

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1977

Slashing fury

Elliott S. Brody

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

Brody, Elliott S., "Slashing fury" (1977). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 3580.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/3580>

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.

Slashing Fury

by

Elliott S. Brody

B.S.E., Northeast Missouri State University, 1973

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

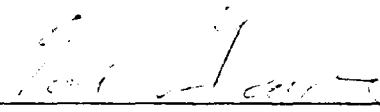
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1977

Approved by:



Chairman, Board of Examiners



Dean, Graduate School

Date

UMI Number: EP34948

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 EP34948

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

SLASHING FURY

Slashing Fury	1
Smitt71
The Belgian Stallion a work in progress83

Slashing Fury

by

Elliott Brody

Well, well, well. A new face. A fella in aprons. Must not be a decent looking woman left in town. You're from down south. You can't be from up north, there is no north from here, except Canada. Unless you're a Cannuck. You're not a Cannuck, are you?

Good.

Hmmm. Those aprons are cute. What's your name? Never mind, your name's Junior. Hear? Junior.

Now, Junior, you don't know and I don't blame anybody for not knowing, but I take a Coke and a Bromo Seltzer every morning and every morning I sit right here. Suppose something happens. Say the dam breaks, washes out the road and detours the bus. Twenty-five pregnant women are stranded in this cafe and you've got to take

care of them. Forget it. This stool stays empty til I get here.

You see me walk in the door, you have that Coke down in front of me before the steam sets on my glasses. Then you can get the Bromo, half a glass of hot water and a slug of cold tap. When this place starts selling bottled Coke and tin-foil packs of baking soda, you won't see me in here again, but I'll be dead, so don't worry.

All the other girls spoiled me, even that old whore, Manni. "Dicker Treadaway," she'd say, "Dicker Treadaway, you spoiled."

That's the way they talk, them breeds. You'll find out about that quick enough, if you can stay alive.

Thanks. Now the Bromo.

DON'T FILL THAT GLASS WITH COLD WATER FIRST, YOU DUMB ASS. DUMP IT OUT. GET ANOTHER GLASS. COME HERE.

Listen. Turn on the hot water, put the glass under it and fill it halfway. Then shut off the hot water, turn on the cold and let it run. Pass the glass under once and drop in the Bromo, two cranks. Get that glass to me and then you can go back and turn off the water.

You got it? Go.

Good. You did that good on the second try. That's not bad. Say! Here's the boys and you'd better be there.

Don't bother asking if they want coffee, just stand smiling by their table, that one under the clock. Say, "Howdy Fellas," and as soon as they sit down, turn their cups over and pour. Bye.

Hey. You'll need that coffee pot, huh?

After you come out of the kitchen, come back here, I'm getting ready to order.

Let me see. You don't like those boys, do you? Well, don't worry, they like you. They like anything in aprons, but they're all right. A little older, but they like you, so don't worry, not too much anyway.

Get me some coffee.

They're a little uglier too, especially Carruthers. Uglier than his old man, but nothing compared to his half brother. Mean too. Of course it's better than being stupid like he used to be. He paid though. I don't think eating steak and eggs with one arm is much fun, but that's what he orders every morning.

He was dumb and he got served right, betting \$2000 he didn't really have on a dog fight between a big hound and a timber wolf. \$2000. \$2000 against the tallest, strongest, toughest Halfbreed you never in your whole life want to meet. You're new. You better be tough. This is Montana, kid.

The last new face in town got off lucky. He only had to fight half of the ones that matter the first month he was here. Bob Giest sent him packing, though. That Giest is bad, once he starts that kicking.

One day he's gonna forget to stop and kill somebody. Then maybe us decent folks'll have a chance at some peace and quiet while he's down at Deer Lodge. Maybe they'll hang him. I'd go.

Hell, he ran off the last good bartender this place had, and you wearing those aprons are gonna see him soon enough. Hoo Hoo, those aprons are cute. I'd move it if I was you, bud.

He'll be here at 11:00 for lunch and mighty sad he's gotta take time from eatin' to fight.

But he leaves Carruthers alone, now that Carruthers carries that 357, and Bobby Giest is no small part of the reason either. Carries it with him ever since that dog fight and nobody calls him on it either.

Don't look so stupid, Junior. What do you think that bulge under his coat is, a hernia?

Hey. Don't you hear that bell? Go get those boys their food.

WELL THEY LOOK HAPPY. HOW ABOUT ME? COME HERE I'M READY TO ORDER.

Let's see. Gimmie some wheat cakes, a short stack and don't come back and tell me you're out of batter. Tell Lukas he's an asshole and tell him to make some up. No, hold it. You stay here, I want to give you some advice. Just get me some more coffee.

LUKAS YOU ASSHOLE. MAKE ME SOME WHEAT CAKES.

That's good. You did that right. As soon as you see the steam leave my cup, get me a warmer. It'll be to your advantage. Listen. This is not your kind of place. Giest'll teach you that if you don't believe me.

You see Carruthers just has one arm and I told you already that he lost it making a bad bet on two dogs, didn't I? Okay. I'll tell you some more, that was just a piece of the story.

See Carruthers used to be a good hunter. Trapper too. Sometimes he'd be gone months. Way up. Past the Yukon. But that's when he was younger. He had a few good hounds and more than enough instinct. Anyway, he got hold of a big, mean hound one winter when he was down in Missoula, tradin' pelts. He came back with this big, gray-black mutt about the size of a small pony in the back of his pick-up. Fucking dog was big enough to read a parking meter.

Everybody asked him what he was gonna do with it and he says, "Wolves."

"Shit," I said, "There's no wolves this far south anymore and besides, they're illegal."

"There's plenty of wolf in Canada," he said back, "And since when did anything being illegal ever matter to you? Besides, you can sell anything in Missoula." And that's no lie either.

He went off with Simpson the next week and about two months later they came back and they had wolf. What they did was run the packs til they got the wolf cornered and when the pack was spent and the wolf was done in, they turned the big mutt loose on it.

Even south in Alberta, the wolves only get to about 150 pounds, maybe 175 or even as high as 200, but Carruthers' mutt weighed over 250. All in all, there couldn't have been too much fighting.

But not the way Carruthers told it.

"Oh, you should have seen it," he said.

"It was about twelve feet of snow," he said.

"And the wolf's tongue was hangin' out."

"Then the wolf was on his back, scared, with his hind legs kicking."

"But it didn't make any difference to Jack."

I knew that dog was no match for a timber wolf in a real fight, but I started thinking Carruthers might be dumb enough to take the bait.

Now, Saturdays, everybody comes out to my place. There's no school left here and the nearest one's the consolidated high school in Glasgow, but that's over one hundred miles away. There's no really outstanding athletes at the air base, mostly scientists, so the only sport we have is what we make ourselves, and I'm the biggest sportsman in town.

I know you're new, but if you notice, this town, this state, this whole country is crawling with dogs. And too many and I said so. That's why I started keeping a kind of humane society out at my place. For the dogs, that is. But who can afford gas chambers, vets and all that?

I keep them out there a week and if nobody wants them and they look like they'll fight, well, what harm is there in a little sport on Saturday? Right? I gotta eat. I gotta feed those dogs, keep their pens in shape, dig the pits, the graves. And all by hand. A friendly admission charge doesn't hurt anybody, the town's got entertainment and I make a living. Where's the harm in that?

I started pumping Carruthers whenever I saw him, telling him how scrawny his dog was looking. "You feeding that dog, Mike?" I'd say. And he'd just look out the window or someplace. Then he'd say, "Of course I feed him, you old fart. What a dumb thing to ask somebody. 'Do you feed your dog?' You know, Dicker, you're getting old."

Then I'd look out the window and say, "How's that?"

"Didn't you see him pull me into town this morning on my skis?"

"Nope, must not 've." But he didn't like that.

"You just be here tomorrow," he said, "You just be here and you'll see him pullin' me on my skis right across the prairie. You just be here tomorrow and you'll see, you old fart."

"Sure," I said, "I'll be right here waitin'."

After a month of business like that I really started on him. Finally, I got so sick of his braggin' I said, "Shit, Carruthers, you think that dog is tough. Bull shit. I got four dogs out at my place that'll make crackers out of that dog of yours, if you're not afraid to bring him out there this Saturday."

"Fuck you, Dicker. Where are they, huh? Where are they, you old fart?"

"You know."

"Yeah. I know, and I'll be there this Saturday."

Now, Junior. You know and I know that that mutt of his would have chewed the face off a grizzly if it got the chance. And when that Saturday's fighting was over, I had four, bloody little pups to bury. Oh, they fought good, and at one point, when they all had him by a different leg, it looked like they had a chance, but he got each of them, four big crunches, four broken backs, and that was that. All in all, unless you like squealin' that just gets higher and higher and higher, an unbalanced fight is not too exciting.

To say the least, nobody was pleased and they let me know. Except Carruthers of course, and he just grinned. But Simpson was a lot madder than the rest because he believed me and bet against Carruthers' mutt. That and I think he wanted the fights to last longer. "I'm just lettin' you know," he said.

"I know you are," I said.

"Nothin' but squealin'," he said.

"That's dog fights for you," I said.

"Well, I thought you had some good dogs, but Carruthers' mutt chewed 'em up like cornflakes."

"Big dog, ain't he."

"And you charged everybody double admission, you old fart, Dicker."

I took the money out of my vest, looked at it, folded it in half and stuck it into my jeans. "Yup," I said, "I did."

"Well, you ought to give some of it back, you old fart, Dicker."

"Simpson," I said, "Simpson, we all pay to learn." I don't think he was twenty-three at the time. I pointed my finger at him, looked hard and said, "You watch that 'old fart' business squirt, or you're gonna learn another lesson. And from now on, it's Mr. Treadaway, to you."

But I paid too. Nobody showed up the next week. It didn't matter too much though because I pulled ahead in the long, long run and went past even on the two weeks admission charges, and for once, I didn't have any dogs to bury. That's the worst part of the whole job, digging. Nothing I hate more than a shovel. And I can tell you, digging that wolf's grave was the hardest job I ever had, but never mind.

If nothing else I did find out how stupid the whole bunch running around with Carruthers could be. I don't feel much pity for Simpson loosing a few bucks in a sure

smear. He deserved that for betting against his friend. And one arm or not, I still don't feel too sorry for Carruthers. He learned too. The only one I care about is Giest. As much trouble as he is, and I've told him to his face plenty of times, he never had a chance. Now, being the toughest guy in town's the only thing he has to his name.

By the time he was a grown man, he'd whipped everybody in town. He may not have killed anybody, but there's been plenty who died of the beating. He's tough, but nobody knew just how tough til the Halfbreed showed up.

