screws to Jim because of that last statement. "Instructors don't carry radios. There's nothing in the brochures that says we do. You've either made a poor bluff or your parents lied to you."

"It wouldn't be the first time."

Another part of me, the part that won, knew that being tough on Jim wouldn't help matters. "You're not giving yourself enough credit. By the end of this course, you'll realize that you're cut out for far more than you thought."

"The bottom line is that I want out."

"I couldn't get you out even if I wanted to."

"What if I was dying?"

"You're not."

"Let's just say I was."

"I'm not going to abandon the patrol, or for that matter make them walk out to a trailhead just because you're tired of being wet," I said. "The bottom line is that you better come to terms with being out here."

Chip walked over. "I heard you guys talking and..."

"Oh great," said Jim. "You going to kiss up to the instructor and tell me why I should stay?"

"I helped save your ass, man. I ain't kissing up to nobody. I was glad you made it," said Chip. "Maybe I wasted my time."

Suddenly Jim's attitude changed, but I've never believed it was because of what Chip said. "I'm sorry. I appreciate what you did," said Jim.

"Right. I just came over to tell you that I talked to a couple of the others and if it'd make a difference, we'll carry some of your stuff."

"You'd really do that for me?" said Jim.

"I got into a sleeping bag with you, man; carrying a little extra weight would be nothing. Besides, I got a light pack." Chip and two other students took a third of Jim's load. As we continued down, I kept picturing Jim with his computer. I still wonder, did he manipulate us to get the things he wanted, things such as a lighter pack?

We rendezvoused with Trish near a wet alpine meadow full of wildflowers. That night she asked me, "What do you like about being an instructor?"

"I wonder about that sometimes too," I said. "I like what these courses can do for people. I've seen some big changes take place." What I didn't say, probably because I didn't even realize it at that time, was that my own needs were being fed.

Three years earlier, late in the winter when I was still a partner in the mountain shop, my wife told me that she'd been sleeping with a friend of ours. "I love him more than you," she said.

Being a glutton for punishment, I asked for reasons. She said, "I don't have to wear low-heeled shoes when I'm with him."

He can grow a beard and he likes classical music." I later realized that those weren't the real reasons. She just wanted out.

I hitchhiked to Oregon and got work driving a skidder for a gypo-logging outfit. Maybe I thought that hard work, the whine of chain saws, and the roar of falling timber would help me forget. It doesn't take a psychiatrist to know what I was really up to; I'd been verbally castrated - being a logger would prove I was still a man. It'd make me feel better about myself. It didn't.

A friend, who worked for Sierra Treks, called and said they needed an assistant-instructor for a 10-day course. The pay would be \$150, less money than I made in two days of logging. I took the job and it was like a vacation. I taught the students about mountaineering and living outdoors, they learned, and I began to feel better about myself.

The next summer I worked with Summit, an outdoor program that, at the time, enjoyed a little more prestige than Treks. After an idyllic first season, the program director said, "You're a good teacher and you've got good counseling skills. You're able to empathize with the students and yet maintain the authority necessary for running a safe course. You give 100 per cent and because of that you're getting good results. Keep it up."

The evaluation made me feel good, very good. I didn't want that good feeling to go away. That I would always pull off good courses became an expectation. In other words, I took my role as an instructor too seriously. Being a good instructor is easy when you have enthusiastic students, students who want to be on the

Trish asked, "The changes, do you think they last after the students get home?"

"I have no way of knowing. I hope so."

"These courses aren't for everybody. They might even be harmful for some people."

"I've thought about that."

"Or maybe in a case like Jim's, the timing isn't right," she said.

"These courses are supposed to stretch people. You stretch and it's going to hurt. No one ever thinks the time is right for pain."

"That's true, but maybe if for instance it wasn't raining, maybe he'd be doing better. I mean, do you like being out in all this rain?"

"Of course I don't. But I have a job to do."

"'To serve, to strive, and not to yield,' isn't that the Outward Bound motto?" She laughed, politely. "Just remember, Jim doesn't have a job to do. You push him hard and I think he'll do what Pam did."

"Push him? Maybe I come across as an ogre to you, but I feel like I've got a pretty good idea of what my students can handle as individuals and as a group."

"So you know how to specifically help each one of 'YOUR' students?"

"That's not exactly what I said. The tone you used twists it around."

"That's what I heard you say."

"You think I should coddle Jim. I shouldn't push him, I shouldn't expect him to put out? If I did that, then I shouldn't be here. It's our job to push 'OUR' students, to help them realize that the limits they've placed on themselves are self-imposed. That's what they paid for. Or their parents."

"You don't like rich kids do you," she said.

"You're putting words in my mouth again. What I don't like are rich kids who think they can buy their way out of anything."

"I'm a rich kid. And I'll tell something I get sick of, everybody always thinking that rich kids have it easy."

"Sounds like one of your buttons got pushed," I said. "You seem to deal with being rich okay. I haven't heard you asking for a helicopter or complaining about a pea under your ensolite pad."

"Not all rich kids are spoiled. I used to be but I've learned a few things since then."

"Then you're the woman I've been looking for -- smart, beautiful, blonde, and rich. Will you marry me?"

Trish laughed. "What I'm getting at, is that maybe because of your bias you don't know how to deal with Jim effectively."

"And you do. Fine, he's yours."

"I'm not saying that I'm better than you, just that I might understand him more."

"And I agree." I blew out the candle.

"I saw how you reacted to Pam leaving the course, and you had only two days invested in her. I think that if you expect much from Jim, then you're setting up yourself, and him, for

disappointment." Trish turned over onto her stomach. "That's all I'm really saying."

"He's all yours. The only thing I expect Jim to do is finish the course."

As I crawled out to greet another grey morning and the seventh straight day of rain, a small reservoir of water at the edge of the tarp drained down my neck. A little more water didn't seem to matter. My clothes smelled of mildew. I felt like webs had started to grow between my toes and that I could breath underwater. I worried about the dampened morale of the students. Chip and Jim had a fire going and a pot of water boiling for oatmeal. The others lingered in their bags.

