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Bartleby Hill And The Great Christmas Feast

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The roast deer at grandma's place radiated its luscious scent for hundreds of yards back into the deep oak timber. I could detect the mushroom and the onions distinctly as I ambled cautiously along through the dense yaupon thickets. Apples and cinnamon virtually always announce the arrival of Christmas, especially when they mix with the scent of roast deer when way down in the back woods during cooler months.

I never kept up with the calendar back in those days. I only awoke with the rise of the sun, made my way out the door to

do whatever needed to be done, paused for my noon day break when the sun was high overhead, returning home only when the sun was sinking near the horizon. When we were nearing Christmas time however, I could still tell without reading or hearing a single word spoken in regard to the subject. We didn't have much spare time for reading, and we hardly even knew what a TV was back then. Even if we did back then none had more than four channels. Satellite dishes wouldn't come out until many years later on.

My grandparents didn't call a TV an *idiot box* for nothing, as the movement of time into the future is revealing with an astonishingly incessant consistency. Grandpa often declared that the television would wind up being the tool used to destroy the world one day. The passage of time into an ever dawning future seems to be proving him right by the year, unfortunately, judging from the huge masses who grasp so heavily onto whatever appeal to emotion is cast before them, and the astounding rate of present day illiteracy in America.

Soon I arrived at the specific spot I was seeking. It was an area where two clearly defined deer trails crossed inside a ten acre thicket of dense yaupon bushes, and cat claw briars that would yield mite near a hundred pound of black berries come springtime, and enough rattlesnake meat to keep the family fed up through until early summer. These trails were virtually stomped out, as if the deer had been penned up and suddenly turned lose to roam at liberty. Not only was there plenty of cover for security in this area where the trails crossed to form an X, there was an abundance of signs indicating at least three different types of game, including the deer I was after, in this case.

I was careful not to walk directly on the trail, choosing instead to move some ten yards to the left side. I didn't want to contaminate the trail with my own scent, nor did I particularly want to leave clear tracks directly in the trail. I moved some ten yards up either side from the point where the two trails

crossed. Sure enough, the seven feet long, three thirty seconds cable was still hanging on the twelve feet tall spring pole where I left it back during the earliest part of planting time. The deer trail narrowed at the point where the spring pole stood.

On the other side directly from it was a tree with a headless nail tapped about two feet off the ground. I gingerly eased the oak sapling pole over, allowing a notched peg I clamped onto the cable some six months ago, to catch on the nail. Gently I opened the loop up until it crossed the path. I slowly grabbed six or eight strands of long yellow dead grass that grew along the edges of the trail. I used two strands to tie the loop open on the small bushes growing along either side of the trail.

The loop was designed to lock with the handle of an old spoon I found in the woods that I bent into an L shape. Two five thirty second holes were bored into either end of the two inch section of spoon handle. One end of the cable was clamped onto the small leg of the L, and the other end passed through the long end, with the bend of the L pointing outside of the loop.

This would be the rig that could virtually guarantee to keep our brine barrel filled through Christmas dinner, and possibly even beyond into the spring planting season. I placed one trap rig on either leg of the trail from the center where the two crossed. Following my first couple of catches, I would commence piling left over apples and pairs into a nice bait pile. I would continue seeking to catch deer, but after taking three or four often the deer would flee the specific area being trapped. With my bait pile already in place, and the coons, possum, rabbit, fox, and wild cats already working the area, it would be a simple matter to put wire and leg hold traps around these secluded bait piles, and nail enough small game to see us and my grandparents all the way through the winter. We might even have enough left over to feed one or two close friends, when all was said and done.

There was a danger element to what I was doing, however. The local hunting club who purchased this particular land tract where I was, didn't want me in there harvesting game. They didn't know I was in there, but I knew they didn't want me there just the same. Word floated back down to the people in my neighborhood that the leader of the club, a man named Cela Doogan from way over on Brown's Creek, once declared that any person seen in those woods who didn't belong, might be mistaken as being a great big buck. His veiled threat was to be taken seriously.