He'd just come to town and he was looking for me. He'd parked his van out there, right outside and was getting out of it when Giest, Tills and Markham came cruising across the street. That Halfbreed was a good head, head and a half taller than his van and I knew it was him by that spiked jacket he was wearing. My brother, O'Neil'd told me to look out for a big monster wearing a spiked, black jacket and to step cautious around him.

I was the only one in town who knew who he was and when I saw Giest come across the street for him I jumped up to stop him, but I guess I was a little too slow.

That jacket he was wearing was a surprise for a start. It wasn't just spiked, it was all spikes. Little ones, sharp like nails. And he was tall. His legs were long and he had on a pair of black leather jeans with some kind of chain wrapped around his shins to the tops of his stompers. That and he had long black hair, which must have been his halfbreed blood.

He was pulling on a pair of black leather gloves when Giest got to him. "You're ugly," he said, "Get out of my town." Then he spit in his face.

The Halfbreed didn't say a word, at least I didn't see his lips move. He just finished putting on his gloves, then he wiped the spit out of his eye and then, POW. He hit Giest on the forehead three times, maybe more, I couldn't count fast enough, and Giest was flat on the ground. Tills and Markham took off running and Giest was sprawled out on his back with blood pouring out of all the new holes in his head.

I was standing there with my mouth open and the Halfbreed just stepped over Giest's body, walked up to me and said, "You Treadaway. Your brother, I know him. Talk."

"Uh, yeah, well," I said, "Uh come on in here. It's a lot quieter than the street. Can I buy you a cup

of coffee?"

"No. Steak."

He must have had steel sewn into the fingers of those gloves, which would make sense because of the wolf and for another thing, he smashed Giest's skull like an egg shell. That's why Giest doesn't have any eyebrows, just stitches under that blue stocking cap to cover his steel forehead. See, what the doc did was cut the skin off the top of his head and then peeled it back and snipped it off at the eyebrows so he could pick out the bone chips. Then he slipped in the steel disc, slapped the front of Giest's face back on and sewed it up. Simpson, who's too dumb to lie, said that when the doc came out of the operating room he said, "If he lives, he lives."

And he lives.

Remember, Junior, if he catches you before you get out of town, don't hit him in the head and don't waste time trying to kick him in the balls. They're long gone from another fight and he never felt anything there after the Halfbreed smashed him anyway.

Dammit, Junior, will you get on it. My coffee's cold.

That's better. I hate to remind you of your job,

but that little bell you hear says my wheat cakes are ready, so if you don't mind, where's the syrup?

What do you want now? Go scrub some pans and let a man eat. I don't know how a punk ass like you got here alive. No way you could have thumbed this far back without somebody shooting you. Look at that hair. Real cute, goes good with your aprons. What say in there, Lukas? You get any off him yet?

Oh, your looks don't scare me much, Junior. The only one your looks are gonna scare is you when Giest finishes with you and you look in the mirror. Unless you're blind.

That's right, scrub the pans.

JUNIOR. Get me a donut.

Thanks. Now, Junior, I'm sorry for talking to you the way I did but I was hungry and one thing I can't stand is somebody's eyes in my food.

You know, the boys have been waiting at the cash register to tell you how much they enjoyed your service for some time now.

What do you want? Don't tell me you're warming up to old Dicker? I'll tell you, if nothing else, people here are friendly, and we do for each other as best we can. Of course, I've always had to make my own way,

which is something I can't say about you, not by looking at you anyhow.

Now, don't tell me where you come from, I'll figure you out in time. I know people, that's for sure or I wouldn't be alive today.

I thought I'd seen every kind of man there was in the war, but one thing I'll tell you is, they don't have a number for that Halfbreed in Washington. And was he ever a surprise to Carruthers.

My brother, O'Neil, saw him first time ever near Wolf Point. He wrote me about this big timber wolf he'd seen cleaning up the pits and that there was some giant Halfbreed controlling it with a pipe and a lasso. First he roped it, then he slid the pipe down and pushed on its head so he could walk it back to the cage built in the back of his van.

Just to survive, a wolf has got to be mean, just to run the way they do. You know they've got to be strong, but when you handle one with a pipe and a rope like that and give it a few dogs to chew on every week, you can imagine, it might get a little vicious. Not that a tough dog ever scared me, but I've learned since then that that pipe trick can help turn a fairly tough dog into one ugly ball of slashing fury, and that's what

it's all about.

See, what I do is, if the dog won't respond to the pipe, I use him to bait on the faster learners or in the first few fights of the day, if he's big. It's better than feeding them when they're useless and besides, it gives them that one fighting chance they deserve. And what's really good about it is that it makes for a system of champions, home grown and everything else. So, you see, no matter what, I'm a sportsman first.

And a promoter too. I don't deny it, a skill is a skill and if a man can't take pride in his work, he should at least take pride in the fact that he's working. You may not know much but I can see you're not dumb through and through. Still, just how you got here, I haven't figured out, but don't tell me.

It couldn't have been on Groman's grain truck because it's been tied up for a week, waitin' for Groman and Peterson to sober up. For that matter, I don't know how that Halfbreet got around so quiet. It's that blood, and that cunning that comes from being wild, I guess.

O'Neil said he heard about him in Glasgow, that he was going around the whole hy-line and that he'd come all the way down from the Yukon with that wolf. It was a lot

bigger than most, I know it topped 220, maybe even 230. Not even your Russian wolves in Siberia get that big, maybe the ones that ride over on the floes. Those are the ones that are big and mean, with the good, thick hides. And the blood and the cunning. It's born in them.

I've never seen any dog, woman, mountain or valley like that wolf. He had fur thick as an ice storm. Shit. After he came back inside from looking at it, Carruthers said, "If my dog kills him, I get the pelt."

But the Halfbreed just put down his steak and said, "No. Money. You got money?"

"I'll have it Saturday. I got it down in the credit union in Glasgow. You'll see it Saturday."

I should have known Carruthers was planning something funny. Trapping is hard work, messy too, and all he wanted was the pelt? Why not put in for the money? \$2000 would have paid for a good, long hunt and a couple of nights in Denver to boot. But I didn't think he'd try something funny. I'm too trusting of my fellow man, you know?

I'm sure Giest would have set me straight, but at the time, he was in the airbase hospital, somewhere

between hell and walking the streets. There's no one in town who'd rather see things go wrong for Carruthers more than Giest. See, Carruthers is Giest's older, half brother. I told you their old man was crazy, but crazy's not the word. The fact is, he was the last one from this town to out-and-out kill somebody.

Happened in Glacier. Little Mike was with him. Little Mike, that's Carruthers. His father was Big Mike and Big Mike was the toughest guy in town until that crazy woman he raped down at Warm Springs shot him. That was Giest's mother.

I don't know how she got away from Warm Springs, but those crazy people are next to wild animals when it comes down to it. And Warm Springs is not what you'd call maximum security to begin with. Hell, look at the way Big Mike and that loony bunch got loose and dicked her when she was strapped down in the tight ward. That's what Big Mike called it. I know he spent some time there. Give most a chance to act a little nuts and nine times out of ten, they'll take it, singing to the birds, talking to God, or try to kill somebody. Maybe both. That was Big Mike.

What a poacher. When he came back from Glacier with that big, bull elk, he said he got it with one shot.

"Ain't that right, Little Mike," he said.

"Yeah," says Little Mike. Pa took him right out of the park and nobody saw nuthin'."

"See there," said Big Mike, "See there."

Well, we didn't see. The only one who did see was the tourist who was taking pictures of the elk when Big Mike poached it with just one shot.

"I couldn't help it," said Big Mike. "The bullet must have gone right through the elk and killed him too. He wasn't wearin' no red, Judge, honest. I'm sorry. Oh God, Oh Jesus, is that you?"

He was standing on the witness chair, looking at the ceiling, talking to Jesus. Sigmun, the jew lawyer O'Neil sent over from Butte, gave him a nod and all of a sudden Big Mike jumped straight into the air and landed right in the middle of the court room floor, screaming and yelling and shaking like a Hoot. Then his wife stood up and started yelling, "Mike. Oh Mike. Somebody help him, he's gone out of his mind." And that's what got him to Warm Springs instead of Deer Lodge.

It took Elizabeth Giest to put him in the ground though, not eighteen months later.

After it all cooled down and the tourist's wife went back to New Jersey with her lawyers, Sigmund and O'Neil pulled some strings and Big Mike was back terrorizing the whole town, only worse. Much worse. You let somebody get away with something like that and you're just making more trouble for yourself. But Big Mike was an old friend, we went through the war together, and I really did believe the shooting was an accident until he came back and put his wife in the hospital on his second night home.

She left him and took Little Mike to stay with her folks in Anaconda, but he ran away from there a few years later to come back here. A few months after they'd left, that goofy Lizzie Giest showed up with a little baby, riding in the cab of Groman's truck. And Groman, grinning like a mule, climbed out of that Mack, walked into the cafe and came up to Big Mike who was sitting right here on this stool I'm on now. "Howdy, Big Mike," he said.

"Howdy yourself," said Big Mike. "What do you want talkin' to me. You better have a good reason for openin' your mouth or I'm gonna break your other arm."

"I got a rider in my truck says she's a friend of yours." Just then Lizzie walked in, shabby, washed out.

She looked so sad holding that little baby. "Hello Mike," she said.

"Who the hell are you?"

"Don't you remember me? You said you'd always remember me." She broke down in tears right there in front of everybody.

Big Mike turned back and looked into his coffee. "I don't know who you are," he said, "But you better get and quick."

He didn't see the .38 she'd lifted from Groman's truck, but she pulled it out from under the baby's blanket and BAM. She blew his head right off.

You know, with all the witnesses, she was bound to hang. She just took the gun out and splattered him. "I love Mike." That's all she said. God damn, was Lukas pissed. He had to close down for a week to put in a new counter top and back wall. He had to replace part of the floor too, but Big Mike's blood is still coming up. You see that dark spot over there? It's never gone away, not even with the new floor.

And Bobby Giest was left an orphan. The whole town felt so bad we raised him ourselves after the hanging.

He got the story about his mother and father in bits and pieces over the years, which isn't really the best way he could have found out, not living alone and being just a child.

He was about twelve years old when he finally put it all together. He was living -- or actually, I felt so sorry for him, I'd given him a place to stay. He never did like people much. If he wanted to sleep near the dogs, well I've got plenty of pens. If anybody from the outside had seen him, they'd have put him someplace a hell of a lot worse and for as long as they could keep him there.

