

Gray's Sporting Journal

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Gray's Sporting Journal

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Front Cover: *Marlin Fishing*, an original oil on canvas, 18 x 22 inches, by Lynn Bogue Hunt (1878–1960).
Courtesy of Coeur d' Alene Art Auction, Hayden, Idaho.


Inside Front Cover: "Peek A Boo," a photograph by Denver Bryan/Images on the Wildside.

EBERHARD BRUNNER/IMAGES ON THE WILDSIDE



Buckets

In Southeast Alaska, a
lot of things can kill you.
Even the rain. *by C.B. Bernard*



Hathaway squatted like death itself over the remains of the deer, dirty to the elbows with her innards. The smell rising from her open cavity burned like ammonia. Fluids stung his hands and forearms. His shot had entered behind the shoulder and low, spiraling through the doe's organs like a drill bit and bursting her bladder, tainting the meat with urine. Splinters of bone punctured the stomach. Gastric acid trickled out in a pair of slow streams that ran beneath Hathaway's legs and down the beach to the water.

He wiped his face on his sleeve, up high by his shoulder and away from the blood. Under other circumstances such a shot might embarrass him. This time it didn't matter. He wasn't there for the deer. He'd come to kill his friend John Stone.

Stretching the curve from his back, Hathaway stood and looked around the beach for bear. This was when they'd get him—startle him over a kill while his hands were busy, the scent of blood like a perfumed dinner invitation. His quadriceps ached imagining the weight of a bite. He'd been near bears before and the smell of death surrounded them, fetid and rank, unapologetically savage. Bears terrified him. He couldn't imagine ever getting used to their presence here in Alaska. This was their damn country.

He glanced at his deer rifle, a stainless Winchester ought-six he'd leaned against a felled spruce left on the beach by the tide. It was cut and limbed recently enough that the exposed faces hadn't yet discolored. Concentric rings showed its age. Ancient. Dizzying. It seemed a sin to log it. He guessed it had broken away from a raft being towed past the town, toward the logging company camp.

Since the local Native corporation had sold the logging rights, the town had entered yet another evolution. After a thousand years, the corporation's animal totem—raven on brown bear on killer whale—had been reimaged: helicopters swarmed the southern sky, log trucks prowled the roads, barges ghosted in and out of the bay at night, hulking shadows on a moonless horizon. The air trembled with activity. Locals remembered a time not so long ago when the paper mill was here, in town, and the sour smell of pulp coated everything like the rain,

but now the pulp was made in Japan and the raw trees came from here, as if, having killed the town by suffocating its economy, the Japanese were coming back for its flesh and bones.

He'd heard fishermen in the harbors complaining about all the deadhead logs in the water, how they had to run them like a gauntlet while checking their crab pots, or cut them from their gillnets like bloated corpses. Before he'd come to the island, Hathaway had never run a boat. He still hadn't run one in the dark, and like everything else up here, the thought of it scared him. There were a lot of ways to die in Alaska.

He kept an eye on the tree line as his hands slipped through the warmth of the deer, cutting the organs free and scattering them on the nearby rocks. Without effort, he'd been able to distinguish the tracks of four distinct bears in the mud above the high tide mark. They bedded down in the beach grass at the tree line, leaving flattened rooms of matted reeds and wild rye, and if the grass moved with the breeze, Hathaway's heart leapt like a hooked salmon. Heaps of bear scat stood like pyres waiting to be burned. Making as large a mess as he could, he pushed the bears from his mind. Blood pooled between the smooth beach stones, leaching outward from the body of the deer, butterflied open on her back and spilling her insides out.

Her fawn still bayed from the woods. Not yet a yearling, it had stood over its mother when she fell, running crookedly up the beach and away only when Hathaway approached. For three hours he'd leaned against the boat, watching the woods, supposed to be hunting but killing only time while

waiting for Stone to return. He'd almost laughed when the doe emerged from the grass a boat's length from him. Her coat glistened in the rain like fallen leaves. The rifle had come to his shoulder with unpracticed ease, and for a moment he'd felt good, felt the adrenaline like a drug, the thrill of his first hunt. He'd never killed anything bigger than a fish before. But when the last echoes of the shot stopped ringing in his ears, Hathaway saw where he'd hit her, saw she was just a small doe, saw the fawn jerkily approach, prodding with a rounded snout at its mother's body. Blood rushed to his face, unwanted, warm. The gun trembled in his arms. The doe had been a stroke of good luck. The fawn was the bad luck that came with it. That was how Hathaway understood luck to work.