Cela Doogan stood about six foot nine, with greasy brown hair hanging down to his shoulders. His build was slender, but was very muscular. Every other tooth was knocked out in the many fist fights he was involved in over his thirty years of life. He could barely breathe without speaking a profane word, and he spent his entire adult life in and out of jail and prison. He had, in turn for a greater profit to himself, sold the hunting rights on the area to a crowd of alien out-lander rogues who seriously lacked common sense, yet measured up to his own uncouth style of being rude and crude. More than likely he would live up to his veiled threat, and nobody around was brave or crazy enough to test the depth of his resolve in the matter; that is, except myself.

I honestly didn't mean harm to anybody personally. I only wanted to live my life to the fullest, and forbearing on a nice meat harvest at Christmas time due to some loser's threat, was simply not my idea of living. It was up to me to devise the method with which I would evade detection by him and everybody else. Evasion was my personal forte, back in those days of yore many years ago.

I skillfully and quietly followed the scent line going back to my grandmother's small cottage home by the open field, with another wood stand behind it. When I made it to the edge of the open field I crouched as I walked along, with the hill in the field to my right, and the tall dried corn stalks to my left. Most

of the corn was harvested, but the farmer who planted the field was also a member of this specific hunting club, and he left the stalks standing for the deer and the wild pigs. As I eased out of the corn, I was met by my younger brother and my two cousins, Jeffery and Randy, racing eagerly toward me in wild excitement.

“What did you get? Did you get anything? Let us see! Let us see! Oh please,” they yelled.

“Shh, be quiet for Christ sake,” I whispered with an air of being irate. “I don’t have anything. I was only checking a few places out. I was not out hunting today.”

“Well, you’re falling down on the job, Bar Killer, cause Jeffro there caught two turkeys on a wire today!,” informed Randy with piercing glee.

“Shh, you boys keep all of this quiet now,” I fired. “You don’t ever know who might be in these woods listening to everything being said around here.”

“Well do tell,” taunted Randy, “you are not afraid of ole Cela now, are ya?”

Before I could even answer Jeffery had already fired his own taunt into the mix.

“If you’re afraid of him, then you’ll surely be a feared of Sydney and ole Koonfly Perry, wont ya?”

“Well what about ‘em?” I fired.

“Cela is nothin’ on them two,’ ’ retorted Jeffrey in a sudden snap. “and Koonfly has put out a special word on you. We just heard it today, as a matter of fact. His half retarded son, Cletus Perry informed me.”

“What did he have to say?” I inquired in earnest.

“He told me to tell you that they have the trappin’ around hereabouts. You can hang it up.”

“Oowee, boy, I am sure shakin’ in my boots on this one now!” I jeered in reply.

“Well you had better be, ole boy,” Randy suddenly chimed in, “cause he said that he knew you were out trappin’ his turf; and when he caught you he was going to strip you down, tie you up, then tar and feather you, if he didn’t bullwhip you outright first!”

“Yeah? Well boy, I shall say here. Looks like I have a mess on my hands if-in he ever catches me,” I replied in an effort to make light of the situation. “But you uns see here? That’s his problem, he is gonna have to catch me at it, and I wasn’t huntin’ today, so if he was out lookin’ he wasted his time and his day.”

“Well we just thought that we’d pass the word on and let ya know, Bar,” informed young Randy. My name was Bartleby Hill, but since I was the hunter in the family, and I often hunted bear, ever body called me Bar Killer.

Christmas time was nearing and I needed two more deer for us to have enough to feed the whole family at our family feast we have every year. I had already laid back four, plus seven or eight turkeys put in by my younger cousins, not to mention the twelve coons I laid back three nights ago. That is a story in and of itself all together.

On the back side of the field in front of my grandparent’s cottage home, in the far right hand corner is a rather large persimmon tree. During the day time I had noticed signs in the form of tracks, manure, and the hard husk found on the backside of the persimmon fruit, as well as half eaten fruit, that the tree was being worked by more than one coon. Sometime around 0100 I decided to duck tape a cardboard shield around my handheld flashlight, then ease out to shine the tree. I carried my handy Ruger 10/22 rifle loaded with Cci subsonic shorts.