When he went crazy like he did, he started prowling in his cage and baying at the moon. If I came close to him, he'd start snarling and foaming at the mouth. Shit. There were plenty of bets won on little Bobby Giest fighting mutts in the pit. He's got over 120 kills and that's still the record. Best champ I ever trained. But sometimes, I wish I'd known that Halfbreed's pipe trick before little Bobby came out of it. I'll bet I could have made him into a hell of a professional wrestler, maybe I could have fought him in Madison Square Garden. And I'll bet you, if Bobo Brazil ever came to town, he'd leave.

I tried to get Lumberjack Luke down here to fight the little tot. Luke's got the Northwest belt and buckle and they say he's won four or five chain-saw duels up in Alaska. I even sent him Bobby's picture and wrote him he could probably pick up a couple of hundred bucks towards the purchase of his coffin, but he wouldn't come.

So, Giest has a sort of fatherly love for me and I know he'd have let me know what Carruthers was planning, because when the whole town told him the story, I was the only one who showed any concern for him. Then when Carruthers left Anaconda and came back here, Giest was the first one to grab him.

Considering he was only fourteen and Mike was twenty-six, he beat him up pretty bad. But then he had to fight Tills for jumping Carruthers out of turn and he made jelly out of Tills. He learned something from living with those dogs that we'll never understand. He watched Carruthers, watched every move he made and I don't think Mike ever knew. He'd gotten soft living in Anaconda, and just like Big Mike, he was always ready to cry when he didn't get his way.

That's how it was before the Halfbreed showed up.

Of course, now, Giest doesn't even know who Carruthers or anybody else really is. Simpson, who drove Giest down to the airbase after the Halfbreed busted him, said he peeked through a window in the operating room's door and that the doc was holding Giest's face in his hand like a Halloween mask, just plucking out the bone chips with a little pair of tweezers.

Actually, I was glad that sneaky son-of-a-bitch Simpson was down at the airbase when the Halfbreed rolled in. Everywhere Carruthers went, there would be Simpson, and when he got back, the first thing he did was go looking for Carruthers. "Where you been, Mike?" he said, "I was lookin' for you all morning."

"I been fishin'," said Carruthers.

"Oh. Is there really gonna be a dog fight with your dog and a wolf?"

"Yup."

"Can I get in on the bettin'?"

"Come here. We got to talk."

But I called Carruthers while the Halfbreed was eating his steak. When he picked up the phone I said, "Okay, Big Mouth, this is the moment of truth."

"Who is this?" he said back.

"I've been telling you since you got him, that mutt of yours is nothing but chicken wire, chicken bones and chicken shit. Now, I'm ready to prove it. How many wolves you say he's killed?"

"Twelve," he says back to me.

"Ten. Is that right? Ten you say."

"Twelve, I said. Twelve."

"Oh, twelve. Excuse me. Twelve, huh?"

"Yeah. Twelve."

"Well, twelve's the limit in this state you know?"

"How's that?"

"Twelve's the limit. That's what I said. Twelve's the limit."

"What do you want?"

"Nothin'."

"Listen, you old fart. You start makin' sense or I'm gonna come down there and turn that mutt loose on you."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that."

"Why not?"

"He'd have to fight the wolf before Saturday."

"What wolf?"

"The one I got here. The one that's gonna eat him alive."

"Sez who?"

"Sez \$2000."

"I'll be right down."

"You do that, Mike. You do that."

WAIT A MINUTE. THE AIRBASE.

You came off that airbase, didn't you, Junior? What's a matter, secrets get too much for you? Don't say yes. If you're a deserter, I'm gonna have to take care of you before Giest gets here. Did you come off that airbase? You sure? Yeah, your hair is long. You sure?

Look at this place. Look at those dishes. If Lukas comes out here and sees you haven't got those dishes up, he's gonna hang your ass high and then Giest'll be so mad at Lukas for taking the first swing at you, he'll kill him, this place'll close down and the whole town'll be even crummier than it was before you came. Why don't you move on while you can still see where you're movin'. Giest has a new thrill, eye-gougin'. I'm not makin' this up for my health, you know. Go on. Take the advice of somebody with a little experience. And when you finish those dishes, I'll take a donut.

You're still here, huh? You think I'm makin' this all up, don't you? Let's see, you're a writer, aren't you? You're writing a book on the wild west. Well, if you're not a writer, pretend you are. Right now you're listenin' to some old coot yak his brains out. Tell me something. How are you gonna describe how the stitches bulge under Giest's T shirt when your hands are in formaldehyde and your tongue's on a board full of pins?

You know, Giest is gonna be here in thirty-five minutes, looking for lunch. Do you know what it's gonna say on the menu? It's gonna say, "Today's Special: Junior. Served rare."

Go ahead, smile all you want. Smiling is what Carruthers was doing when he walked in here that day and saw the Halfbreed eating his steak with his hands.

Like a dumb shit, I got up and said, "Excuse me."

"Carruthers," I said, pushing on his chest, "Carruthers, if you want to live long enough to see your mutt get chewed to pieces this Saturday, watch what you say."

He took a look past me to get a shot of the Halfbreed, looked down at me and said, "What is that thing? I swear, Dicker, you'll do anything for a little excitement, won't

you. Well, if he's gonna fight my dog, he's gotta take that spiked jacket off, and if he looses, I get the jacket."

"Don't be so stupid, will you. Your dog's not fighting him, he's got the wolf."

"Where?"

"Out there in that van out there."

"Out there where?"

"In the back, jack off. In the back."

"Oh. What's all that blood out there?"

"Giest."

"Giest?"

"Yeah. I think our friend over there just killed the toughest guy in town."

"No shit?"

That's when the Halfbreed put down his steak, picked up his coffee cup and threw it against the wall.

"NO SHIT," he yells. "Ha Ha. No shit. You Treadaway, more steak. You Jack Off, sit down."

Carruthers looked back down at me. "Go on," I whispered. "Go on, sit down." But he kept looking at me. "Damn it, Dicker, this is a white restaurant, what's wrong with you, feedin' him in here?"

"You never talked like that to Manni," I said and walked back in to tell Lukas to cook up another steak. When I came back out of the kitchen Carruthers was standing next to the table, with one hand over the back of a chair. The Halfbreed was looking up at him, waitin' for him to sit down, but Carruthers couldn't bring himself to do it. Then the Halfbreed said, "You hungry?"

"No. I ain't hungry."

I came over to them, pulled out a chair for myself and sat down facing the Halfbreed. Then Carruthers let out a disgusted groan and sat down between us, but he wouldn't look at us, he just kind of looked around the room. I started to say something like "This should be one hell of a good fight," but the Halfbreed was ahead of me. "So, you Jack Off, huh? You got big dog."

Carruthers rolled his eyes at me, grinned and said, "Yeah. You got the wolf?"

"Got wolf. Kill sixty-two dog since summer. How big your dog?"

Carruthers looked up at the ceiling. "Let me see. He weighed two hundred and sixty when I got him and he's picked up six inches at the shoulder and I've been usin' him to pull me around on my skis all winter, so I guess

he weighs about three hundred and eighty now. Yeah pretty close to four hundred, somethin' like that, four hundred ten."

The Halfbreed was trying to see what Carruthers was looking at, and without taking his eyes off the ceiling said, "Okay. 2000."

"2000. Bull shit. Ain't no wolf weighs 2000 pounds."

"Nooo. 2000. 2000 dollar. I win. I take. We bet. 2000. When fight?"

"Uh, Saturday, right Dicker?"

"Right."

"You, Treadaway, shut mouth. You, Jack Off when fight. How many day?"

"Two. No, it's Wednesday today. Three days."

"Jack Off. When fight. Two day? Three day? You got money? Here I got." He reached into his jean's pocket, pulled out a pretty thick wad, counted out twenty one hundred's and laid them out on the table in a fan.

Carruthers stopped looking at the ceiling then.

"Now, where did a yella skin breed like you get all that money?" he said, while the Halfbreed was putting it all back in his pocket. "Ha Ha. Where pits? Treadaway, your land?"

"Yup."

"Good." He looked at Carruthers. "You got money?"

"Yeah. I'll have it Saturday, before the fights. Where's this wolf you got?"

"In van, in back, go look. Three day, big fight. My wolf, your dog. Treadaway dig new pit. No shit. Ha Ha."

It was raining that day. Kind of low, gray and green in the passes. The Halfbreed said he wanted to see the pits. We left my truck here in town and took off in his van with the wolf riding in the back. He was sleeping, breathing slow and his fur was thick like fog. "You like whisky?" I said.

"No."

"Uh, yeah. Well you can bed down at my place."

"Treadaway, you fight dog like brother, huh?"

"Yeah, except he's got a bigger operation, close to Butte like he is. Tobacco?"

"No."

"Cards?"

"No."

"What about women?"

"Got woman."

"Where?"

"Up."

"Oh. Up. I guess it's been quite a while. You'd think after you made all that money for O'Neil, he'd have at least set you up at his Holiday Inn. You didn't maybe get any there, did you?"

"No. Treadaway."

"What?"

"Shut mouth."

And I did shut up, but I was getting the first laugh I'd gotten out of this guy since he came to town. And a lot of luck he brought me. I ended up paying for all of Giest's and most of Carruthers' hospital bills. But man oh man, did I have him. Just talking about white women. Hoo Hoo. White women.

But it did bother me he didn't drink, smoke, play cards or fool around and he had all the one-ups on me from being around O'Neil for so long. See, O'Neil's my older brother and he's the one who got this whole dog fighting business started. Now, he says he's running for the state house. He'll win too, if he runs his politics like he runs his dog fights.

Anyway, the rain let up a little. The road was full

of water and we were bouncing around so bad, the wolf woke up and started prowling around in his cage. When he stood up to stretch, he put his nose down and his hind legs way back and he looked more like he was made out of lumber and iron than muscle and bone.

He had good, stout legs that folded back into his chest in thick slabs. Strong haunches for pulling out of a bite. His neck was short, more a part of his legs and chest, the nose pointing down.

That's what the trouble with Carruthers' mutt was. His head was too high and most of his real strength was packed in the front of his shoulders, like he was top-heavy, but he had the long legs for running a wolf down, boxing and then pushing away while he bit. Those long legged dogs get a bite in between their paws, push and pull at the same time and rip whatever it is they're chewing into long shreds pretty easy. Then they're looking at the sky, swallowing their meat.

The back of the van was fixed with a board across the floor and a bed roll. There was a .30.30 and a .12 gauge mounted on the wall of the side door and a leather harness fixed with a pretty complete set of skinning knives. Hanging over the back of the Halfbreed's seat

was a black hip belt with a nine millimeter in the holster.