Snow had moved down the mountain overnight. It pushed past the 500-foot mark, rain at lower elevations, though the misting they'd gotten running the skiff from town had let up some. The rain would be back. It always rained in this damn country. People in town wore it like a badge of honor. It keeps the hippies out, they said. Limits the tourists. In his time here, watching the cruise ships pull into port, Hathaway had learned that to be true. Who are these people who pay a fortune for a week in Southeast Alaska and then stay on the ship watching movies in port? But he'd also learned that 16 months of endless rain could make a man forget who he was. His clothes never completely dried. Even covered in black garbage bags, the seats of his truck were always damp, his windshield opaque with fog. Mold insinuated itself into everything. Grass grew from the roof of every house in town, the closest anyone came to having a lawn.

In the Arizona of his childhood, towns diverted whatever water they could, wasting resources so people could irrigate their lawns. Each suburban home was edged by manicured sod that ended like justified text against a margin of desert. It made no sense to him, but neither did the ambivalence people here showed about landscaping: Houses cobbled together. Yards left as they were found or enhanced with abandoned boat parts, crab pots, fishing gear. No pride in appearances, as though they surrendered to the futility of competing against the natu-

He'd never killed anything bigger than a fish before. But when the last echoes of the shot stopped ringing in his ears, Hathaway saw where he'd hit her, saw she was just a small doe, saw the fawn jerkily approach, prodding with a rounded snout at its mother's body. Blood rushed to his face, unwanted, warm. The gun trembled in his arms.

ral landscape without even a fight. *Lay down your rakes, brothers.*

Rain filled everything. It pooled in the curved hulls of boats in the harbor, of boats trailered in yards, rising in wheelbarrows and five-gallon pails left upright as though in supplication to God. It rode into the coffee shop on the plastic coats and rubber boots of those stubborn enough to live here, beaded up around window frames and dripped into woodstoves, masked the streets and gutters so they were implied rather than seen beneath inches of standing water. It even seeped its way into conversation, as if it were the most interesting thing that might happen on any given day. *Rain.*

And then, movement in the fringe of trees where the beach met the forest. A stick snapping, or a branch. Hathaway lunged for his rifle, his heart a rumbling diesel, his skin gone cold. The deer's blood slicked the gun's barrel. He held his breath as the motion carried through the tall beach grass. The bear emerged just uphill from where Hathaway stood tensed and anxious, watching through his scope.

Bang.

"Don't point that thing at me, you jackass," John Stone said, walking toward him. The green wool of his halibut jacket disappeared against the backdrop of trees, creating the effect of a disembodied head floating above a pair of striding legs. Stone carried his rifle slung casually over his invisible shoulder as

if he hadn't a fear in the world.

You should have, Hathaway thought, keeping the rifle trained on Stone as he filled the circle of scope until it could no longer focus.

"What the hell you doing, Hathaway?"

"I'm watching your back. There's bear sign everywhere."

"There ought to be. You see the bait buckets just back of the tree line? Season's not open for brownies. Must be a poacher hung them there."

Hathaway lowered the gun but didn't put it down. "Must be," he said.

"We'll have to let Fish and Game know, we get back to town. Somebody stumbles on those things, he's liable to get himself eaten."

Overhead a patch of sky had opened up in the cloud cover, and a shaft of sunlight found the beach. Around here they call those sucker holes, because they sucker you into thinking the weather is clearing and then it rains on you.

Stone squinted in the sudden light.

"Any rate, I didn't see much sign except for that fawn crying. If someone's baiting bears here, that'd keep deer away. Surprised to hear your shot. Guess you got lucky, Hathaway."

"I'm just a lucky guy, I guess."