To the right hand side of the field stood an old dilapidated pack house. Ahead of that were two tobacco barns where tobacco was strung up on factory made sticks and hung to cure over a nice kerosene flame. During the coldest time of the year we would often sneak inside to warm up ourselves, and to smell the sweet scent of curing tobacco. There was a drain ditch running along beside the tobacco barns and the pack house. This drain ditch ran the entire length of the field, forming a creek near the far right hand corner. Older people in the area have informed me that the ditch had simply been dug out from the creek. The persimmon tree was on a hill-face some thirty yards in the woods, and up on the small hill. I eased down into the ditch, walking through the flowing water for the entire length, until I entered into the woods. This action would give me complete cover from all sides of the field on either side.

When I eased up the small hill from the creek, I quickly snapped on the light as I paused underneath the tree. There they were, so many sets of glowing red eyes that I could barely contain myself. Carefully I sighted down the gun barrel between the eyes, since I couldn't see the gun sight at night, squeezing off a muffled pop. I heard a sudden release from the limb and a thud upon the ground, when my target collapsed. It was a simple matter to stand there, taking aim between the glowing red eyes, and simply pull the trigger. To even my own astonishment, a single shot in every case, was all that it took to complete the task at hand.

Quickly and quietly I gathered up my game, then made my way back down through the eight feet deep ditch. I stashed half of my kill in an area I knew was safe, then carried the other half to my grandparent's for processing. When my arduous task had at long last been completed, I eased back down to retrieve the other half. In forty minutes my task had been completed, and a large portion of Christmas dinner had been produced. All that remained was to smoke out the

carcasses in two barbecue grills using peach wood over the following two days or so. This process could be completed inside my grandfather's chicken house with the dirt floor, to minimize any danger of fire. The chickens had long been relocated into more secure living quarters.

The night air was filled with excitement as my cousins and I bedded down in grandma's home for the night. Around 0200, however, my own day was set to begin. I knew now what I was up against. Ole Cela Doogan was no joke to be laughed at, by no means, I just didn't want to admit the fact to my younger cousins. When he made a threat he was deadly serious. I am glad that he had given me a heads up on the matter, rather than remaining quiet about his feelings. I, on the other hand, didn't intend on giving him, or his allies, the same royal treatment by any means.

I opened my eyes naturally without arousing any type of alarm. The quarter moon shined directly into my bedroom window. I could tell by the glow that the time was right for me to exit out. Slowly I gathered my clothes, putting them on in moonlit darkness through my window. I picked up my 1936 308 bolt action Russian sniper rifle that I had purchased in Roses discount stores for only fifty dollars. I had ordered over 2000 rounds of discounted ammunition for less than 200 dollars, so I would never need to purchase bullets. Eighteen of these rounds were fixed into an ammunition belt that my father had given me as a Christmas present many years before. I quickly and quietly seized this up as I slowly made my way out the door of my grandparent's cottage home. My razor sharp western hunting knife was intimately sheathed onto my right hip. Slowly I eased over the threshold and out the front door onto the porch.

The entire world felt to stand before me, and at my finger tips for the taking. I eased down the dirt road before my grandparent's home to the left until I came to the huckleberry pond. A nine foot deep ditch had been cut into this natural

oasis of berries and vegetation. I sneaked down into this ditch, making my way through the water and the nighttime sludge. Before long I eased near to the woods on the opposite side of the field. The local deer herd had already crept out of the woods to nibble on the grass and herbs still available this time of year.

I paused behind the tall ditch bank while I stood upon an aging stump, peering over the edge like a soldier in a battle trench. I eyed the deer herd in the quarter moon light. Gingerly I raised the heavy wooden stocked rifle to my shoulder. I carefully selected the specific deer that I desired, pulled back the bolt, drew a steady solid bead, then gently but steadily pulled back on the trigger. The 308 roared loud enough to wake the dead, but never kicked the slightest. The feeling generated back to the hunter by this massively powerful weapon was closely related to that of a small 22 rifle.

The 200 pound twelve point buck fell like he had been poleaxed. He had been shot directly in the ear, passing through the skull completely without touching the rack, damaging the meat, nor the beautiful hide. The magnificent sight was beautiful beyond description. The cape, the head mount, and the rack would fetch more than a thousand US dollars on the black market, if it was retrieved without any knife marks. The meat would be laid back in the larder for the annual Hill Family Christmas Feast. The only problem now was that I needed at least three more deer the same size as this one, and soon.