I had good cause to worry about the patrol's morale; it was Resupply, the day that we replenished our stock of food. Typically, we would've hiked out to the White River trail-head, met the logistics van, loaded up, and carried our heavy packs back into the wilderness. However, after a week of rain, I sensed that if the students saw the van and a road, the potential existed to break the dropout record.

I discussed the situation with Trish. She said, "Ferry it in. Take Chip and Jim, hike down to the trail junction, empty your packs, go on to the trailhead, and ferry the resupply stuff back in. The rest of us will meet you at the junction. I don't know what you've been saying or doing to Chip, but he's really shaped-up. He's in for the duration."

"I think you're right. Did you see him out there this morn-

ing? He's started to take on a leadership role. But Jim, I'm not so certain about him."

"Jim was out there with Chip," she said. I shrugged. "But you don't trust him, right?"

"Not really. And that has nothing to do with his being a rich kid.

"Remember what you said about pushing the students? The same thing applies to trust. We have to risk trusting them in order to push them into being trustworthy. I think Jim comes from a background of not being trusted."

"And probably for good reason."

"Ever since I got back from taking Pam out, since that Indian Head Peak deal three days ago, he's been holding his own. Something like this could make him feel important to the group; it could make him feel trusted. It could turn him around."

Chip, Jim and I headed down to the White River. The rain had stopped. I looked at the little dabs of blue behind the clouds and thought, those could be sucker holes or maybe the deluge has ended. A few patches of sunlight moved along the mountain side and down over the forest. I started to count the different shades of green and stopped at seven when Jim complained about his heel. Chip took some of Jim's gear; I took some more. Jim carried an empty backpack with a sleeping bag strapped beneath it.

By the time we reached the trail junction, the sucker holes had drifted off into the east and rain fell again. "Is there going to be a vehicle at Resupply?" Jim asked.

"I don't know," I lied.

"There must be one, otherwise how would they get all that stuff moved in?"

"I know one thing; I'm going to be carrying a heavy pack back in here. Your heel is giving you trouble so I want you to stay with our gear and guard it," I said. "And put your rain parka on."

"I want out," he said.

I started in on the "you-can-do-it" pep talk. Didn't work. I tried the "you'll-be-glad-you-did-it" routine. He doubted it. I told Jim about letters from ex-students who thanked me for convincing them to stay. I didn't mention the people I'd talked to whose instructor made them feel like crap because they quit. Instead, I said, "You might regret this later."

"I'll think about that then. I want out now."

I wondered what he'd return home to? The image that came to mind may have been a cliché, but it's uncanny how close to the truth clichés can be. I imagined his father, a man who expected his son to be a success; a man who wore silk dress-shirts to the office where he put in long hours, and felt he deserved a few weeks alone in the Bahamas with his wife - who was chairperson of the Heart Fund, worried about facial hair, and who sometimes, late at night while her husband slept beside her, tried to pinpoint the day when ambition gave way to boredom.

"No, you're not going to leave." He'll thank me for this someday, I told myself. "You don't have that option. I know, and you know, that you can complete this course."

Jim stomped away. Fifteen minutes later, the empty aspirin bottle bounced off my chest. "Now what are you going to do!?"

* * * * *

In the past decade, I have reviewed that little piece of my life many times. Perhaps, were I then who I am now, the situation might never have arisen. But at that moment, after the aspirin bottle had bounced off my chest and we stood in the rain glaring at each other and Jim screamed, "What are you going to do now?" - at that moment, only one thing mattered; what I did next.

Jim had raised the stakes. I didn't know he was bluffing, though I suspected it. I had to wonder, was the aspirin in his stomach or dissolving on the forest floor?

Picture it; think about how you'd feel with someone standing before you who has just announced his suicide. A friend once told me how his girlfriend had taken her life. He'd wanted to break up with her and every time he brought up the subject, she threatened suicide. Finally, after six months, he broke up with her. A few days later she asked him to come over, just to talk, just to sort things out. He entered the living room and saw her sitting on the couch, wearing a white negligee. She asked him to come closer and as he walked towards her, she pulled a gun from beneath the pillow, stuck it in her mouth, and pulled the trigger.

People who threaten suicide have GOT-CHA! If they've told you a lie and you react, you've played right into their hands. If it's the truth and you don't react, then after they're dead you

get to think about them for the rest of your life. You have been caught in the ultimate manipulation.

On top of that, I didn't know whether or not an overdose of aspirin would cause death. The nearest phone to call a poison control center was more than 25 miles away.

I said, "I'm not going to do anything. You are." A puzzled look crossed his face. "You're going to stick your finger down your throat and puke that crap up."

"Fuck you!"

I took him firmly by the arm and held my extended index finger a couple inches from his nose. "You have two options. Either you do it or I'll do it." Our eyes locked. I felt his breath against my face. Rain struck the hood of my parka. "That's the fucking bottom line."

We continued to stare at each other. I envisioned myself with a half nelson around Jim, my hand in his mouth, a finger searching for the spot that would make him gag, and then me keeping my finger at that spot until his gagging produced results.

Jim must've envisioned the scene also. "I'll do it myself," he said.

The sight of blood has never bothered me but if I see or hear someone vomit, I get extremely nauseous. "Go over there a ways and do it," I said.

Jim hunched over behind a bush. I covered my ears. When he stood up again, I went to see if he had told the truth. Among the gorp and pilot biscuits, I saw some half-dissolved white tablets, enough to cure a killer hangover but not enough to do damage.

"You were bluffing," I said. "Again."

Jim mopped his mouth and chin with the sleeve of his sweater. "You can't stop me," he screamed. "There'll be rivers, cliffs, crevasses..."

"You don't know when to stop, do you?" I felt a strong, primal impulse to punch his lights out.

"You'll have to watch me every minute!"

"No, I won't." I stopped short of saying something vindictive. "You're off the course." We'd both lost.

At the Resupply site, Chip and I divided the supplies and filled our packs. "Wait for the others at the trail junction. I'll be here for awhile," I told him. Before Chip departed, he walked over to the van and said something to Jim.

I found Eric and we discussed the Jim-situation. Eric asked me why it happened? I said maybe it was the rain, but that I honestly didn't know.