"Treadaway," I said to myself, "Treadaway, cross your fingers, boy. Just cross your fingers."

He noticed me looking around. "You know guns and knives?"

"Some," I said. "I know I've got my fingers crossed this all turns out our way."

"No shit. Bet on wolf. You win. How much you charge crowd?"

"I charged 'em ten bucks the last time I fought Carruthers' mutt and they all got mad, but for Championship fights I always charge ten and nobody ever complains. Carruthers' dog took out a really big wolf a few months ago and I don't think your wolf is much bigger."

"Wolf six hundred pounds."

"Sure. And Carruthers' mutt weighs four hundred ten. I don't really give a shit to tell you the truth, size don't make the fight, or the odds. I've got 'em all whipped up in town about this fight and that's what makes the difference. I just wish you hadn't told Carruthers your wolf's won sixty fights."

"Sixty-two."

"Yeah. Sixty-two. I told 'em back there you were counting on seeing him win number 1000." I looked over at him and he seemed to like that line, he was actually grinning. Carruthers won't say much though. Anyway, for this fight, twenty bucks for members, thirty for guests. That's reasonable. I started the club as soon as I knew you were coming for sure. 'A security fee is what it is,' I told 'em. I gotta watch that now, O'Neil's getting into politics. No telling where the snoops'll end up. Besides, there's just getting to be too many damned people around here. Just too many."

"That good."

"What's good about it?"

"Bigger fight. More money."

"Yeah. Bigger fight. More money." I hated to break his heart and tell him that it didn't always work out that way, but hurting his feelings was something I didn't want to experiment around with. "Yup. Bigger fight, more money, you got a point," I said and looked out the window, listening to him and the wolf growl back and forth at each other for the rest of the ride.

When we pulled in the Halfbreed leaned forward to set the brake and when he did, all those spikes in his

jacket came out of the seat's upholstery with a bunch of little pops tearing it. Then he sat back looking out the windshield. "Good place," he said, "Way back. You got chickens?"

"Yeah. I got four white leg horns I mail ordered out of Richmond, Virginia last year. You oughta see 'em. They cost me..."

"Good," and he got out of the van, went around it and let that wolf out. Then he came over to my side. "Hey," I said, "I waited four months for those chickens and that rotten mutt of yours just took off for my hen house."

"Treadaway, you wait here. Not safe. Big wolf need meat. Hungry. Wait. Not safe. I call you, you come. Bring pipe and rope. You hear?"

"I hear you God damn it."

"Treadaway."

"What?"

"Shut mouth."

You know, sometimes things happen you just aren't ready to appreciate. Take an antler cribbage board. What if you saw one in a big store in New York? You'd say, "Hey. Only fifty bucks." But here, who cares about

antler cribbage boards? Nobody. So, like I say, you don't always appreciate what's at hand and let me tell you, I've thought for a long time about how I sat in that Halfbreed's van while his wolf was playing in my chicken coop, and I'm still not sure I appreciate it.

Wolves have good noses and this one knew just where to follow his. The Halfbreed ran back there too, around the far side of my cabin. All I heard was the squawkin', growlin' and yellin'. Then, around the porch came a chicken, flying up to the roof, coming down, running around the posts, up the steps and then around the cabin. "Poor little chicken," I said, "And I was gonna have you for dinner Saturday night."

But the wolf had other ideas. He came up on the porch just as the chicken'd ducked out. He stopped for a minute, sniffed, got the scent and took off after it. Then the Halfbreed showed up, grinnin' like a mother bear chasing her cub, holding his arms out, straight across the porch.

Next time, the wolf shows up first. Actually the chicken was in the lead, if you count the wolf's mouth ahead of the rest of him. And the Halfbreed was not far behind. Then they were both gone, but that's when the real growlin' and yellin' started.

The Halfbreed came around first, he was holding the chicken out in front of him, his jacket was covered in feathers and the wolf was scramblin' around the corner for the seat of his pants. They ran across the porch and the Halfbreed had about a five foot lead when he stopped. He stuffed the chicken into his jacket then spun around with his arms up. The wolf left the ground and wham.

What I'm saying to you, Junior, is that you have got to learn to appreciate the unexpected, even if it costs you more to see it in your own yard than at the movies. So, remember, take it when you can get it and worry about paying for it some other time. Yeah. That's it.

Over the house a big fog was pushing itself out of the canyon. I started to yell something like "You damn asshole," just before the wolf hit him, but instead, he hit the wolf and knocked it straight back down.

He dropped one leg back to keep from falling off the porch, let out a yell and waited. The wolf came back fast, hackles bristlin', yellow eyes turnin' black and teeth pourin' over his gums as he curled into a thick, tight ball. The Halfbreed shot out one leg and kicked it out of its crouch. It rolled out of that fast and came snappin', his eyes said kill and out of no where, the Halfbreed brought his left around and smacked that wolf

right under the jaw.

"DOWN," he yelled, and the wolf looked down.

They were both breathing hard and the Halfbreed dropped down to one knee, his arm still out. Then he brought it around the wolf's neck, rolled him over and they started wrestling. First he was on top, then the wolf was on top. Then they rolled over and over and fell off the porch.

When they stood up, the Halfbreed had his hand in the fur behind the wolf's neck and was scratching him, the wolf's tongue was hanging out, and they were both looking right at me. "Treadaway," he goes, "Good, huh?"

"'bout as good a job of dog handling as I've seen."

He nodded, but then he stopped smiling too. He lowered his eyes, right into me, but I wouldn't look away and we stared hard for a long time. Then without yelling, plain and clear and direct, he said, "Treadaway, Bring pipe."

"Go to hell," I said. "You owe me twenty bucks."

He wasn't ready for that and I was glad he'd stopped me before I told him how much I really had paid for those chickens. Actually, they were fifteen a piece, but I was never gonna see another egg, or one good meal at least

from the one he had in his jacket. That and I was just plain mad.

"Twenty bucks," I said, but he still hadn't caught on.

"For dog food," I said, "White leg horn, Richmond, Virginia, mail order dog food. Twenty bucks. Ha Ha."

You know something, Junior? You're hanging around someplace you just don't have any business. You'd be wise to leave, lunch time is right around the corner.

Well, if you're gonna stay, get me some coffee.

That dog food business settled him down and he let out a long breath and came over to the van. I was feeling pretty caged in, sitting there, and hopped out. The wolf was standing there looking at me, and I held out my hand to him. He came over and sniffed me and I put my fingers in behind his ears and started scratching him. "There you go boy," I said, "You know a good hand, there don't you. Come on, let's get you back in your pen, now, come on." And he followed me back to the cage, past the Halfbreed whose mouth had dropped open.

Grain company scales or not, I don't trust them. I check every dog I fight and I check by hand. It's there I can tell what an animal has in him and if my hand wasn't

any good, nobody'd come to my fights. But they do and they make their odds on my word. And what people trust in me, the animals do too, only they can sense first, and that wolf knew I liked him and I knew he liked me.

The Halfbreed stepped back while I coaxed the wolf into the pen, then he closed the doors, leaned back and said, "You good man, Treadaway. Wolf like you."

"Of course I am. Of course he does," I said.

"What kind of cheap show you think I'm runnin' here?"

"You not your brother."

"You're damn right I'm not! As far as I'm concerned, Butte, Montana's on the other side of the world. Now, do you want to cough up twenty bucks?"

"Treadaway."

"Don't act like you can't afford it." He didn't say anything to that, just reached in his jeans, came out with some small bills and counted out twenty.

"Thanks," I said. Some big rain drops were starting to fall and I felt a cold spot touch the back of my arm when I put the money into my pocket. "Well," I said, do you want to come inside, or would you rather stand out in the rain?"

Walking across the yard we didn't say much til we got to the door. The rain had really started coming down

and when I opened the door, I walked straight in and yelled "Come on in." I got my bottle out, opened it, took a swallow and offered it to him, but he waved it off.

I brought it over to the table, pulled out a chair for myself and pointed over to the other one for him. Then I took another, good long pull at the bottle, settled back and stared out the open door at the rain.

"Halfbreeds," I thought. "They don't even have enough sense to close the door behind them." But after a few more pulls on my bottle, I didn't feel so mad. I put my feet up on the table and I realized I was starting to grin, just thinking about those chickens.

I looked over at him. He had his nose up in the air, twitching it and sniffing around. "What's a matter," I said.

"Stink. Where pits?"

"Oh, you think they'll smell any better? Listen, I got plenty of pits. You can bunk down in any one you like."

"No. Where pits?"

"Backaways. You wanna go out there, the rain's lettin' up, but we can't take your van, it might get

stuck in the mud."

"Walk."

"Suit yourself."

Out near the pits, I keep an open space, kind of like a ring. It's pretty well surrounded with aspen trees and the grass always comes up thick there. Usually before a big fight, I bring the dogs and their handlers out in it and let everybody get a good look, then I check the dogs and give weights so everybody knows nothing shakey's going on.

We were walking across it and I was trying to figure another line on him. I knew I'd pushed his temper about as far as I could for one day so I didn't say too much but, you know, sometimes it's hard to stop when you're having fun.

"They say that pipe trick of yours sure works good," I said, "Mind if I borrow it sometime." No answer. "Yeah, a lot of people have no idea what it takes to make a dog into a good fighter." Still no answer. "And, uh, tell me, what was it you did back there to get that wolf so mad at you?"

"Take meat."

"Take meat?"

"Make him mean. Look." He reached into his jacket and pulled out the remains of my chicken, gave it a squeeze and put it back. I was looking at the bulge it was making in his chest. Some of the blood was trickling out over his belt and down one leg of his jeans. "And you think it smells bad inside, huh?"

When we got to the pens, all the dogs started yowling to get let out as soon as they saw me. The Half-breed was looking around, then he said, "Treadaway. You got little dogs, they fight?"

"What do you mean, 'do they fight?' What a fucking thing to say to somebody. You're damn right they fight. They wouldn't be here getting fed if they didn't fight. You know, you sure know how to piss somebody off."

"Treadaway."

"What?"

"Ha Ha."

"Go ahead and laugh," I said. You just take a look at that dog over there because, pound for pound that is the fightinost son of a bitch you're ever gonna see." I was pointing over at the Big Mountain Blonde. He was all by himself in the Champion's pen and that dog was a champ through and through.

He didn't weigh over ninety pounds, but he never quit, and he could snap, bite, snarl, and tear his way through dogs almost twice his size until they were done.

I knew I'd over matched him against that dane they brought over from Bozeman. I'd actually retired him, but he was winning big in the three legged dog races we have sometimes, and I knew he was in good shape. Anyway, there weren't any dogs but puppies to fight that week, except for the Blonde. And even though the odds were all against him, that Blonde tore the hell out of that dane and killed it before he bled to death.