Stone squatted down next to the splayed deer and pulled a cigarette out of a coat pocket. Predictably unshaven, the stubble rode high on his cheek, ending just below a scar the length of a rifle slug. Hathaway had no idea what injury had caused it. He imagined Stone as the kind of man with a constellation of scars, a creation myth for each of them. Maybe he'd ask Abigail when he saw her. She'd know.

"Christ, you shot a doe? Must be *her* fawn, then. Jesus. At least you didn't shoot it, too." Stone studied the carcass of the deer for a moment, a halo of smoke surrounding his head. "The hell you do to it? Looks like you dressed it out with your teeth. Jesus, Hathaway. Thought you said you'd done this before."

Hathaway answered him with the butt of the Winchester, swinging it by its barrel so the heavy stock connected with his temple. Stone's cigarette hissed out against the beach rocks, wet with blood and rain.

Lot of ways to die here, Hathaway thought, raising the rifle butt again.

The pulp mill shut down in the '80s. Predicting the town's death, the editor of the newspaper called for the heads of the American syndicate that sold out to the Japanese. Some people cut their losses and left town, moving north to Anchorage or the Valley where they resorted to desk jobs or reinvented themselves as farmers. Others surrendered some piece of who they were and returned to the Lower 48—*America*, they called it. After a period of economic darkness, commercial fishing kept the town viable. It seemed for a while that everyone in town bought a permit and a boat. The fleet continued to grow even as the numbers of fish diminished, until the market no longer could support the fishery. How could small-boat troll fishermen in Alaska compete with fish farms in Canada, Chile, and Norway? They couldn't. They bought smaller, faster boats, and turned to charter fishing. To some, charter fishing was no different from commercial fishing—making money by harvesting the resource. Except the money came from cigar-smoking "sportsmen," usually from Texas, who arrived in parties of six and behaved like frat boys at a bachelor party. The client aspect of the business led others to see it as tourism, and wanted to tax it accordingly. The Texans slept at the fishing lodges, which fed them and shuttled them by van to the harbor and to the airport, their fish blast-frozen and bundled in waxed boxes, never once stepping foot into town. Economically, the town felt their presence only in the sale of marine fuel or in property taxes even as they came and went in droves. It became increasingly difficult to catch salmon or halibut in the bay.

The Native corporation responded by selling logging rights to the Japanese. The rest of the town took drastic measures to resurrect itself by opening the doors to full-scale tourism. The mayor and the Chamber of Commerce built a deepwater lightering dock and invited cruise lines into the bay. While the rain and a general privileged laziness kept many passengers on board, some disembarked into the small downtown of wooden sidewalks and old

Abigail had black hair and crooked teeth. Her expression had a fatigue to it that worked her features like gravity. Above the puffiness, her eyes shone like diamonds. Like ice.

Russian flair. They bought trinkets and postcards, took a few pictures, and drank lattes at the coffee shop; then they went home and told their coworkers they'd seen Alaska, and Wasn't it magnificent? They had the T-shirts to prove it.

Hathaway often marveled how one place could mean such different things to so many people. For him, it was about open space. About beauty. About wildness.

That's what had brought him here—at least ostensibly. He was newly arrived in San Diego, a few years out of college and already divorced, plowing a cubicle farm as a policy writer for the healthcare industry, when Clare had shown up at his door soliciting signatures on a clean-air petition. Didn't he hate working in that environment? Didn't the crowds and the traffic and the smog get to him? Over margaritas she told him she'd always wanted to travel north. She told him there was a rain forest to save from logging, salmon to save from overfishing, eagles on the endangered-species list. She told him she wanted to protect them all.

"I love eagles," he said.

Six days later they were bouncing along the Al-Can in his truck, farther north than he'd ever been. The mountains rose straight up from the shoulder of the road. Fireweed burned in the clearcuts. He didn't even know Clare's last name.