Eric said, "Should I talk to him about staying?"

"You can try, but I don't want him in my patrol." The talking finally ended, I filled out a report, and it was time to move on. I hoisted the 90-pound pack onto my back. I stopped at the van. "Do you want to change your mind, Jim?"

"No," he said.

"Did you do this to get back at your parents?"

He bit at his upper lip where a thin, soft moustache grew but said nothing.

At the edge of the forest, I turned around. The van was

nearly obscured by mist. I could barely see Jim standing beside it in his yellow rain parka. He raised his hand. I raised mine.

In the trees it was dark. Large drops of water fell from the soggy, black lichen that hung from Douglas-fir branches. I came to a slight opening in the trees and stopped to rest. Behind the smell of evergreens and rain was the scent of earthy-decay. I heard the words to a Grateful Dead song coming from up the trail. "That you Chip?"

"Right," he shouted and then came into view. "I dumped my stuff at the junction and came back. Thought you might like a hand with that load," he said. I said thanks and we divided it up, with me lost in my thoughts.

"You're taking Jim quitting the course too seriously."

"Maybe there's something I could've done that I didn't."

Chip tested the weight of his pack and set it back down on the ground. "Right, you can make it stop raining or make it so Jim's dad isn't an asshole." We sat on the trunk of an old fallen snag. Chip pulled out his knife and poked at the dead wood with it. "Can you walk on water? You must see yourself as some kind of fucking savior, man. Well, you're not. You can't do something good for someone who doesn't want it done to them. You're wasting your time thinking you could've. You're just feeling sorry for yourself."

"You're pretty cocky today." I felt an urge to put him in his place, to pull rank, to tell him that what I felt was bigger than he could understand. But I was too tired and too uncertain;

how could I really know what Chip understood?

"I'm just doing what you told me these courses are all about. When Jim got hypothermia and you said you needed my help, that was real shit hittin' the fan. And you didn't bullshit me about it. I had to do something for somebody else. It pushed me." Chip looked up from the log. "It felt good."

"That's because you did real good," I said.

"See, there you go. You're always handin' shit out to other people." He shook his head. "Sometimes you have to give and sometimes you have to take. You've given me things right? Things like getting to the top of a mountain, putting me in charge... I think you even trust me. Maybe not, but.."

"I trust you. Why do you think I picked you for Resupply?"

"You're doing it again, man. Cut us both a break; nobody's that tough." He drove the knife down deep into the rotten wood of the snag. "I'm not trying to get you to say good things about me. I'm saying something good about you. But you want to turn it around and act like you don't need it. This giving and taking stuff; it's a two way street."

The rain increased and then slacked off. "Thanks," I said. Beneath the old snag stood a group of pale mushrooms, their caps still covered with dead needles and black earth. High above us, hidden behind clouds, a chunk of ice detached from a glacier and rumbled down the mountain. I remember this moment very well. I remember thinking that maybe a little place inside of me had started to clear up, that I didn't really want to hollow out a log and float away to a distant, unknown shore.

"Com'on, the rest of the patrol is waiting for us at the junction," he said and lifted my pack up. "Do you think this rain is ever going to stop?"

I helped him with his pack. "The sun has to come out eventually; I think." We started up the trail. "What did you say to Jim back at the van?"

"I told him that he'd sold you and himself short."

The trail was wide to begin with and surrounded by dense stands of old-growth timber. The deeper into the forest we went, the narrower the trail got. I thought about sleep, rain-sleep. And I knew that in the morning, the path would lead us up and into the mountains.

* * * * *

Rain fell for 21 out of 23 days of that course. No one else dropped out and Chip did very well. Eric gave me a good evaluation. Trish fell in love with Eric and he fell in love with her. I hitchhiked, in the rain, back to Chico where I finished a degree in geography. I instructed for one more season. I never did find out what Vic Walsh thought of me. But I have a pretty good idea. A friend of mine, who later worked for Outward Bound, told me that he'd mentioned my name to Vic. The patriarchal mountaineer chuckled and said, "I remember him; he's the guy who got his students wet on the first night out." What a memory to be associated with.

I have never seen nor heard from Chip or Jim. I hope that Chip continued on after the course as he had during it. I believe

that he succeeded. As for Jim, I doubt that he ever regretted dropping out of the course. He probably went into marketing or designed a software program that the computer world couldn't do without and is now a wealthy businessman who lives in New York. I wish him well.

THE SMELL OF WOOD SMOKE HIGH ABOVE MONTANA

by

Bruce Weide
and
Mike Warren

"If we couldn't laugh, we would all go insane."
(J.B. as quoted by B.W.)

"I feel like a shill with a glass stomach," he said. The bartender with a scar, rolled his eyes and poured another drink. A blast of cold air accompanied by the smell of rain surged into the bar as a woman passed through the door. The smoky air in front of her parted for a moment and then closed back in. She walked up to the bar and squirmed onto a black leather stool. The whiteness of her long fingers hardly contrasted with the whiteness of the white Russian she ordered. A tiny piece of hotdog stuck to her white dress right where her love button would be. Didn't matter; he thought, it wasn't her.

"But the booze is getting to me," he said. The bartender

didn't hear him. He twisted open a Mojave Imploder, held half the capsule to his right nostril, and inhaled.

"Hey!" the ugly bartender hissed as he rubbed the purple scar on his face, "there's devices for that shit, and you do it in the bathroom."

"Sorry, sport," he said and popped the other half into his mouth and washed it down with the last of his draft beer. "I'm a little dry over here, sport. Give me something a little stronger and a little bigger."

The bartender poured him a schooner of Guinness stout. "You headed up or down, Smiley?"

He shrugged and walked away to a vacant table. The woman in white followed and sat in the chair across from him. "I'm a nurse in the ER at Sanctified Mercy Hospital," she said. "What do you do?"

"I work at the crematorium and pound bones into powder with a rubber mallet. I substitute teach on the side."

"My granduncle was a Nazi. He was also an asshole," she said and flicked the piece of hotdog off her uniform.