Here. Here's his picture. That's when he was in his prime, when the Halfbreed saw him. Hell of a dog, that Blonde. Hell of a dog.

I've always had my favorites. Even though he was the town's pride at the time, I could never let myself warm up to Carruthers' mutt because of the way they used him, that and this town doesn't have too much pride left. And well, the Halfbreed and that wolf, they stood for something, the wilds, those big mountains out there and that sky. This town still has some of that left and that's why Carruthers came back to it, but to hear him tell it, it was more of a choice between the lesser of evils.

"How come you left Anaconda?" we asked. And all he said back was, "Too many alarm clocks."

The Halfbreed pointed over to the largest pit. "That one," he said.

"What about it?"

"Too small." Then he turned around and walked back to the cabin.

It rained buckets, the rest of that week and by Saturday, that pit was a lot smaller than when I'd finished digging it out Friday. Morning of the fight, the Halfbreed didn't bother me and I slept late, so I figured he was finally satisfied. He helped me some but most of the time he worked with the wolf or went hunting. He said the wolf needed to taste that wild meat to fight hard, and I didn't mind it either.

When Carruthers got there, it was his yelling that woke me up. "Dicker, you old fart. Dicker, where the hell are you?"

Oh, man, my head hurt. I reached over for my bottle and there was still some left in it, and not just a little. I pulled it down and yelled back at him. "Shut up." I was just getting my jeans on when he came in through the cabin door. "Shut that door," I said.

"Well, well, well," he goes, "Dicker Treadaway with his pants down. This is a special day."

"Shut up."

"Aww, Dicker."

"Shut up," I said. "Shut up or forget the whole fight." He started to say something smart but the Half-breed had already come in.

"Who yell?" he said. "Ah, Jack Off. You got money?"

"Yeah, I got it."

"Where?"

"Right here." Carruthers grinned, pulled out a big wad and dropped it on the table. "There's over 2000 to cover my bet and another 800 against anybody dumb enough to bet against Jack."

"Okay, Carruthers," I said, "just like your bet with the Halfbreed, no odds. I'll cover your bet with the house take." I got out my receipt box to write him a slip. "Where'd you get all that money, Carruthers?" I said.

"Dicker, unlike some people, I've got friends."

"Aww, shit on you."

"Wait a minute, you old fart. Before I take that receipt, who's holdin' the money?"

And again, like he was king of the hill or something, that wild assed Halfbreed butted in, always ready to fight. "Treadaway, you hold money," and he reached into his pocket, pulled out his money and threw it on the table next to Carruthers'.

I could see the steam starting to rise out of their collars and Carruthers said, "Why, you God damned, yella skin halfbreed. Who the hell are you to come in here givin' orders? Whyn't you just get back into that ocean you crawled out of. Treadaway ain't holdin' a dime of this money."

"Jack Off, you shut mouth now."

"Eat shit."

Now Carruthers, as you saw for yourself, is no little boy and I really couldn't blame him for jumping the Halfbreed like he did, but then too, I wasn't very surprised when he flew over the table after the Halfbreed smacked him. But he got back up and when he did he was holding a .357 on us.

"I figured I'd have some trouble out here," he said.

"Carruthers, you dumb ass, put that thing away."

"Now, you just shut up, you old fart. This is between yella skin and me, ain't it, yella skin? You

know I been followin' your kinds' claw track a long time, and I figure it's about time I got one of those yella hides to put down in front of my door."

"Look, Carruthers, if you kill him, there won't be a fight. I'm telling you, he's the only one who can handle that wolf, and you'll never know just how tough that mutt of yours really is. People are gonna start sayin' you shot him because you knew your dog couldn't win."

He plain wanted to kill that Halfbreed. He was shaking and, if it'd gone off, that .357 would have blown the Halfbreed to pieces. But Carruthers can be reasoned with and that's partly why he's not as tough as his half brother.

"All right," he said, "you hold the money, but you make one wrong move and I'll ruin that stinkin' old hide of yours and I won't use a gun and I won't kill you either. You hear me Dicker?"

"Yeah. I hear you, Mike. Anything you say."

"Good. Now where's this new pit?"

"Out back. You know, go take a look if you want."

"Yeah, I will," he said, and backed out of the cabin, slow, still holding the gun on the Halfbreed.

The whole time the Halfbreed was standing there, looking at Carruthers' gun, I kept thinking, 'Don't do it. He'll kill you for sure.' He'd had his hand on the table, like he was gonna throw it. He didn't look scared and that was scaring the hell out of me. When Carruthers backed out of the cabin, he let go of the table and looked over at me.

"Satisfied?" I said.

"Treadaway," he goes, "Treadaway. When I was on the glacier and the sea gave me the wolf pup, it wore a collar then. I heard a growl like thunder and I saw a man, hunting on the floes. His guns were like an army and he was taller than the yellow in the sky. At night I hear him call his lost wolf pup, Treadaway. Other men have tried to kill me and I am not afraid, but I thank you for my life."

"Shut up!" I said. "Just shut up. I'm so disgusted with you."

The rain started coming down hard about the middle of the second fight, a good bull dog against a gray dog of all nations with a thick black muzzle. The bull dog, a brindle got into the other one's hind leg and put it out of commission in a hurry but that gray mutt had more staying power than I thought and he was moving fast.

He dove in for a bite in the bull dog's belly but he didn't have the drive with his hind leg out and he slipped.

When that happened the bull dog was all over him and went in for the throat, but the gray dog got a hard snap into the bull dog's chest, behind the leg. He bit him so hard there, the bull dog yelped and let go of his bite. The gray dog was trying to get back to his feet when the bull dog grabbed back in for the throat. The gray dog was still on his side and bit into the same spot under the bull dog's leg.

They held on like that, not moving, stiff and frozen for a good three or four minutes, holding on, growling, each one trying to pull the other one in half. That's when a fight comes down to the real action, the death grip, both dogs not moving, everybody standing still and all eyes waiting to see which one's gonna give out first. It's just a matter of which dog has the strongest heart.

The whole crowd was sweating, not breathing and the rain was pouring down the backs of their hats, making a small puddle of mud behind each man there. The bull dog went down to his forequarters and the gray dog's eyes

rolled away, almost like he was pulling them back to get more strength in his gums. His teeth went in deeper and a small stream of blood poured out of the bull dog's chest, onto the gray dog's face and through its fur to the ground. The bull dog tried to turn and pull out of the bite behind his leg and not let go of the gray dog's throat, but when he did, he fell over.

Going down, his weight took the gray dog's throat out with it and the gray dog was dead. Then the bull dog tried to get back up, his big tongue was hanging out and he was panting fast. He looked up to see if anybody was smiling down at him for winning and about four of us let out a big cheer. Then he dropped his head in the gray dog's blood, sighed and it was all over.

It was quiet for another minute. Nobody moved and then they all busted loose at once, jumping up and down, screaming and smacking each other around and yelling, "holy shit, God damn. Did you see that, gimme my money and fuck you, wow, Jesus Christ, what a fight!"

Next, we put the Big Mountain Blonde in with an Airedale they brought over from Comstock. He outweighed the Blonde by a good twenty pounds and it was a regular championship fight. They sure couldn't complain about the

card that day. The Airedale had already won six fights and the Blonde had won the town championship two weeks before. But I guess that Airedale had won his owner too much money, because when I checked his weight, I could tell he had a few more pounds than he needed.

"You've been feeding this dog pretty well, haven't you Mr. Bretz?" I said to his owner.

"He's earned it, Dicker," he said back.

But when it was all over, after the Blonde took him out in four bites, he didn't have much affection for him left. He wouldn't go down and haul the carcass out of the pit, which is a matter of duty and honor, and when he spit down on it, I blew up.

"You get your ass out of here," I said, "and don't let me catch you near one of these fights again."

There were a couple of old, old timers there who were ready to make dog meat out of him, and he left.

The only one who thought it was funny at all was the Halfbreed. He'd won big on that fight.

"You think that's pretty funny business, don't you?" I said.

"Fast fight. Little dog kill big dog. Rich man loose."

"Well, let's just hope things keep going our way. You better go get the wolf out and bring him over to that open space I showed you."

"You come."

"No," I said. "I've got to go find Carruthers and tell him to do the same thing with his mutt."

I started walking over to where I thought Carruthers might be when I saw Simpson comin' out of the crowd, walking towards me. "What's he want?" I thought, but I really didn't care, so I turned around real fast to duck him and went back over to catch up with the Halfbreed. The two of us walked in between some parked cars and I was pretty sure I'd lost Simpson. "I'll talk to you later," I said to the Halfbreed and turned around and headed back to the open space where the crowd was starting to gather.

"Something's not right," I thought. "Something's wrong."

I'd gotten so turned around going back and forth like that I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to do next, and I had to stop for a minute and get it straight in my mind. Then I looked up and I realized I was standing in the middle of the ring, with everybody standing

around me, waiting for me to tell them what was gonna happen next.

"All right," I yelled. "Boy's, we've got, as you all know, a special attraction comin' up here in just a few minutes. Now everybody kick back and relax, get your socks back on and in less than a half hour we are gonna have us the rippinist, slashinist, fightinist dog fight that's has ever been held in the great state of Montana."

Well, that little speech got a cheer and some yeehas, and I walked out of the circle and went back over to see how the Halfbreed was doing. I knew I'd forgotten to do something but I couldn't figure it out. I thought if I retraced my steps, maybe it might come back to me, but I still couldn't stop thinking that something was wrong and that's when Simpson caught me between a couple of parked cars.

"Dicker," he said, "Giest ain't dead."

It was actually the first time I'd thought about Giest since that morning he got smashed but I was still too busy to talk to Simpson about it. "Oh, yeah," I said, "that's good, give him my regards, will you Simpson?"

"He's in the hospital."

"Simpson, you're gettin' underfoot. What hospital?"

"At the air base."

"Oh yeah, well he always was tough. Remember that time he got that strangle hold on that husky and broke its neck jumping down on it with his knee. Boy, now that was some fight, wasn't it, Simpson. Oh, wait a minute, you weren't there, were you Simpson?"

"No. No I wasn't. Dicker?"

"What?"

"Look."

He had Carruthers' .357 pointed right in my guts.

"Give me the money, Dicker. I'm supposed to kill you if you don't."

And I gave it to him. He'd been taking it about not being able to do anything right for a long time and he looked pretty determined to see this thing through as ordered. After I gave the money to him, I looked at him. He was smiling like he was really proud of himself. Then he said, "Boy, you sure are a dumb old fart, Dicker."