They'd arrived in the midst of the charter fishing boom. Commercial market prices tanked for

salmon, but sport-fishing boats were turning clients away. There was no logic to it. The same people who wouldn't pay to eat salmon would pay to catch them. Hathaway became grateful for such people when John Stone hired him as a stern-monkey on the *Keta*. He'd never scrubbed a deck or baited a hook in his life. He was unaccustomed to working with his hands and back, and it didn't come easily to him, but Stone tolerated him because he didn't get seasick. He'd come to Alaska to enlarge the boundaries of his world, and instead found it shrunk to the size of the fiberglass deck between the gunwales of a 27-foot Sea Sport. Nothing in his life prepared him for the long days of physical labor. His blood was filled with desert sand, not Pacific brine, and his English degree from Arizona State seemed a liability. Clients and guides alike, especially the Texans, treated him with suspicion.

He learned first to dumb down the way he spoke, then not to speak at all.

When Clare left, he stayed on with Stone and the *Keta*. Where would he go, back to San Diego? He barely remembered it, having fled before he even formed an impression. Thinking about it absently while bleeding chinook on the boat, saving their gills for crab bait, his mind struggled to picture California as a half-developed Polaroid unshaken and abandoned. San Diego was Clare's home, not his. And before that, his ex-wife had marked the fenceposts and corners of Arizona. Hathaway had no home to go back to, and nothing yet to look forward to. The days he passed in mute labor on the rolling sea, the nights scrubbing out his loneliness with a stiff-bristled brush and soapy water, hosing fish blood through the scuppers into the harbor where the scales twinkled like stars beneath the sodium lights of the dock.

Abigail had black hair and crooked teeth. Her expression had a fatigue to it that worked her features like gravity. Above the puffiness, her eyes shone like diamonds. Like ice. The first time Hathaway saw her, she was holding a mug of tea close to her face, reading *Anna Karenina*, her hair tucked into a Chicago Cubs hat. Rain-soaked customers filled the coffee shop around them. Most were locals in

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Buckets

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faded rain gear, though Hathaway recognized a few brave cruise ship passengers by their matching ponchos with HOLLAND AMERICA across the chests and backs.

"You like Russian literature?" he asked.

"Not really. But she throws herself in front of the train."

"I hope it's not research."

He smiled to show he was joking.

"There's no trains on the island." She didn't return his smile. Hathaway scoured her face for some hint of sentiment, but found only blankness. The same expression he saw a dozen times a day in the salmon he stacked like firewood against the *Keta's* fiberglass bulkhead.

"I suppose I could throw myself in front of a ferry," she said, her expression softening, her eyes coming to life. Hathaway thought of the sucker holes, and how they enticed tourists into leaving their raincoats in their rooms.

He pointed to her cap. "You like the Cubs?"

This time she smiled.

"Like throwing myself in front of a train."

The coffee shop was almost the extent of their relationship's geography: at a back table, a book in her hands, a chimney of tea steaming beside her. Hathaway haunted the place on his days off. She never showed surprise to find him there.

They saw each other that way two or three times a week until one day she put her hand on his, leaning in close to share gossip she'd picked up around the harbor. He'd known her more than a month. At that moment it occurred to him to ask her last name.

"Stone," she said. "It's Stone."

The rain began again. Just like that, like a valve had been turned, and the air filled with a spray that soaked through layers of wool clothing and skin until even his bones felt damp. Hathaway pulled his coat more tightly around him and tugged on his wool cap. He blinked into the sky.