Quickly I dragged the large deer back toward the ditch in thick cover. I drew my side knife, then proceeded to gut the carcass. When the carcass had been completely cleared, I selected a nearby willow branch, which I promptly cut, then speared the liver and the heart on to. I cut the deer's head underneath his jaw, pulling his tongue through the slit, whereupon I clipped it off with my handy k-bar army survival knife. Normally I lop off the feet, the head, and skin the deer

right there in the field, but this beast's appendages were simply too magnificent to behold.

I eased back down the ditch, toward my grandparent's cottage with the huge deer on my shoulders, being possible since I had gutted the carcass. I carry him into grandfather's empty chicken house, where I complete the job of skinning him, quartering the carcass, and cutting off the appendages. I am extremely careful with the hide, especially around the head area. The complete hide peels off as smoothly as a wool sweater, even around the head, ears, and eyes.

While I wasn't into the taxidermy end, my local taxidermist, David Monroe, would gladly fix up the head mount with nary a single revealing nick, for a case of beer and a new bag of heisted purple budded ganja. I personally didn't have any use for the stuff, but it spent better than money in my neck of the woods at the time.

A single woman with child and drawing welfare stamps had traded it to me for a furniture repair job that I did for her a while back. She had no cash nor stamps to trade with me for my labor. The woman actually made me another kind offer for the job, but I am happy that I passed it over for the much more valuable herb. The other gracious offer can be had in far too many varying locations, at no charge in most instances, so any possibility for some rockin' action from her really didn't do much for me.

I asked my half-baked cousin, Gale, to transport me to another location where I knew deer abounded that same night later on. Her home at the time was not far from the place I intended to hunt. Even though we were second cousins I always thought her to be rather attractive when decked out in her well pressed faded jeans, western shirt and cowgirl hat, with her hair pulled back tightly into a tail behind her head. She didn't need makeup, having a rather natural kind of beauty about her.

She made and chewed the best of homemade chewing tobacco. When any of the family had a need for some, she was our sole supplier. She could fight better than most men, out cuss a sailor, even out shoot and out trap any cowboy for miles around, no matter how proficient he claimed to be. She had been known to outfox the best of the G and F men around, for years, otherwise known by all of us as the Goon and Fag sheriffs. Many had taken a personal hit out on her, but could never make a catch by a long shot. She really was my type of gal, only we were kin, that's all.

We skillfully worked out a drop off and pick up point. My cousin, Clark Hill, rode with us for extra assurance in our mission, otherwise three was enough to see this adventure through. The only problem was that while being extremely intelligent, Clark was also rather large framed, and was somewhat slow on the foot. What he lacked in speed, however, he replaced with clever intellect and raw brute strength.

This drop off point was at a field deep in the woods, with only one way in, and one way out in the opposite direction. The field sat almost immediately adjacent to Mijj Bo Singletary's cow pasture and farm. Ole Bo was alright most of the time, but then sometimes he could question far too much, and be downright cantankerous to the point of making a complete 180 degree turn, to include stabbing the person who he had warmed up to in the back. He had come close to netting me enough trouble to consume a month of Sundays, but I knew how he was and always managed to remain at least one step ahead of him.

Here it was 0300 in the morning now. Gale motored down the back road in her old 1974 Buick. The V8 motor was strong as an elephant, and quiet as a mouse with a good set of mufflers on it. Loud mufflers, thumping music, and cars with glittering tacky paint jobs simply won't cut it in this business. The dark blue color of Gale's car and its sleuthing silence as it rode along, made it virtually indispensable as a hunting tool.

Quick as a cat and quietly as a mouse, she dropped us off at the road going to the farm.

Her instruction for pickup was to pull off the road on the other side of Bo Singletary's farm, white flag the window with the grill of the car pointing in the direction of the cow pasture, then place the flashlight with the red light on the dashboard of the car, if all was clear. If there was any question of safety or any hint of a possibility for trouble, then she was under strict orders to simply pull off and let Clark and myself find our own way back to my grandparent's cottage home.