"You put that gun away," I said, "and I'll show you what an old fart can do to a creep like you, Simpson." But he just laughed and held the gun on me while he slithered off between the cars, back to Carruthers. That

Carruthers, I thought, nothing more trouble than a fool with a plan.

I went back over to where the Halfbreed had his van parked. He hadn't gotten the wolf out yet and there was a black look on his face. "Hey," I said, "We gotta have a talk."

"No," he said back, "no talk." And he turned around and walked over to the driver's side of the van and reached into it.

"Wait a minute," I said, "God damn it, will you wait a minute, you don't know what just happened."

But I guess he did know what happened, because when he turned around again he said, "Here," and he slapped his 9 m.m. into my hand. "Wolf win, we get money."

"Hey, now wait a minute, brother," I said.

"Treadaway."

"Okay," I said. "Okay." He was moving fast and I grabbed him by the wrist. "Just a second, I got to handle your wolf. Take him over there now, but don't let on like you know anything, okay?"

"Okay."

I put the gun into the pocket of my jacket and went looking for Carruthers. "Howdy, Mr. Boss Man," he said.

"What are you doin'?"

"Dicker, this dog is gonna win and when it's all over, I mean to collect."

We were walking through the crowd and he had his dog pulling him on the leash. He'd taken it's muzzle off and that dog had got the scent of the wolf, you could see that. He was snapping at anybody in the way, growling, looking all around. Then he started jumping and pulling so hard, he almost pulled Carruthers off his feet.

"You're makin' a big mistake," I said to him.

"We'll see who's makin' a mistake soon enough," he said.

I walked out into the circle ahead of him. The Halfbreed was standing off to one side of the center, holding the wolf. When Carruthers walked into the crowd with his dog, the whole place went wild. The Halfbreed looked over at him and the hate they had for each other just came boiling out of their eyes. Their dogs were both straining to get off their leashes at each other, and for a minute, it looked like we were gonna have the first dog-man tag team match in history.

Simpson pushed his way out of the crowd and ran up to Carruthers and slipped him his gun and the money, right

in front of everybody. The Halfbreed saw it, but he looked away and Carruthers yelled over at him, "What's a matter, Ugly?"

I stepped out into the center of the circle, looked around and whistled. "All right," I yelled. "Everybody shut up." I put my arms up in the air and looked down at the ground and waited.

"Okay," I said, "this is the fight we've all been waiting for. Now, let's have some quiet so these dogs don't start acting up while I'm checking them." I started over towards Carruthers and pointed my finger at him.

"Hold that dog," I said.

I bent over the dog with my hand out across his back and brought the other one up against his chest. It was solid and deep. Then I pushed down on the hind quarters and felt along both sides of ribs, with my ear over the heart, it was beating good and strong. "You got a hell of a good dog, Mike," I said. He didn't say anything to that, like I wasn't telling him anything the world hadn't heard, so I didn't look up at him. When I finished checking the dog, though and stood up, I looked at him. "Three hundred eighty, huh. My ass," then I turned around and walked off, to check the wolf.

"That wolf looks awful scrawny," he yelled after me. I don't think he weighs what my dog ate for breakfast," and that got a big laugh out of Simpson and the rest of their bunch.

I was expecting the wolf to be a little feistier than he was, but I guess even wolves, if not people, know who their real friends are. I bent over to check him the same way I had Carruthers' dog, but what a difference. He really was wild. There wasn't anything on that animal that he didn't have a use for. His fur was thicker than I'd thought and his skin felt extra tough. I put my ear down over his heart then, and when I heard it, like a hammer beating on the inside of a safe, I forgot for a minute, just where I really was.

It was like I was together with a buddy for the first time in my life, and that I wasn't checking him, I was petting him, my one good buddy that I never had, that one dog.

I looked up at the Halfbreed. "What's his name?" I said.

"No name."

"No name?"

"No name."

"Halfbreed," I said, "every dog has got to have a name and if you don't think of one quick, I'm gonna call him Jim."

"That good."

I bent back down, like I was giving him one more check. "Okay, now Jim," I said, "you get in there and show us what it's all about. Okay there buddy?" I was putting my hand down to nuzzle his head when the Halfbreed said it, "Treadaway."

"Just leave an old man alone for a minute, will you?" and I stood back up and walked into the center of the circle.

I pointed over at Carruthers dog first. "Gentlemen," I said, "Over there, with sixteen kills, at two hundred and sixty-five pounds, the meanest dog in the West, Big Mike Carruthers' Mutt Jack."

I waited for the noise and the cheering to settle down and then pointed over at the Halfbreed. "And over here, at two hundred and forty pounds, with sixty-two kills, the pride of the far country, The Halfbreed's Wolf Jim." I waited til they stopped their booin' and then said, "Okay. Make your own odds, the fight starts when both dogs are faced off at opposite sides of the

pit, no pushing around the edge. Boys walk your dogs, Carruthers, you walk first."

Carruthers, Simpson and the rest of their gang walked the big mutt over to the far side of the pit, turned and faced off. The Halfbreed turned the wolf and they both walked over, backs to the world, the crowd running behind them, everybody trying to get a good spot to watch. I came up, pushed through the crowd, pushed 'em all back and looked at both men and their dogs.

"All right," I said, "when my hand drops, release your dogs. Is that clear?" They both nodded.

Each one had his chin down and his legs set, their dogs poised for command, both their tails straight up, their front legs dancing. I looked. The front row of the crowd was bent over and there was a packed row behind them and another row behind them.

I raised my hand. "Go," and I dropped it. Carruthers, let go of his dog, "Go, Jack. Rip him up." The Halfbreed said one thing, "Kill."

They looked like they both heard him and took off, met each other in mid-air like two rockets exploding in fur, teeth, eyes, and claws. They touched ground, fell back and started to circle, and slowly the circle got

smaller and closer together. Soon it was spinning around, going faster and faster, crashing into itself, leaving the ground, coming down and WHAM. They shot into each other, their front legs up like boxers, their jaws open and digging teeth going straight for the throat.

They left the ground, both at once, shot straight out of the pit, almost flopping out and killing one side of the crowd, but they moved back and the dogs dropped.

I looked over at the Halfbreed and Carruthers. Carruthers was making faces, looking away, closing one eye, then the other. "Ooohh," he yelled, "oh, ooo, get him! Get him." The Halfbreed still had his legs set apart, he was looking down at them, beating his fist into his palm, and the rest of the crowd was yelling, "Holy shit, God damn. Oooo! Look at that. Look at that! Ooooo. He's got him."

The wolf had gotten into the mutt's right leg, a good strong bite near the top. The mutt had his other leg up over the wolf's back, trying to push it away, but the wolf wasn't letting go. He just closed in deeper like a living bear trap. Carruthers' mutt tried to climb over him and bit into the back of his neck. The

wolf shook his head back and forth, tearing away at the leg and when he let go, he'd gotten the first blood. Carruthers' mutt yowled and a big gash opened up in the shoulder and I knew he was hurt bad.

Carruthers yelled out, "No," but the wolf shot back into the same spot, only this time, higher, closer to the front of the chest. Carruthers' mutt buckled. He twisted his head all the way around and got in under the wolf's throat, but the wolf had him too tight. He walked the mutt backwards, still biting into the chest and when he did that, the mutt fell over and I knew it wouldn't be long.

The wolf hadn't let go and when the mutt fell, the grip on his chest tightened and the gash opened wider. Blood was pouring out under the throat and shooting in long squirts out of the tear in the shoulder, filling the wolf's eye. Carruthers' mutt flopped over into a puddle of blood and dirt. Both dogs' legs had turned a dark muddy red.

Carruthers was down on one knee, beating the ground around the pit, yelling, "Come on, Jack. Come on, Jack. Get up boy, get up, get up," but the wolf was back into him too fast. He got half way back up when the wolf went

in, just threw himself into the chest, all two hundred and forty pounds hitting, and biting. He was all over the mutt and for a minute, it was like there was only one dog down there. The mutt yowled again, the wolf went back to the same spot he'd torn open. His muzzle went into the chest, deep, like he'd gotten a hold of the breast bone and he flipped the mutt over on its side, and then we all heard it, the squealin' to die.

Tears were pouring out of Carruthers' eyes. He was slamming the ground with his fist. "No. No. No." His dog looked up out of the pit with one eye, looked up and all round and for a minute, I could almost see what he was seeing, men standing over him like trees, waiting for him to die. I stepped back and looked at the rest of them, looked up at the sky, and then Carruthers screamed.

The wolf had put both paws down on top of the mutt. His jaws closed over the throat, and then, lifting off his legs, dragging it off the ground, he tore it out in one long thick, shredded hunk. His head jerked back and he tossed it into the air once and caught it. Carruthers' mutt one eye was still open, looking straight out of the pit, still moving while the wolf was shaking

his throat out, running around him, shaking it, blood splattering the walls of the pit, the mutt's eye turning in the socket, following the wolf running around him, his head swimming in a thick red pool. He tried to lift his head one more time, but it was too much for him and he fell back and groaned. His head splashed to the ground, the one eye closed and he was dead.

The wolf stopped chasing around the pit and went over to the carcass and attacked it again but it didn't move. He picked up the throat in his mouth and shook it some more, then threw it out again. He went back to the mutt and sniffed him. Then he sat down and let out one, long endless howl over the body. A howl that spread out to the mountains and touched the pine trees like wind does in winter. A howl that drove the geese back from spring. That's what I was thinking and it started pouring, the rain just broke open on us with one huge clap of thunder.

The Halfbreed said the wolf howled like that to let his real master know he'd made a kill, and you can bet, if that character ever comes to town, Dicker Treadaway is going to be long gone.

Nobody said a word or tried to move. They were all standing stock still, not even noticing the rain, just

staring down into the pit. Carruthers was flat on the ground, one arm working, his fist slowly beating the ground. The Halfbreed got out his rope and lassoed the wolf. Then he slid the pipe down the rope and dragged him out of the pit. He got him back up, dug a piece of meat out of his pocket and fed him while he scratched his head, then he shot over to me real fast, grabbed me by the arm and said, "You got gun?"

"Yeah, I got it."

We walked over to where Carruthers was starting to get onto one knee. Simpson was helping him but when he saw the Halfbreed and the wolf coming at him, he turned around to run so fast he knocked Carruthers back over. Carruthers got back onto one knee, his face was ugly, his eyes set way back and dark and the Halfbreed kicked him back over on his butt.

"Pay now," he said. "Wolf win."