He gently reached into the schooner and picked it up out of the foam. "Oh cyclops of the night, of brainless genius," he said.

"Oh, I love literary people," she said. She shook a cigarette from a pack of Eve Extra Longs and put it between her red lips. "Gotta light?"

He pulled a stick match from behind his ear, struck the head with his thumbnail, and held the flame to her cigarette "I hate

it when women smoke."

She sucked in and half the cigarette turned to ash. "Hey listen, I have a good story, listen." The smoke made her words sound like they came from inside a cloud. "I was a nurse for the World Health Organization. They stuck me out in a leper colony on Laccadive Island. We had it under control. People were stabilizing at the very early stages. But then people started dying - dying all over the place of kidney failure. Leprosy doesn't do that. We were stumped and all that time people kept dying for a year. Then we figured it out. Tylenol had been available on the island for five years. A couple pills a day stopped the pain." She giggled. "Turns out the poor bastards figured that if two pills stopped the pain, twenty-five would cure them." She softly punched his shoulder. "That much Tylenol is toxic, Jack." She took his chin between her two fingers. "Analgesic deaths," she whispered.

He pointed at her chest. "Are those real or did you have a mastectomy at some point?"

"Okay," she said and got up and walked away.

The ugly bartender walked over to his table. "Strike out, Smiley?"

"Not exactly, just pissed her off. What's the little lady drinking?"

"White Russians."

"Send her a shot of vodka and a glass of milk. It's on me. I'm not a complete jerk. Oh, and by the way, if you keep picking at that scar of yours, you'll break it open. It'd be a real mess

then."

He steered himself to the bathroom. A full length mirror hung in front of the urinal. He looked down into the urinal. He hated those cigarettes butts, god how he hated those cigarette butts, especially the ones with filters; they didn't break up completely when he pissed on them, like his daddy's aircraft carrier did in the Pacific during World War II when a Jap torpedo blew it to shit.

"More than two shakes and you're playing with it," said the dwarf standing on the milk crate at the urinal next to him.

"Hey, I think you got blood in your urine," he said. "Just kidding." He looked in the mirror and saw himself. It always looks bigger from up here, he thought. He zipped up and looked back at the mirror. Damn, he thought, those fucking piss stains.

He walked to the sink. There was graffiti all over the wall, all of it so stupid he couldn't even think about it. Except for one. He took a matchbook out of his back pocket and wrote the number down.

He sauntered up to the bar. "I feel like Mr. Bojangles at 78 rpms," he said to the ugly bartender. "The Imploder. Too high, too high, too high, too high. Give me a Velvet Ditch. Heavy on the sewer water, sport."

"What's the magic word?"

He tossed a twenty dollar bill on the bar, grabbed his crotch, and walked back to the table. As he sat down, a woman

walked through the door. She smoothed her aquamarine aerobic workout suit down over her hips. She looked around. "Hey!" Her gravely voice rose above a Stones song. Mick Jagger's voice blared out from the neon jukebox;

"Please allow me to introduce myself
I'm a man of wealth an means."

"Hey, Lola," he shouted.

She saw him and stalked over to his table. "Good to see you, Lola. Don't sit down, you're sweaty," he said. "Sit on down, I was only kidding."

"Am I going to be in the way?"

"Contingency plans, babe. I believe in contingency plans."

"Here ya go, Smiley," said the ugly bartender as he shoved a tray with thirteen Ditches toward them. "You owe me fifty cents." A new song started on the neon jukebox. "Lola?"

She reached into the Bull Durham tobacco bag she kept on a string around her neck and pulled out a couple quarters. "Any calls for me tonight, Sport?"

The bartender shook his head, laughed, and walked back behind the bar.

She raised one of the drinks in a toast. "Encountered any obstinate bones lately?"

"No, have you?" He polished off his first and picked up another.

"No, but I'll tell you what happened down at the cow clinic today." She emptied another drink down her throat. "This old fart called up from his ranch, okay? He says he's got this prob-

lem with this young Charolais bull of his, like it's lying on its side and quivering out in the pasture just beyond the house, he says, the god damn thing hasn't gotten up for a day, it just lays there and shakes, so the vet says 'I'll be out there,' and he drives out there and you know what he finds? He finds a dead Charolais bull, which is worth two grand I'll have you know, and there's a couple dogs that have been chewing on its belly so that they're deep inside its guts, and that's what made the damn thing look like it was quivering, those two dogs. Lazy rancher. But what the fuck, we charged him for the visit anyway." She sighed and picked up another Ditch.

The door opened and a woman wearing a purple fox skin coat stepped in. The way his head whipped around made Lola say, "I'm intrudin'." She picked up a drink from the tray and headed over to the pool table where the dwarf was chalking up his cue. The woman in purple sashayed up to the table and picked up one of his drinks.

"Hey, Jim," he said. "Maybe I'll play some pool, maybe later. But this walkin' up to my table shit is no good."

Jim turned away. He waved Jim back. "Don't play with Lola. She'll whip your ass. She did it to me once."

Jim turned away. He waved Jim back. "The moustache is almost gone."

These Ditches are beginning to gutterize me, he thought. He pulled out his Vick's inhaler and breathed deeply seven times. Much better, he thought as the back of his head felt like it

peeled away. He shoved his chair away from the table and started to stand up. Maybe I should ask Lola to dance, he thought. Naw, nobody dances to Dylan, and he sat back down.

He raised his fist up into the smoky atmosphere and yelled, "Party!" No one looked at him. "Fuck me to death," he muttered under his breath as he sat back down. Lola looked over at him and smiled. He shook his head.

From outside came the squeal of brakes, followed by a pregnant pause, then the sound of clashing steel and breaking glass. Everyone in the bar looked towards the door. The eight ball bounced off the table and onto the floor. It rolled up against the neon jukebox. A young boy rushed through the door. "I need a towel! Quick, give me a towel," he screamed. The bartender tossed him a wet bar rag. The kid dashed back out the door.

Bad shit, he thought and downed another drink. Some poor bastard's probably maimed for life. It made him think of his cousin with the cleft lip.