Clark and myself eased along the narrow dirt road in the moonlight, walking some thirty yards to the left hand side of the road in the tall standing pine trees. After what felt to be a walk through the woods at night time, lasting hours, we finally made it to the field side. Clark seized up the set of night glasses he wore around his neck, scanning the field carefully, seeking out possible danger as much as the game. Sure enough, a rather large deer herd was out in the center of the overgrown field, grazing.

"I spy some nice sized does, and a buck about the same size of the one you shot earlier on. We only need to maneuver around the field to the other side, then we can have sight of them without using any type of aid," Clark slurred with great intuition as he gazed through the sights.

"A moonlight magnification scope on a crossbow would come in handy right about now," I replied in a whisper. "Think I am going to save for one next year."

"That is going to be nice, but we will have to make do with what we have for the time being," Clark smiled as he replied.

"You know, when we shift our position on that herd, we will be facing those farmhouses a hundred yards or so in the woods on the other side," I said. "I fear taking a shot."

"We'll just have to make the shot count," Clark replied.

“Problem for us is that we’ll need four the size of the one I slew earlier tonight, to round out what we need for the family Christmas feast, with some left over to spare,” I retorted in contest to Clark’s correct assessment of our position with the deer herd.

“Like I just said, we’ll have to make every shot count in this venture,” Clark fired back at me in a heavy whisper.

We made our way through the dense cover while being careful to remain a hundred yards out from the open field. After walking for at least thirty minutes, we finally resumed our new position on the opposite side of the deer herd, where we could clearly make out bucks from does in the moonlight. Clark raised his timeworn 25/20 to his shoulder, while being careful to pull back on the bolt. The gun bucked slightly, but no deer fell. The other deer behaved as if they never even noticed the shot, other than raising their heads and glancing around. Reloads with less powder for the subsonic benefit, and with heavier lead, really do work, but still the ears receive a nice pop when firing one.

“Did you make a hit, or miss?,” I whispered to Clark.

“I positioned the gun behind an oak tree. Maybe the shot was muffled by it,” Clark fired back with a stiffened huff.

About that time a light snapped on from the woods across the field. The heavy motor of a large truck roared and the sound moved on to the other side of the wood stand, toward the road where we entered. Trouble was on its way, with us caught smack dab in the middle.

“Let’s move on around this branch and cut across the Singletary millpond branch, over to where our pickup is. She’ll leave at the slightest hint of trouble. All that we can do is hope she is still there,” I whispered with a shiver of distress in my voice.

“The Christmas feast is the day after tomorrow. I hate to come home empty handed and let the family down like this,” Clark said as he winced and shook his head from side to side.

“Let's make it back to the pickup point, then concern ourselves with particulars later on,” I advised.

We worked our way around the field, and into the branch on the other side. As we rounded the field edge, we saw five heavy wheeled jacked up trucks roar down the road and directly into the center of the field, scattering the deer as they did. Two of the five had large rebel flags painted onto their hoods, with the bars running down the sides. We soon heard the doors slam as five men with bright spotlights and high caliber rifles slung across their shoulders, commenced to shining light beams in every direction, searching for the wicked hunters they just knew were lurking about.

We soon made it down to the thick broom straw patch beside the mill pond where our pickup was still patiently waiting. Her red dash light loomed its way back toward us through the woods. We eased up on her, investigating first to clear any questions of her identity, since it is highly possible that the bad boys are aware of our rather time worn techniques to at least a slight degree.

“Lets move out,” I say to her as we ease into the car, being very careful not to slam the heavy door. I sat beside Gale on the passenger side of the car, while Clark moved into the back seat.

“What are we going to do about our obligations to the family for our Christmas gathering, ole Bar man, there?” Clark asked.

“What do ya mean?” Gale snapped in direct response to Clark’s question.

“Well hell, we need at least four more deer the size of the one Bar Killer here slew earlier on. What are we going to do about our problem now? We have a posse in hot pursuit of us, and

bent on doing us real harm,” Clark snapped to Gale with an air of seriousness in his voice.

“We could go to that field over near Owen Manor. You know, the one in front of the old Purdee Family Plantation Home. That place is always full of deer, and we’ve all surely slain our share out there with the smooth ease of true professionals,” I whispered off the top of my head.