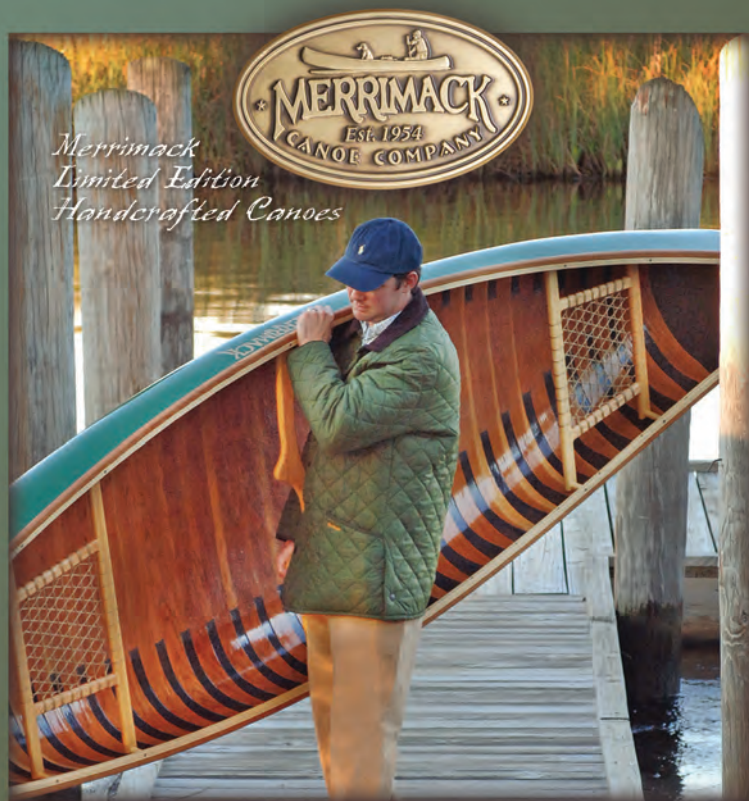
Would it never end? A part of him

wanted to be done with it, all of it. He'd always hated the desert as a kid, the way the arid heat forced life to adapt. No place for a childhood. Sand worked its way into everything the way water did here. The idea of distinct seasons had been a dream, a utopia, but this bordered on sadistic. Even his blood thinned with rainwater. Seven months after he'd arrived in country, he'd stumbled home from work looking for a beer, slick with fish but repulsed by the idea of a shower, of more water, to find a note on the kitchen table. Clare had gone back to San Diego. "It's not you," she wrote. "It's the rain." But there were days Hathaway couldn't distinguish between the two. He rode the swelling deck of the *Keta* as the skies poured down upon him, John Stone and the clients dry in the small cabin. Rain worked its way down the cuffs and collar of his Grundéns. His skin became perpetually wrinkled, his hands a clutch of prunes. Alaskans had names for everything—snow was termination dust, newcomers like Hathaway were cheechakos. They called the rain liquid sunshine, and swore it didn't bother them, but it had to. It had to.

The bait buckets were just five-gallon pails of brightly colored plastic. He'd stuffed them with fish guts from the *Keta*, hung them from spikes in the trees. When he'd shown up to rebait his first ones, he'd found bits of fish strewn from one end of the beach to the other. Land otters or mink. After that he left the lids on. Punched holes in them so the smell could get out but only bears could get in.

Water lapped against the beach, rain thrummed steadily on his shoulders and the rocks around him, and the fawn cried from the woods for its mother. At some point, Hathaway figured, it would run off. Learn to fend for itself. It would be fine, he told himself. Nature would take its course, and however he felt about it, he had his own business to attend to.

Walking through the beachgrass made him nervous. Taller than him, the color of a duck's beak, it seemed to whisper as he moved through it. In the matted grass where the bears bedded down, he found fish bones, whole key-shaped skeletons, bear turds lined with deer hair and dotted with berries. His rifle sling tangled, and the long, slim blades of grass tugged at his legs. Hathaway carried the Winchester



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before him. He listened intently, imagined himself a soldier on patrol in Vietnam, like his father. The bolt was closed. The safety was off. A shell locked in the chamber and three more in the magazine. Was surprising a Viet Cong more terrifying than a salivating bear?

Conscious of every sound, alert to any movement in the woods or grass around him, he hauled the bait buckets one at a time to his skiff. The stink of old blood burned his nose. When he carried a bucket, he gripped his rifle with his free hand instead of wearing it on its sling. Even though it took both hands to fire it, this way he could get to it more quickly. There would be no time to waste if he needed it.

They had one other place they met. Abigail had been a point guard on her high school basketball team, traveling around Alaska by ferry and airplane in search of a state title. Her eyes weren't kind as she remembered aloud the stout, smiling Natives from the northern coast whose set shots were unfailing line drives, honed by years of playing in low-ceilinged school gyms. Ten years out, she still missed the feel of the court. As a reward for sharing that piece of herself, Hathaway offered to play one-on-one with her a few nights a week on the courts behind the elementary school.

Puddles covered the ground. Her ball was worn smooth by years of use, slick with rain. It slipped from his grasp on rebounds. His shots soared wild and away from the backboard.

"Didn't you say you played in high school, too?"