I pulled out the 9 m.m. as Carruthers' hand went into his jacket. I wasn't sure if he was coming out with the money or his .357, but the Halfbreed was sure. Just as the gun's butt started to show he said, "Jack Off. You stupid man. Kill." And he let go of the wolf.

Carruthers' arm went up to protect himself and the gun fell out of his hand. The Halfbreed grabbed it fast

and held it on the rest of the crowd. Carruthers had fallen onto his back and the wolf had started to tear into his arm bad. I never was sure what I'd do when it finally came down to having to pick one side or the other, but wolf or not, wilds or no wilds, Carruthers was still a human being and I squeezed the trigger.

You know, you can empty the clip of a 9 m.m. in less than four seconds, and when they were over, the wolf's one side was blown open from his chest all the way back to its hind legs, the gun shook my hand around that bad.

"I'm sorry," I said, "I'm sorry, Jim."

The Halfbreed went over to it and touched it above the eyes with the tips of his fingers and rubbed the head. He stayed like that for a minute, and I held up the gun and yelled, "Nobody move." Then he stood back up and turned to Carruthers. He was passed out, his arm was bleeding bad but the Halfbreed didn't pay any attention to him. Instead, he tore open his jacket, reached in his hand and pulled out the money. Then he stood back up and came over next to me. We waved the crowd further away and then slowly, we backed over to the van, but nobody came after us, they were all bent

over Carruthers to see if he was still alive.

When we got back to the van the Halfbreed was counting out the money. He took out his 4000 and put it into his jeans and then climbed into the driver's seat. I still had his gun in my hand, when he took out the rest of the money, the 1600 I'd won, and stuffed it into my shirt pocket.

"Gimmie Carruthers' gun," I said, "here's yours."

We traded like that, looked at each other and then he turned away. He looked north, up high into those mountains where the clouds were coming down, covering the tallest peaks.

"Treadaway," he said, "you kill wolf. One day his owner come, you run like wind."

"Thanks for the advice," I said.

He turned back to face me. I held out my hand, and he took it and we smiled at each other for the first time.

"S'long," I said.

"Bury wolf. Goodbye."

He put his foot down on the accelerator, floored it, and then he was gone.

I walked back over to see how Carruthers was doing, but they'd already gotten him into a car to take him to

the hospital, and the rest had cleared out. It was just me and the wolf. The rain was still pouring down, soaking me through to the bone. I looked down at him, shook my head and turned to go inside, when I heard it, another howl, a long one that came out of the sky and seemed to roar like thunder. I turned around, there wasn't anything there, but I knew there wasn't anything I could do about it. I stood over the wolf a minute and then I said some words. I turned around again, walked back to my cabin and got the shovel.

And that's how...GIEST. Howdy Giest. Here you go, sorry. I was just keeping your stool warm for you. Say, Giest, 'want you to meet this fella here. Name's Junior. He's been telling me how he's goin' to kick the shit out of you. Wait a minute. Where'd he go? There he goes out the back. Get him, Giest. Get him. Get him.

Yeaha.

Smitt

by

Elliott Brody

Smitt came home. He opened the small refrigerator that sat tightly in the kitchen's corner. In America, they ate this way too. Fathers came home and fixed their own meals but their wives did not cook. He knew what they did: put people in political prisons, held them in jail without telling their families. The engineer was so wrong. The people there knew nothing, the engineer was lying.

The supper was chicken. A thick brown gravy sizzled on the sides of the meat as it warmed in an aluminum pan. The stove was electric. In the mountain provinces you could have an electric stove because of the rushing water, and so few people. It was a good place, they were alone.

The two children had opportunity, his wife was a good woman.

"I'm leaving you chicken tonight," she'd said, "Don't make the pan too hot."

She knew he would be too hungry to wait. The chicken would be burned and cold inside. The pan would be burned on the bottom and half full of burnt gravy and warm water, waiting in the sink. She would feed the new baby, pull it away from her breast, lay it down and then clean the kitchen.

Smitt wouldn't be worried about her, he just couldn't be left alone, the children would have to stay down the road, at the Blanks.

The table she had made him paint yellow the winter before was pressed into a window nook. The low, gray clouds of the mountains made the kitchen too gloomy, even in spring. It was spring now, gray and wet. As Smitt fixed his tea and waited for the oven to warm his breakfast roll he looked out the window and thought of the earth, how dark the dirt was and how loose with the intertwining paths of the long blue worms.

He remembered those worms. Twelve years earlier they had turned from his pitchfork, when he was a prisoner in the camp. Being a prisoner had not been too bad, but he

was married now, with two children and a new one on the way. The work had been nothing for him, it only made him stronger. He remembered how peaceful he'd felt watching the loose dirt fall away, turning over and over as the worms fell back and the new road advanced another kilometer, like another worm, a hungry one.

It was all in his wrists, a force he never thought of. In school a big boy was teasing two of the smaller children, making them cry and Smitt stopped him. He turned the older boy away and threw him on the ground, just by grabbing his shirt. It was so easy and the boy deserved it.

The sergeant deserved it too. Anyone could see that the kind Lieutenant Mitla detested the sergeant's handling of the men, just the way he detested Stien for his treatment of them now.

The sergeant must have deserved it or he would have been executed. Did Mitla ever know he had been the one who killed the sergeant? Probably, they had never discussed it. Other men knew it, had seen it. They would see the engineer get shot this morning too but these would be other men, no, there were still some left. Some had been there long before he killed the sergeant. They had seen other men die before that and they would see more

after they watched the engineer die today.

He did not want to go to that. When they asked why he had missed it, he would tell them his stomach was giving him trouble again. It did burn.

"Sometimes it burns like acid in the bottom, or up front," he would say, pointing a huge finger into his coat and their faces would turn away in belief.

The engineer was a likeable enough man. He was more likeable than himself, truly. He knew that much about himself, he was not likeable but he was not cruel. And the engineer was as Major Mitla always said nicely, "Wrong, oh so wrong." It was no better anyplace else.

"Because I love my country." Over and over the engineer would say that, or he would hum or try to mutter the words of the old anthem when he could no longer talk. He had a beautiful voice. When he sang, his face became the only light in the room. But Smitt had lived with the singing of dying prisoners for years.

And Stien would only shake his head. "You are wrong, oh so wrong," he would say. The engineer's eyes would be shut and they would have to be opened for him. Smitt would touch the bare wire to the engineer's anklet and the engineer would open his eyes. Smitt admired the engineer's strength, he had lasted a long time.

Weeks ago, Smitt had broken the engineer's thumbs and Stien would not call a doctor. The engineer made splints from his shoe laces and from pencils another prisoner must have smuggled to him. For the prisoner to have given the engineer pencils, now that was something. Yes, the engineer was likeable, it was too bad Smitt would never talk to him.

It had been funny, so funny the next morning when the men were brought out for their exercises. Stien had called back the engineer during the night and had laughed at the shoe laces, but he could not see the pencils.

"How will you run in the morning without laces in your shoes, you foolish man?" Stien had asked. "You will be so tired you will fall out of them."

But that morning Major Mitla was watching the men and Smitt had to hold his hand over his mouth to keep from laughing.

"Stien," Major Mitla said later, "You will get more from these men if you do not always repay their hostility with your own."

"But, Major Mitla, he will not do anything we ask."

"Stien, our purpose here is to win the men's confidence. If we can bring them back to our heart's land, not only in body, but in soul, we have done a great thing

for the Brotherhood."

The Major was sitting at Stien's desk. He picked up the two pencils that had been unwrapped from the engineer's shoelaces. In his white hand the two gnawed pencil stubs were like bullets. "Look at Smitt," he said, and Smitt put his big hands together and smiled.

He had earned his command. It had happened like the turn of a coin in the hand. Never sure of the Brotherhood, he had been only a soldier within it, the rest was disobedience and brawling. Always brawling, for no reason, for himself. When the drunk night would fold numbly across his eyes, any word directed at him became a challenge, worse, an insult against his blood, the Laldersaks.

The young Lieutenant Mitla had come running at the sound of Smitt's fight with the sergeant, but the sergeant was already dead. The small one in Smitt's crew was the dangerous one, the real threat, Smitt knew that. He had a knife out, a big one he'd gotten and he was about to make sure the sergeant was dead when the Lieutenant found them.

The small one looked up from the sergeant's body, and yelling, "Mutiny," he dove for the Lieutenant. But he had to go past Smitt and Smitt caught him like a fly.

Lieutenant Mitla had gone to the Colonel. "I have a good man now, one to handle the men. Smitt his name. He

should be a sergeant instead of a prisoner turning dirt in the road." And for as long as Lieutenant Mitla ran the camp's corner, Smitt had done a good job. And Captain Mitla had kept him there, to do what had to be done, to control the men, to help them.

On the yellow table, as Smitt broke open his breakfast roll, were two delft-blue Dutchboys. One was for salt, the other for pepper. He picked up the one for salt. She had cleaned them before leaving for the hospital. "Would it be a boy?" he asked himself. A boy would be good for the oldest one and the girl could play with the new baby too.

He poured the salt into the melting butter cupped in his roll. How had his wife been able to keep them so long, he thought as he put down the salt shaker.

The Brotherhood would not like his children pouring salt from two little Dutchboys every morning. But the Dutchboys were all right. They could stay, he would not turn them in. He laughed to himself and as his eyes half closed he looked through the window and into the wet, hollow gray beyond the trees.

Mitla owned two small statues of Greek gods. White marble someone in his family must have smuggled out of Berlin. Mitla was lucky. As a boy he had looked at those

white statues. And in his well tailored and neatly cuffed gray uniform, he showed the advantage now. And who was Smitt to expect an invitation into the Major's home? Only the man who had saved his life.

But one time he had been invited into the house. He had waited in the hallway for the Major to give him an important paper to deliver to Stien and he had seen the statues, and was given his first cup of coffee since the war.

Since that visit Smitt had had one other cup of coffee and it was also thanks to Major Mitla. In Major Mitla's home, the coffee cups were made of ancient red porcelain, yet they were perfectly white inside and a gold ring ran around the lip.

Major Mitla brought the hot edge of the cup to his small lips and blew cautiously at the steam, sipping and then setting his cup back down. In Smitt's big hand the cup shook and he had to hold his other hand under it. It burned his lip, but the coffee was very good, strong. As the Major spoke to him, he held the cup, not wanting to move until the Major was finished. As it burned his hand he wished he could casually sling the cup back into its saucer the way some officers do but it would have been an affront.

"Sergeant," said the Major, "How long have we known each other?"

"Twelve years, sir."

The Major looked down into his coffee. "And we have lived closely with death in those years, haven't we, Smitt?"