“Yeah, but that’s too damn far away for us to drive to now, late as it is,” Clark huffed, being obviously agitated at our failure to fulfill our family obligations.

The car eased on past Bo Singletary’s cow pasture. A whole herd of fifty cows or more, grazed peacefully out in the pasture, like they didn’t even notice us sleuthing along the paved road in front of them with our headlights clipped off.

“Well hell,” fired Gale, “one cow would be enough, wouldn’t it? Why don’t we just nail a cow? All of the bad guys are on the opposite side of this huge farm estate, with their minds on other things. Why don’t you roll that window down and hop your happy ice up on my passenger door. You could slay the dumb thing from there, and you had better do the job with one shot, I am telling you.”

“Well I’ll do-be-dolly-damned,” said I with a new air of excitement in my voice, “me thinks the girl has it!”

Clark handed me the old 1936 Russian bolt action 308, slamming a round in it for me. I took the rifle from his hands as I rolled down the window, taking my seat upon the car door. The cows silhouetted themselves perfectly in the moon light on the hill, some seventy five yards from where we were on the road. I sat up on the door as we motored along at thirty miles per hour, throwing my now cocked rifle across the top of the car.

As we passed I took surgical aim immediately behind the fore leg where I knew the heart was, then eased back on the trigger.

The rifle roared like a cannon shot in the black darkness, throwing a fire steak some four feet from the barrel tip. The barrel never jerked upward a centimeter, nor the stock never kicked an ounce. A cow crumpled on the ground as Gale eased down on the gas pedal. In what felt to be an instant we were gone from the area.

“Damn that was a fine shot, son!,” she shouted with new found glee. “Now this is what we will do. We will go down to Skeeter Hill Road, and sit for a while behind the pack house there. We can stash that rifle underneath the old house until first light tomorrow morning. I will swing both of you back down there in a couple of hours, where you two can butcher that cow, and bring out the meat by the roadside. I will come back in forty minutes, since I know that both of you can butcher that thing in less time.”

We three sat behind the old pack house breaking open cans of cold beer and talking about all of our hair rising wild eyed adventures that night, and those had in times now passed. Before we realized it our moment had finally arrived, she fired the car up and headed back out toward Bo Singletary’s cow pasture. She was careful to clip the lights off as we motored along on the hard surfaced road before reaching Bo Singletary’s pasture. When we reached the point where I had downed the cow, she stopped the car to drop Clark and myself off, then moved on.

Clark and myself climbed over the wood and barbed wire fence, into the pasture. We both crouched low as we moved along smoothly as silk in the now murky night. The thickening fog concealed our movements and activities, aiding us in our cause, but it also concealed any possibility for danger up ahead on the job from us both as well. We made our way along with extreme caution, scanning the area constantly with our night glasses. Soon we walked up on the fallen cow.

We both seized a back leg and commenced to slice the hide with our sharp knives. We began with a slice around the hooves, and down the inside of each leg. Clark cut the hide on the stomach, and commenced moving up one of the two forelegs on the inside, while I moved up the inside of the other. Soon we began peeling the hide away from the luscious marbled meat, starting at the rear hooves, which surprisingly had little fat. On the other hand we shouldn't have been surprised at all, since these cows were pasture grass fed year round.

In fifteen minutes we were gutting the carcass. Both of us labored without speaking a single word. Once the carcass was gutted, we both began hacking it up into quarters, then transporting the quarters to the side of the hard surfaced road. It took both of us to haul a single quarter out to the roadside, but we made it in extraordinarily fine form. We speared the liver, heart, and the tongue on a sharpened stick, as was usual for us when we make a kill. We left the head, the feet, the guts, and the hide there in the pasture.

With much labor we both finally had the luscious meat there inside the car with us.

“Think that's enough?,” Gale asked with widened eyes.

“It mite near done it,” Clark laughed, “I think”

“I hate that we had to leave that mess there in the pasture like that,” I said with an air of concern.

It really was poor form for us to do such things, but we didn't have the time to mull over it right now. Should the mess be discovered, and it probably will be, and traced back to us, all of us would be in some deep sewage for sure. The odds of us being found out, however, were slim to none, in reality, considering our location and general situation at the time. When we made it back to my grandparent's home, we offloaded the meat into the old hen house, then commenced to sawing and chopping it up into steaks, roast cuts, and chops.