"I did. Just not on a team."

"The hell does that mean?"

He tried to think of the last time he'd been in a game, or even touched a basketball. Nothing came to mind. He dribbled the ball off his foot. His hook shots hit the backboard like a bullet, rattling the rim, or sailed high over the top and into the night.

Summer burned away some of the clouds. Daylight lingered until midnight, or later, and there were days on the *Keta* when Hathaway stripped down to a T-shirt beneath his rubber overalls. Sea

lions climbed onto the fingers of the harbors. Goats came down from the high shale ridges and grazed on the beaches. The whole world seemed to bask in the warmth.

No matter how much the town welcomed it, the sun never built up any momentum. It rained every other day.

Business boomed with the season, and Hathaway spent more time helping out around the lodge each evening after cleaning the boat. During that time he also got to know John Stone better. Hard labor had earned the boss's respect. It was the only language he seemed to speak, and he let Hathaway drink the lodge's beer and smoke cigars on the wrap-around deck with him and the clients while they watched the rain bubble up in the puddles dotting the driveway.

Stone had been born in Alaska, up north near the arctic circle, in a cabin that had an outhouse because the ground was too frozen to dig a septic. His parents still lived in the same cabin. It still had no plumbing. Hathaway saw that as a symbol of Stone's immeasurable ruggedness. That even his mother rolled her pants down over a cold hole in the earth.

Independently of each other, husband and wife were Hathaway's only source of companionship in town. Mornings began when he unlocked the *Keta's* cabin at 3:30. Most nights he closed one of the town's two waterfront bars, drinking pints of Alaskan Amber bought with boat tips, the only things from Texas that were small, making conversation with anyone who sat nearby. The next night he'd close the other bar. Alternating between them kept Hathaway from feeling like he was in a rut.

One night near the end of the summer, a Sitka blacktail ran across the gravel driveway of the lodge, chased by a neighbor's Lab. That week's group of Texans hooted and cheered from the deck, sloshing beer down through the porch slats. Later, as Hathaway loaded his truck to head to the bar, Stone suggested they fill their deer tags together that fall.

"You hunt, right?"

"Sure," Hathaway said. "Yeah. Of course."

Over dinners at the lodge, he watched the way Stone walked and moved. He listened to the way he spoke to the clients

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and tried to mimic it. It was the same way Abigail talked. He cursed the newness of his clothes, and wished for frayed edges to his Grundéns and Carhartts. When he was alone on the *Keta*, he took his laundry from his drybag and soaked it in fish blood, hoping it would stain.

Four red bait buckets and two blue ones were lined up in the skiff's bow, and the rain beat out a percussion line on their lids. A sunworn gas tank sat beside them. He'd wedged it between the cylindrical floats he used as dock bumpers so it wouldn't slide around the deck. He'd brought a vinyl camouflage drybag full of food and overnight gear, but nothing in it would chase away the kind of chill Hathaway had.

Covered in blood, Stone's body curved like a jump shot on the beach beside the deer. Early afternoon, already getting dark. Town a good two hours in his underpowered skiff, the 25-horse lamed by a misfiring cylinder, Hathaway still with work to do. He washed the blood from

his hands and forearms in the cold water. The bears would come. He didn't want to be on the beach when they did. It was only a matter of time.

As he worked, he kept an eye on the tree line. When the beachgrass switched and swayed, he froze, realizing he'd made a cheechako's mistake, putting the bodies between himself and his boat, between himself and the rifle he'd left leaning against the spruce log. He'd heard stories of hunters chased into the water by bears that fed on their half-dressed kill while the hunters succumbed to hypothermia, chest deep in the cold Gulf of Alaska, their loaded rifles waiting uselessly on shore.

"Damn," he said. "Damn."

He wished he carried a Casull like Stone did, holstered under his coat. Smaller calibers might stop a charging bear, but he'd take his chances with the .454. Not that it mattered. He had little chance of reaching Stone's body in time.

So those are my options, he thought. Stand still and wait to see what happens, or go for Stone's gun.

The choice was made for him. He

didn't think he could move even if he wanted to. Fear rooted him to his spot. He thought of Abby, thought of the way her body felt against his. What the hell was he doing here?