He looked around to see how the other people had taken this intrusion. At the table next to him a skinny man wearing a raspberry beret shook like a withered blade of bear grass in a mid-winter chinook. He put his hand on the shaking man's shoulder. "Hey buddy, what's up?"

"Wow man, it's like I can't explain the connection, but it's like the time...." A tear welled up in his eye.

"Go on, man."

"It was this U.S.O. show. I was stationed off the coast from Guam. It was Christmas. Bob Hope was comin' to entertain us.

Ahhh, I don't know, it'd just probably bore ya."

He handed the jittery man one of his drinks. "Go on man, if it bores me, I'll let you know."

"America needs more guys like you," said the skinny man and downed the drink. "Me and Tremaine figured we'd get the jump on all the other guys and showed up for seats an hour early. Tremaine had this huge boil on his neck. Like I'm talkin' massive, ya know? The boil was so bad that Tremaine couldn't hardly move his head around, it hurt so bad. Anyway, we were sittin' there waitin' for Hope and the sun was blazin' down on us. It was like it was hot enough to french your fries. I swear to God it was that hot. So we're sittin' there waitin' in the sun, just waitin'. The other guys started filing in and there was only about fifteen minutes till Hope came on. Then I heard this sound and felt this warm wetness against my face, kinda simultaneously like, ya know? It was his boil. It exploded. The sun did it, I guess. It splattered all over the side of my face and onto my uniform. I never did see Hope, I spent the whole time cleanin' myself."

"That's it?" he said. "That's all there is?" He looked around and out of the corner of his eye he saw someone come in through the door. "Here, take these," he said and handed the man three Ditches.

She was perfect, wearing black leather exactly the way he wanted it worn. The zippers, the nylon....even the studs laid out perfectly, just the way he'd always pictured it. He liked the way her hair had been shaved two inches above her ears.

But it wasn't her. If only it'd stop raining I'd go home, he thought and raised the last ditch to his lips. "You been had," he muttered to no one.

SALMON DREAMS

Emil cut and the calf bellowed. He tossed the testicles in a bucket. "Okay Jerad, let him go." The calf dashed off to the far end of the corral. Emil walked to the water trough and washed the blood from his hands. "That should be the last one."

Jerad watched the calf find its mother. Emil dried his hands on his shirt. "Something's bothering you," he said. "I can tell. I've known you since you were a baby."

Jerad kept watching the calf. "Can you come up to the house for supper tonight?"

"Why don't you just tell me now and save me getting my ass kicked in another round of that 'Star Fighter' computer-game your boy is so fired up about?" Emil put a pinch of skoal behind his

lip. He offered the can to Jerad.

Jerad shook his head. "The place sold. It's gone through, it's final."

Emil sat on the edge of the trough. "When?"

"Should all be done in about a month. A ranch this size... too small, it's a dead end. I'm 42, that's young enough to change." Jerad looked at Emil. "Besides, this was my dad's dream not mine."

Emil shrugged. "I can understand that."

"Do you think I'm making a mistake?"

"I'm not the one to tell you that. You'll never be certain unless you are right now." Emil spit and wiped tobacco juice from his grey moustache. "I don't suppose the fellow that's buying it needs an old cowhand?"

"It's not a man, it's an insurance company. McGregor is selling out too. It's going to be a real-slick, real-big operation. They've even got a helicopter to help 'em move cattle."

"So they don't need me around, right?"

"I asked them to keep you on. They said no." Jerad cleaned the knife. "I'd appreciate it if you'd stay on with me until it's all over."

"Yeah, sure."

Jerad dipped a whetstone in the trough and started to sharpen the knife blade. "We're decided on Seattle There'll be a place for you. After we get settled. I'm sure...I know Cheryl agrees with me. You're like family." He drew the knife back and forth across the stone. "You've always talked about going up to

the Northwest, seeing a place that's green all the time, do a little salmon fishing."

Emil massaged his knee. "It wouldn't work."

"There's nothing left for you here."

"Bet it rains tomorrow." Emil looked west, towards the skyline.

"I feel real bad about this Emil." Jerad tested the blade on his thumb nail. "I wouldn't blame you for venting a little steam. In fact, I'd probably feel better if you did." He slid the knife in its sheath and handed it to Emil.

"Complaining never helped." Emil stood up and straightened his back. "Your dad gave me that knife. Pass it on to Todd."

"It's yours, you pass it on."

Emil put the knife in his back pocket. "Tell Cheryl thanks for the dinner invite. I'm headin' down to the line shack in Scorpion Gulch."

"We haven't used that place in five years. Why are you going down there?"

"Do some thinkin'," said Emil.

"I know you like it down there, but what are you really going for?" Jerad put his hand on Emil's shoulder, "You're not figurin' to something crazy are you?"

"Time to cash in my own little insurance policy."

"What is it, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Some Anasazi pots. Just one pot, that's not cracked or chipped, is worth around eight grand to city people."

"You know the kind of people you're going to have to deal

with to sell stuff like that?"

"You deal with insurance companies, I'll do what I got to do."

* * * * *

Emil unlatched the tailgate. The hinges grated. "I've given you a ride this far Tish, now it's your turn." He pulled two weathered planks out from the truck bed and formed a ramp. "Com'on," he said. The horse snorted. He kept a hand on her rump as she backed down the ramp.

He saddled the pinto. "This'll be our last visit home." He turned and looked at the truck, a '54 Chevy, faded to greyish blue. He'd bought it new, on his 32nd birthday. Cracked glass spread across the back window like a spider web. But she runs good, he thought, pretty good anyway. He blocked the front tires and tossed a set of keys on the seat. The sand sucked at his feet as he walked back to the horse. He scratched behind her ears. "Don't want her rolling away on us." The horse leaned into his scratching. He stared at the southern skyline formed by the Kaiparowits Plateau. It stood a mile above him and stretched out long and flat, ending to the east where it dove down into the waters of Lake Powell. On the other side of the lake was Navaho Mountain, an extinct volcano that the Indians considered sacred.