"Yes sir. Many men died here, but they did not have to."

"You are right, Dear Smitt, so right."

Smitt smiled.

"Has your wife had the baby yet?"

"Soon, sir. She has gone to the hospital."

"What about your other two children?"

"She took them with her, someone, her sister has them."

"That's as well. Children are such a blessing to the world and yet such curses to the home."

"That is true, sir."

"What do you think of the engineer?"

"He is a strong man, inside, but he is dying."

"Stien is going to have to execute him tomorrow."

"No."

"I agree, Dear Smitt, I agree."

That evening as Smitt warmed the chicken his wife had

had left him, he thought back to his conversation with the Major in his home. As the Major had talked Smitt had looked into the complicated patterns woven into the Major's carpet. It was confusing but eventually he located the spot where the two dragons poured from magic lamps beneath the castle's trees. And he was asked to give his opinions.

It was the first time he had been asked to give opinions and he had given the right ones.

"But Smitt, Dear Smitt, the man is dying, he is too broken to save."

"Then Stien has killed him, Major Mitla. The engineer is a good man."

"Was a good man, Smitt, was a good man. He can not be saved and if he is kept alive, more of the men will try to imitate him and Stien will do the same things to them."

Smitt put down his coffee and looked at the Major.

That evening he was bringing a forkfull of half-warmed chicken to his mouth when he realized his conversation with the Major had not been about the engineer, it had been about Stien.

Stien was the one killing the men like ants. It was out of Major Mitla's hands, really, the concentration.

Major Mitla only signed the warrants and the other papers. From then on the men were Stien's responsibility and Smitt's.

He did not think he was any better than Stien, he only did what was needed of him to help Stien, but he at least would have sent the engineer's thumbs to the doctor. He would not do that to men if he were Stien, it was not good for the Brotherhood.

The next morning as Smitt sat staring through the window and smiling over the blue Dutchboys he knew it was Stien who was spoiling the camp's reputation in the capital. And it was a good camp, or could be. The mountain air was so good for the health and it was clean. It could be such a good camp. If not for Stien the engineer might have been helped and Major Mitla might already be a colonel. Instead the engineer was going to die, no he was already dead. Smitt was going in late today, his stomach was burning.

He picked up the blue Dutchboy full of salt. Stien had ruined the camp's good record, not Major Mitla. He had not taken his eyes out of the window when a picture of Stien standing over the engineer's body formed in his mind. A voice cried out of the woods and at the same time he heard a crunch. As he looked down to see

the fragments of the Dutchboy crumble out of his hand, the salt poured through his fingers in a clean, white pile.

His wife would be home in two days with the new baby, and his son and his daughter. There would be something new to replace the salt shaker. He did not know what it would be or how he would get it, but there were pencils in the top drawer of Stien's desk and the children might enjoy playing with them.

from The Belgian Stallion
a work in progress by
Elliott Brody

The young woman had just walked to the top of a small, round hill. She stood in front of the sky, the Paris breeze flowing in her silver gray skirts. For a moment she reached her right hand up to hold her bonnet but then brought it down to her skirt. It was painful because the young American soldier at the bottom of the hill was staring so intensely at her.

But it was beautiful also because she understood how lonely he was and she could do nothing to help him and she could see he understood her pity for him and that he did not think badly of her for that pity. And the soldier understood it was a beautiful moment and that she was beautiful, even her lips. Even from the foot of the hill he could see that her lips were not

red and gaudy but that they were nice and very soft. He knew that in three years all the girls would be ordering silver stockings and that silver stockings would be on every leg visible in Northridge and in War Party, and they would all remind him of the French girl he was seeing now.

It was tempting to take a swipe at the Redingtons when the subject of Buck came up, but being crazy didn't keep a man from being able to work. The French girl had walked up the hill into Buck's memory everyday since the first time he had seen her. There were times when she came to him briefly and they were the most frequent. He would be walking into the shed for the tractor and instead of seeing the hay littered floor, he would see her hand go up to her bonnet. A bowl of potato salad would be passed into his hands at a picnic and as he smiled at the woman who had given it to him, the lovely girl on the hill top in Paris would smile back.

She had passed through dreams, branded cattle and gone down the road into Northridge on Saturday night and she never knew she was being carried in someone's thoughts. Buck, in fact, rarely noticed his thoughts about her, but they were always there. Her face, her clothes, her stockings (which never did become popular in this

country) and even her eyes, were all lost like a small piece of glass in the kaleidoscope of Buck's memory since The Great War.

Particularly he remembered his six months in prison. It had not been a camp with a fenced in yard and bored, defeated men walking in the solitude of their gray circles. It was more like some place buried under the skin of a map, so old and lost from time that once there, prisoners forgot which countries their nations were at war with and which soldiers in the prison with them they were supposed to fight. And there were even German soldiers there and in the dispute over the sausages, they had sided with the French against the English, Turks and Americans.

It was until the sausage woman had walked into their midst that Buck had believed he was in a real prison. Four of them: himself, the wise little French civilian, the British captain and the one-eyed old man had followed her out, down into a darkness they had always believed hid a corner, but instead, emptied into a street. She had told them of her home, how she had gotten lost in the old streets turning, with too much wine in her head. She was old but her red hair was young and her legs were plump. When they undressed her, one at a time they

climbed on top of her in that wet cellar, drunk themselves on her sweet ugly breath. And when she returned with the sausages for them and the dispute had broken out between the others, she had led the four of them away, thinking they would live with her and keep her happy for a long, long time.

Buck had deciphered that much since his escape in 1918. It was in the month of June and had it been winter he would not have seen the sun light and would have never looked up to see the small patch of silver blue sky shining through. And now, he could still hear the curses of the old woman and the others echoing behind him as he climbed.

But for six months the beautiful French girl had looked through the pine trees and into Buck's cabin in Middle Gate, watching as he shaved with the hard, cold water from Little Creek. The blue steel pan full of soapy water stood on a rough table beside the window. One streaked, sun-faded curtain hung across the window's lower half and in winter the upper half was so cold that it was impossible to see through it. In early morning when the sun was bright, however, the icy glaze would look as if it were glowing red and it was warming to him as he shaved.

He cleaned the window every spring, when he found himself swelling with the new movement of western breezes blowing fresh air across the roof of the canyon. And usually on that day in March, he would take a bath, even though it was still too cold at night and he would feel it, even as he slept.

She watched Buck sleep because she was coming to Northridge to live. A better place to live than Cleveland. Her letter had said that. Her husband, Hamilton Jefferies had been killed in an auto crash, her parents dead for some years now, the Redingtons were all the family she and the boys had left. Montana sounded like such a good place for the boys to grow up, at least she and Hamilton had planned it that way before he had been killed in the car crash. They had decided it when the child she was carrying now was first thought of. Actually, they talked about it that night. And since she was Buck's mother's niece, why they weren't just kissing cousins, they were family. And if he, Buck Redington, could possibly meet the boys and her at the station in Northridge, his help would be greatly appreciated. Arriving March 21,

Sincerely,
Judy Jefferies

How many boys did she have? He was walking out to crank up the old Model T. True it was no Buick, just a Ford Model T, if that's what you wanted to call it. But it was a good car that his mother, Susan Jefferies Redington had ridden in without complaint. It was good enough for his rich cousin and her "boys." That car just kept running, and you could not ask more of Vanadium steel. But would she like the old Cresofski place, where that big, white, two-story house looked east into the rising sun. A lot of people from the east has never seen the sun rise across a cold field in winter.

He tried to explain it to Steamer Mills and Steamer could only sit in an angry, disbelieving daze.

"Well, exactly how come they can't see it?" said Steamer.

"Too many buildings," said Buck.

"Well, we got buildings. On my folks' place we got two houses, a feed shed, a garage for a truck and a tractor, a barn, three sheds, a smoke house and a moon, and that's a lot of buildings, but we still see the sun rise at breakfast."

"But they got so many buildings they could cover every acre of your folks' place and still have buildings

left over."

Steamer looked at him like a small, round king who has lost his temper. "There you go," he said, "You're still delirious from the war. You know that, and I'm not the only one who says it. My Daddy says it. You're delirious and war-crazed. That's why I don't listen to you. Cause when I tell him what you said he says your brains were soft to begin with and that's why you didn't play football."

Steamer was the only person in Northridge who still talked with Buck and Buck knew that the only reason he still talked with him was that Steamer would talk to anyone about anything. But he argued seriously and looked out of round, determined, blue eyes pressed behind soft pink cheeks. Often, as he listened he would make small kissing faces, working his lips into a variety of shapes. Instead of rolling his eyes at a remark he disagreed with, his whole head would roll and he would look at the ceiling, turning his entire body in a slow circle. And when his back was turned and he was again gazing at the car on the rack above him, he would pick up the grease gun, aim behind a joint and deliver his opinion.

"Nope. There's no place you can't see the sun rise over the land in America."

Steamer, whose real name was Gregory Simpson Mills, had been the toughest center to ever play football for the Roosevelt High School team. It was fully agreed, Steamer was the best. He could not be knocked out of the way, and he had played all four years. The first year, when Gary had been a senior, he had made the team in spite of all the jokes. He was only fourteen. But not once that season did anyone go over him to get at Gary, although plenty went around. No one blamed Steamer for that. He always made a good hike and the tough, little cuss took a beating every game from the bigger, more solid boys. After the second year there were no more jokes, only his nickname and it was said with respect.

Playing football had led to Steamer's taking the part time job at Michelson's shop, where four years later he was still fully employed as the shop handiman. His father titled him that on income tax forms. Gary, playing behind Steamer, had agreed, Steamer was the best, it was only that his farts had made it impossible for him to get a good pass off. Gary would call a play, waiting for the ball to be hiked. Suddenly, a bellowing

echo would rumble from Steamer and the ball would be in Gary's hands.

"Well you could pick one up and carry it around," said Gary.

"And you could paint it green and drive it in the parade," said Turney.

Buck knew he still talked to Steamer because nothing he said made a real impression. He would tell his father and repeat to anyone what his father had said about them, but in the end, none of it made any difference to Steamer. So he told Steamer that Mrs. Judy Jefferies was coming and Steamer asked if he was going to try to do it to her and Buck asked him was he crazy. She was a grown woman with children of her own. But he was already in love with her. He had already pictured her stepping off the train, her skirt billowing in the stiff, March breeze, the sky behind her blue with spring and the mountain tops white as teeth.

He could love her if not for the war. She would be coming to Northridge knowing nothing about him. She had not heard the story of how he had cried on the train station's platform after his discharge. She

did not know he had practically lost control of his father's land. She would just have to see him from what she could see, and all of that looked good.