High on the beach, above the mud, the grass parted. The orphan fawn tumbled out into the rain. It looked around the beach and bayed for its mother.

Early September, the long daylight hours gone, they shot hoops under the playground lights. Abigail sank an arcing jumper from the top of the key that put her up 11 to 4. They played to 12, and she needed just one more bucket to get there. A mist hung in the air. Through the glare, Hathaway could make out the dim outline of the mountains looming like the shoulders of the town.

Over the months he'd learned to use his size and weight to his advantage. Foul- ing her seemed unfair, but he liked the way their bodies touched. The intimacy of athletics had never occurred to him before. When he dribbled, he hunched over



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the ball, curving his back to her defense. She had a mean outside shot.

"I'll bet you miss your next one," he said, stalling to catch his breath.

"What's in it for me?"

"Besides winning?"

"I win all the time. I want something more."

"Something more? Like what? Dinner?"

"No."

"Then what?"

"A favor."

Stained with sweat and rain, her red sweatpants clung to her thighs as she spun the ball distractedly on an index finger. Even under the uneven lights she wasn't beautiful. Hathaway's heart beat him senseless from the inside out. It was the exertion, he told himself. It was the game.

"I like the sound of that," he said.

"Maybe you shouldn't."

"Maybe I do."

"No. No, I don't think so."

"There's nothing you can ask for that I'm not going to be okay with," he said.

"That's how it is?"

"That's how it is."

"Well," she said. "We'll see about that."

Abigail checked the ball, and when he returned it, she faked a shot. Leaping to block, Hathaway committed. He felt he could keep on rising into the night air. She dribbled beneath his upraised arm and put in the layup, laughing.

"Know what you did wrong?"

He wasn't sure where to begin.

"You left your feet," she said. "Never leave your feet."

The fawn's bleating must sound like a dinner bell, Hathaway thought, gathering his gear in the skiff. Confused by what had happened, and frightened besides, it latched on to him as a surrogate mother, pausing from its cries only to lick the matted blood from its own legs. As Hathaway untied the boat from the trees and coiled the line loosely over his arm, shimmying sideways down the beach to the skiff with an eye on the grass, the fawn followed close on his heels. There was a grating mew to its cries that got under his skin, like the rain.

"Scat," he said, waving his arms at

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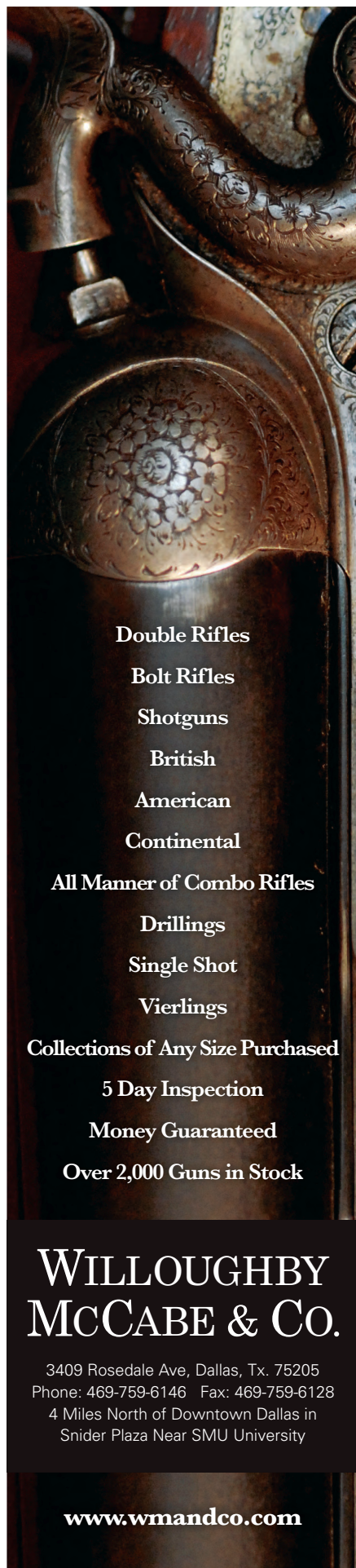
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it and watching the tree line nervously. Hathaway didn't trust his senses in the fading light. With each minute that passed, he liked his chances on the beach less and less. "Go on, get out. Beat it."