He took a couple lemon drops from his shirt pocket, held them out for the horse, and then gave a gentle tug on her reins. They stopped at the rim rock and looked down. The canyon dropped 800

feet to a sandy bench. Beyond the bench he could see the inner canyon, at the bottom of which flowed a shallow muddy river, the Escalante. "Okay Tish, let's get on down."

He stayed in front of the horse but didn't pull on her reins. "You're doing just fine." The angle of the sandstone grew steeper. The horse slid and her nostrils flared. He pushed against her chest with his shoulder. "Just relax," he said quietly. He could feel her sweat coming through his shirt. "A little ways more and we're home-free."

They continued their descent. The angle eased back. His fingers relaxed. "You scared me up there. You never slid that much before." The horse farted. "Not so nervous now," he laughed.

The bench extended for half a mile to the rim of the inner canyon. He climbed onto the horse's back and traversed the bench. In places, slickrock domes bulged up from wind-rippled sand like the backs of whales surfacing on a silent red sea. "Only April and it feels like summer." He looked at the snow-covered mountains, far to the west. "Still winter up in the Henrys."

They descended into a side canyon with a shallow creek. The air felt heavier and smelled of new growth. He got down off the horse to let her drink. In one place an apron of sand fanned out over the canyon bottom, formed from years of spilling down from the rim like a slow dry waterfall. He stepped upstream from the horse and drank.

The cottonwood leaves were small yet and brilliant green. He walked down the path and the horse followed. They passed the en-

trance of another side canyon. At the junction of the two canyons was a pool where bullgill swam.

He'd always wondered how those fish found their way up the muddy and shallow Escalante. Wondering about the hows and whys of those little fish always caused him to remember a picture he'd seen years ago in a school book. The picture showed a large salmon in white rapids, with a caption that read, "Natural instinct guides the majestic salmon to the place of their birth where they spawn and then die." He'd thought it a mean trick for God to play on salmon.

Someone had left the gate open. It doesn't matter, he thought, we haven't run cattle down here for years. Hell of a place to run cattle anyway, what with it taking a hundred acres per head and the quicksand and the side canyons of side canyons for them to get lost in. He led the horse through the gate and closed it.

The shack stood in the shade of a red sandstone wall. He walked to the edge of a small bluff and listened to the river. Across the muddy water a larger wall glowed amber in the evening light.

The shack looked fine. It was 14 x 14, made of yellow pine that had come from the mountains, been milled in Tropic, and packed down by mules. Over the years, wind-driven sand had pitted the wood and tinted it red like the sandstone. A rusty chimney stuck up from the roof. To the left of the front window hung a deer skull with antlers.

Years back, he found the skull wedged between the side walls

of a narrow canyon. He'd tried to imagine being trapped, waiting for death. Until that day, he never pictured animals making mistakes. Later he found a mouse that had fallen from the canyon rim. A couple years after that, he watched a swift miscalculate its dive and slam into the sandstone wall. Time spent alone had shown him that everything made mistakes. Even plants rooted in the wrong places. And the problem with mistakes, he thought, is that you can't really learn from them because the exact same circumstances never happened again.

He unsaddled the horse and opened the barrel; there were still oats. While the horse fed, he brushed her down. He removed some food and a towel from the saddlebags and headed upstream to the deep pool. The horse followed.

He took his boots and socks off and looked up at the red and white layers of sandstone to where a spring trickled down through black lichen that clung to the rock, peeling away in places like an old scab. He removed his clothes. The snake grass felt stiff to the bottom of his feet as he stepped through a hedge of reeds, and into the pool. The bluegill darted for cover. He dove into the water and surfaced with a shout. After he washed the sweat from his body and the dust from his hair, he stood on the bank and let the air dry him off. He placed a plastic bag with a steak, a potato, a dozen carrots, and some beer into the pool. "Tomorrow night, after we pick up the pots, that's our retirement dinner," he said. He walked naked, except for his boots, back to the shack.

Emil put on a clean teeshirt. When he was a boy, his mother

always told him, "You will feel best if you wear something clean and white next to your skin." He smiled. She couldn't tell a joke to save her life, but she knew how to laugh; unlike his father.

Outside, he built a fire and heated up a can of Western Family Chili Con Carne. A crescent moon appeared above the canyon rim. "Hey Tish!" The horse walked over. He rubbed her just above the nose. "After eatin' all those beans, I oughta be able to compete with you." He tossed a couple more sticks on the fire and went into the shack.

He knew from memory that a kerosene lantern hung to one side of the stove. He struck a match on the stove top.

Back in 1950, he'd packed the stove down in pieces. My first year out here, he thought. Came out from South Dakota because he didn't want to fight in Korea. At the age of 16 he'd killed a man, accidentally. He and a friend had been pheasant hunting. Emil tripped. The shotgun went off. Emil couldn't stop the bleeding. Ten minutes later his friend died. After that Emil didn't hunt and never wanted to touch another gun.

The war started and he wouldn't fight. His father called him a coward. In Utah, he changed his last name from Weiss to Gunther. Old man Pendelton, who only seemed old because Emil was 19, had asked, "Can you handle horses?" Emil bluffed and said yes. "Good, I need some things packed down to a line shack. We'll see how you handle being alone."

The match burned close to his fingers and he blew it out. He thought of the last time he'd heard his mother's voice. He had called home a few times and always hung up before the call went through. But one time he waited. His mother answered. Three weeks later he would receive a postcard from a cousin telling him that she had died while kneading bread dough.

"Emil! It has been so long and I have had worries. I must have a chair to sit, this is so happy a day."

He asked what the weather was like out there? She told him. He asked about the farm.

"I hear your papa, he comes into the house. I get him."

"No! I just want to talk to you, Mom."

"When will you come home and make friends with your papa?"

"Does he still...."

"I know his heart." He heard her call his father to the phone. "A special call," she said.

He could hear his father say, "Is it him?" The line went dead.

Not until five years later did he try again, an attempt he blamed on whiskey. The operator at the Huron exchange said, "I'm sorry sir, that extension is no longer in service." He asked her where Mr. Weiss had moved to. "He passed away nine months ago," she said.