“Boy they all sure will be proud of us, come the day after tomorrow, when the feast begins,” I said as I glowed with great pride.

When we had completed our task of cutting up the meat, we carried it down to the brine barrel tucked away in the wood stand beside my grandparent's cottage. We placed the brine barrel far out of sight in the woods just in case the cottage was ever searched for anything by some authoritarian. In this business of living free, one must always remain one step ahead of the competition if he is to ever keep his head up and in the open air, and his legs off the big chains and iron balls. With daylight only two hours away, we all got cleaned up, then crashed out on my grandmother's living room furniture and on the floor.

When we awoke, some four hours later, both of my grandparents were awake.

“Well boy, did ya get the goods?” asked grandfather in a trembling voice of noticeable concern.

“Yeah, we got it,” I replied in a slurred tired voice.

“Well boy, I do declare for the likes of me, we all couldn't see how anybody could accomplish such a feat on such short-notice.”

“We did, and you'll see it's here soon,” I replied.

Grandfather punched his fireplace with an iron poking rod hammered out for the purpose, then moved on into the kitchen, and proceeded to throw himself together a ham sandwich for breakfast. In a minute he was back carrying a tin coffee pot in his trembling right hand filled with water. This he sat on the hearth by the fire. After grandfather had coffee, we both headed outside to the barn shelter and gas barbecue grills underneath. He fired up the two barrel grills while I retrieved the precious fresh meat, piece by glorious piece. As

the meat cooked, we stacked it on platters and inside large home crafted willow bowels down inside grandpa's root cellar.

"Come tomorrow all of this will be good, being that it's cooked in your one of a kind special sauce," I said with a pleasant smile.

"Yeah, the same old time tested and true one. That's wild honey fresh out of the tree, mustard, and peach vinegar, mixed," he replied.

"A little dose of your classic white lightning mixed in doesn't harm anything, to be honest about it."

We both laughed at the reflective thought.

We cooked meat and baked beans all that day. Eventually Clark arose to help out, while Gale and grandmother prepared the cakes and vegetables in the kitchen on the wood stove. By nightfall, at long last this huge feast was finally prepared.

The following day was Christmas eve. The freshly harvested, selectively chosen cedar tree was up in the house, the toy wooden men and soldiers hung, with the popcorn chains and the candy canes by their sides on the slightly spiny, sticky sap drenched limbs. The holly limbs with their red berries hung gracefully from the top portion of the door frame and the black jack oaken hearth mantle, with the long stockings all in their proper place by the fireside. The fire was snapping pleasantly in its seat on the fire dogs, crafted from scrap railroad rails.. The general feeling of warmth in the house seared a permanent impression on each and every mind present that day.

By 1100 hours the people began driving up into the yard. Soon grandmother's home was filled with more than a hundred guests, while all of us busied ourselves warming up the food. When they heard that cousin and myself had gathered the meat all on our own, the men bunched up, saying aloud;

“Well let's give three cheers for our family heroes. Old Saint Nick could have never been kinder to all of us this year, more so than at any other time, in our opinion!”

They all grasped their hands together out in the yard, where Clark and myself took a seat. They cheered loudly as they tossed us both high into the air.

“Hip hip hurrah, for our two family heroes! Hip hip hurrah! Hip hip hurrah! Three cheers for the ones who have surely made our day! Hip hip hurrah!”

H L Dowless

Dowless is a national & international academic/ ESL Instructor. He has been a writer for over thirty years. His latest publications have been two books of nonfiction with Algora Publishing, a fictional novel by Atmosphere Press, and fictional publications with combo e-zines and print magazines; Leaves Of Ink, CC&D Magazine, a novel with Atmosphere press, Short Story Lovers, The Fear Of Monkeys, and Frontier Tales. He recently signed three contracts with Pen it Publications. He has enjoyed a lifetime of outdoor activities from big game hunting, camping, fishing, and trapping, to archaeological field work in various exotic locations. What he enjoys most of all is meeting freedom loving, interesting creative people, who are also regular dedicated fans of his publications.

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