Emil listened to the thick, muddy sound of the river and thought of all that water flowing by, cutting at the sandstone walls and dredging the canyon deeper. He lit the lantern and lay

down on the lower bunk. He'd jerryrigged the bunk by stacking one bed on top of the other.

What made him want a bunkbed was an article in Family Circle called, 'Decorating Your Child's Room.' He had been thumbing through the magazine while Cheryl made breakfast. "I'm ten years older than you," he'd said. "Does that bother you?" She laughed and said no. That was in '63, the morning after he bought the truck - a month prior to President Kennedy's assassination.

Emil had driven straight from the car lot in St. George to her place, a white clapboard house with three rooms. She taught first through eighth grade and lived alone. Her parents lived in Provo, where her father was a librarian at the university. Her sister had married a law student and later moved to Los Angeles.

Emil showed Cheryl the engine, opened the tailgate, and kicked the tires. She stood on her tiptoes and looked inside the cab. "Does it have a radio?"

"You bet. Even picks up a Las Vegas station."

He drove her to their picnic spot on a promontory that looked down a thousand feet to a bench that dropped into a side canyon of a side canyon that drained into the big canyon beyond their sight. A bank of clouds moved towards them from the west, dropping bolts of lightning and curtains of rain. "I think the storm is close enough for us to hear the thunder," he said and turned the radio off.

The wind carried the warm smell of moisture to them. Lightning flashed down, connecting the sky with distant mesa tops. She pinched his side softly, "How about you take me home and I'll

fix us a dinner to celebrate your new truck?"

"Are you frightened of the storm?"

"No, I'm hungry."

By the time they reached her place, it was raining hard. After dinner, while she cleaned up, he started a fire. "I think Beethoven's Sixth Symphony would be appropriate for tonight," she said. As the music started, she turned off the lights and joined him beside the fire.

"I've been saving this for something special." She held a bottle of wine up so that the firelight behind it looked red. She handed him the wine bottle and a corkscrew. The cork broke when he tried to pull it out. "Let me try," she said. She poured the wine into enamel cups and passed one to him.

"I guess something has to be said before drinking this?" His only experience with wine had been at the Lutheran church in Huron, South Dakota, during communion.

"No, but a toast adds to the fun," she said.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Here's to us."

"To us. And a ranch of our own."

"One of these days anyway."

She softly touched her cup to his and brought it to her lips as if the wine were something holy. "It's excellent," she whispered. The fire added reddish highlights to her brown hair and made the smooth features of her face appear even more delicate.

"Yeah, it is." He set the cup aside.

In her bedroom, with only a candle for light, she pulled back the white comforter. He sat on the sheets and turned her so that

she stood with her back to him. He undid each button with extreme care. His hands slid inside her dress and moved up to her shoulders. The dress fell to the floor.

Cheryl's hands moved to her underclothes. "I'll do it," he said. Occasionally, wind wrapped around the house and drove rain against the windows. Lightning struck nearby. For a moment, after the lightning disappeared, his eyes saw her naked body as black and the space around her, white. The imaged faded.

"Now you do me," he said and stood up.

He lay awake long after she drifted off to sleep. The main storm had passed and he listened to a quiet rain fall upon the roof. The smell of sage came in through an open window. He could feel her breath at his neck.

From the bottom bunk, he looked up at the calendar pictures pasted onto the walls of the shack. The caption beneath one picture read, "Dining in the Domeliner on the way to Los Angeles with Union Pacific." The picture showed a number of people eating and one smiling black waiter. Emil looked over at another picture of a man seated on a combine in a wheatfield. The combine was small compared to what farmers drove today. Emil fell asleep.

The next morning he awoke from a dream of flight. He had flown over fields of wheat that moved like waves in the wind. He hadn't dreamed of flying since childhood and it made him feel good inside.

He looked at the lantern and realized that he'd let it burn empty. "Doesn't matter." Did I say that or think it, he won-

dered? Thoughts can get pretty loud after a little time alone.

He stepped out of the shack. Thin clouds moved in from the west. A mourning dove cooed down canyon. He ate some oatmeal and then saddled the horse. They followed the fenceline to a side canyon. At the head of the narrow canyon, he dismounted, and left Tish to nibble at some grass. He ascended loose sand to a hollow in the rock. At the entrance, he paused and caught his breath.

He walked across the dusty cave floor, where ancient corncobs lay nearly buried, to an Anasazi granary built of rock, mud, and sticks. Mouse and lizard tracks crisscrossed the dust. To the left of the granary, figures had been carved into a section of black desert varnish. One petroglyph showed three stick figures with bows and arrows hunting bighorn sheep. Another depicted a circle that spiraled inward. The largest figure was one with a long triangular torso and square head from which horns protruded. Life, infinity, and the gods, he thought.

He looked at the carving he'd added to the wall, a stick man on a horse surrounded by three cows. Beneath the figures, he'd added, "E.G. - 1956" and a large question mark. "Emil Gunther," he said out loud, "and the year he learned that everything changes, the year he spent 28 days down at the line shack, alone." The year Cheryl married Jerad.

Emil knelt down in front of the granary and pried at the stone door with his knife. He arranged the pots, bowls, arrowheads, and a woven sandal in the dust. For a long time he sat looking at the pottery and calculated again the money he would receive, at least \$25,000. This is what's left of them, he thought,

this and some structures and stories carved in the rock. They lived here for centuries and no one knows for sure why they vanished. All that money for the memory of people who've been dead 1200 years.

Emil remembered his last conversation with Old Man Pendelton. Between sips of Wild Turkey, they replaced worn hoses on a tractor. Pendelton knew that he was being eaten up by cancer and would die soon. Though he had told no one, Emil sensed this private knowledge. Half way through the bottle, Emil wanted to say that he appreciated how Pendelton had taken him in, that he would never forget the Old Man, that he loved him. None of the words that went through Emil's mind seemed right. Instead he blurted out something to the effect that nothing made much sense.

"Nobody said it was supposed to," said Pendelton. "You start looking too hard and you miss what's there. When I get up in the morning I think, 'By God, here's a new day to do something with,' and I go out and work at what I do best. Then I eat and sleep and do it again. And there's always special trimmings that make me hold out for more, like October, calving season, good food, and friends who share their Wild Turkey. And once in a while, when things were really going my way, I ran into a woman who made me feel strong."

"And when that's gone?" asked Emil.

"I haven't reached that point yet. You tell me."

Emil shrugged. Pendelton said, "You were pretty tight-lipped about you and Cheryl. No one ever figured it out, except me. Put it behind you. It didn't work out and it never would've. Trust

me on that one. You've been more of a son to me than Jerad ever was, so I'm not speaking up for him. One more thing Emil; I don't think Jerad knows that you and Cheryl were serious."

After the Old Man died, Jerad told Emil that he still had a job, for as long as he wanted it. Maybe he never did figure it out, Emil had thought. Or maybe he feels obligated for all the time I spent with him when he was a boy. Maybe it's Cheryl's doing. Could just be common sense, now that I'm the only one who knows the ranch inside and out.

Emil stood up and walked over to the wall of petroglyphs. He hammered the butt-end of his knife with a rock and chipped away at the desert varnish. The tip of his knife broke. He worked from the top end of the question mark and carved a line that spiraled inward.

When he finished, he put the sandal in a coat pocket. He set the pottery and arrowheads back inside the granary and pushed the stone door into place. I'll come back for these tomorrow, he thought and returned to the horse.

The sky had turned dark grey. Between gusts of wind he could hear a jet flying overhead. He rode across the bench where the wind blew sand from the top of small dunes. A bolt of lightning cut a jagged white crack in the sky. He counted to five before thunder sounded. To the west, curtains of reddish-purple rain fell from the underbellies of black clouds.

The rain caught up to him before he reached the shack. When the rain ended, the air smelled of wet sage.

After unsaddling Tish, he put a triple helping of oats in her bucket. He brushed the horse's back, under her belly, and cleaned the mud from her legs. He opened the gate and returned to the shack. He placed the Old Man's knife and the sandal on the bottom bunk. The sun came out. He walked down the embankment and sat with his back against an old cottonwood where the exposed roots formed arm rests. He watched the river grow larger and more muddy from the rain.

At first he tried to fight the drowsiness that caused his head to nod. I'll cook the steak and potato later, and then drink the beer, he thought. But right now it feels good to just sit here and listen to the river cut its way deeper into the ground.

The river rose higher and higher and lulled him to sleep. For a long time, Tish stood at the edge of the embankment. She sniffed the air and pawed at the ground. Emil did not stir. Tish turned and followed the stream to a place where good grass grew. The clouds floated east. Patches of sunlight drifted along the desert floor. Steam rose from the sandstone and the river grew.

Emil opened his eyes as the morning sun cleared the canyon rim. He smiled. An Appaloosa stood in the water before him, the horse Old Man Pendelton had given him after his first year on the ranch. He grabbed the horse's mane, jumped onto her back, and laughed at the lightness of his body. He felt the horse's strength through his legs as she ran out of the water and up a sand dune. They stopped at the edge of a cliff. He looked down at the river, the clear water turning frothy white as it plunged

over a small falls. Salmon leaped from the rapids.

Good, he thought, I have always wanted to see them and now I have. He nudged the horse with his knees. They ran towards a field of wheat. Behind the field stood sandstone mesas, topped with Douglas Fir and beyond that, a white mountain.

DIRECTIONS TO THREE FINGERS LOOKOUT

To reach the summit,
walk up through a dark forest
where moss drips down to decay.
Continue up to a lake saddled between two mountains
(Search and you can find a good place to sleep,
a nest between some well-placed fir,
at the edge of a cliff,
with a view of the glacier
and the Three Fingers.)

In the morning, follow the ridge east,
past elfish canals that cut through small fields
where gnomes chockol ground squirrels
and back away with sheepish grins.

Up higher, in a large alpine meadow,
the last fingerprints
of Pleistocene ice
can be seen on the bottom
of little kettle lakes.
After the first frost
kills the bugs that bite,
stop for a swim
if the sun is out.

On the ridge, nothing stops the wind
that flows in from the ocean
ignoring tides
and punishing trees that stand bent,
stunted, and flagging east.

Stay with the ridge on into the high country;
cross rock, lichen, sedges, and ice
to where trees gave up
and mountain goats lick the rock
you pissed on, for the salt.
Traverse the top of a steep glacier
whose titan groans can be heard
as you climb the last of the route
up to the south spire - it rises
as if imagined by an Iowa farmer
who longed for mountains instead of corn.

Atop this is the Lookout,
a vertical half-mile drop behind,
a thousand feet off the front.

At night, when everyone is asleep,
You might go out beneath a full moon,
and stand above clouds that roll
farther and farther
inland from the coast
until the world becomes mountain tops
sticking up out of clean white cotton.

You might think,
"I am better than others for being up here."
You will know this isn't true,
but beneath your thoughts you will know it is.
Then you will go back inside the Lookout to sleep,
the moon interfering with your dreams.

CLOSE TO THE ABYSS

A lightning bolt attended the air
and left it stunned
with the acid perfume
of ozone

The same fragrance landslides exude
an electric musk
hanging in the air
Like my brother and I smelled that night
in the Tetons
so many midnights ago.

The day
just the day was frightening enough
with the rain
and the lightning storms
the steep rock
wet and slick

We holed up like marmots
to escape the rain
ice water dripped down my neck
I sang to hold back the fear
He didn't like that
but what else could I do?
Tell me Damn it
what else could be done
with the weight of responsibility
for a brother six years younger
with fear
heavier than a stone?

Night came
 We emerged from the hole
 and ascended brittle rock
To think of it now hurts my stomach
 The rock so poor
 and fear so dense
But we were charmed that day
 Even more that night
 when we hear the jet
 and marveled at how low it flew
 God was it close!
We rappelled down another hundred feet
 the rope shredded our clothes
 the snow numbed our hands
And we saw that a chunk of mountain
 larger than three jetliners
 had crumbled
 and crashed down on the snowfield
 where we stood
 silent in our good fortune
 five minutes above death
Breathing the perfume of fallen rock
 electric in the air
 Air so dry and pungent
 it was toxic to ravens.