Instead of chasing the fawn off, his voice seemed to draw it closer. Gangly, unsure on its feet, the deer walked like it was on ice. Under other circumstances Hathaway might have gotten down to his knees and reached out to it, let it sniff his hand. Scratched it behind the ear. The idea brought Clare to mind. Clare would have swaddled it in her fleece, brought it back to town and raised it as a pet in the backyard. Had it really been a year since she'd left? Any loss he'd felt over her had curdled. Women like her were a dime a dozen here, iron shavings to Alaska's magnetic north. Drawn by what they see on television or read in some environmental magazine, they came with ideas and blasted everyone for their sins against Mother Nature, as if they could make the world a better place one lecture at a time. And then Mother Nature herself, in the form of rain, drove them away. Hathaway told himself he had no use for such people. People who want to save the world but don't care a damn about the people in their own lives.

Thinking of Clare rankled him, turning his impatience and fear to anger. He kicked at the fawn when it drew up at his feet. It dodged and retreated, skittish, and Hathaway missed, his rubber boot slipping on the wet rocks and sliding out from under him. Rocks dug into his back when he landed. He held the Winchester in the air above his chest, grateful it hadn't gone off.

"Damn it," he said, and climbed to his feet.

The rain had picked up again. Hathaway could feel the cold in his hands, wet from handling the coil of rope, from the rifle. The fawn followed him to the boat, but kept its distance. Putting his weight into it, he shouldered his skiff into the water and clambered over the bow. Digging a long half-rotted oar into the shallows, he backed into deeper water, lowered the outboard, and pulled the starter cord. The engine sputtered to life like a waking animal. On the shore, the fawn stood knee-deep in the shallows, watching him, bellowing its orphan cry.

Pointing the bow south, Hathaway ran around the corner of the bay and idled a hundred feet offshore. Darkness enclosed him as he worked. There were no stars in the sky, and when he tilted his head to look for them, the rain splashed his face, spilling into his eyes. One by one he emptied the bait buckets into the water, the fish guts spilling off the stern in a long chum trail. The water numbed his hands and forearms as he rinsed out the pails and nested them inside one another in the bow, where they wouldn't look out of place. When this was all over, his boat would look like every other skiff in the harbor when he motored back and tied off in his slip.

He'd put food in his dry bag. He was prepared to wait all night if he had to, anchored offshore and watching the beach in the darkness. Prepared to wait as long as it might take.

Hathaway gunned the motor, turning around and returning toward the beach. Daylight lingered only as a tease of dim color where the sea met the sky. He could make out the silhouette of the truncated volcano, dormant a thousand years, beyond it nothing but ocean all the way to Russia. It was difficult to see where he was going in the darkness, and he ran faster than he should have, hoping to take advantage of what light remained.

Nearing the beach, the boat lurched, shuddered as if struck, and heaved at a 40-degree angle toward land. The contents of the bow—the gas can, the bait buckets, stray, rusted tools he kept loose—crashed to the port side, and the tiller jumped, wrenched from his icy hand. Hathaway grabbed a gunwale for balance as the skiff righted itself, swiveling to one side. Behind him the outboard whined briefly, a hoarse, metallic cry, and quit. He spun on the stern bench and leaned over the transom in time to see the log float past and vanish into the darkness, a deadhead, smaller than the one on the beach. He pulled the starter cord. Nothing. Again. Nothing. In the silence that filled the space left by the muted outboard, the rain pinged the skiff's aluminum deck and floorboards.

She'd seen them off at the harbor, even though it was a full hour before dawn. Dawn, which comes as late as 9:30 in October. As they'd loaded their gear

into Hathaway's skiff, she'd stood swaying on the finger, half asleep, her eyes hooded beneath the blue baseball cap. Did she even own a coat? He'd never seen her wear one. Her sweatshirt hid her figure, which was sinewy and strong, primal and lean. Hathaway tried not to look, afraid he'd get caught.

He topped off his gas tank and bled the water from the filter as Stone untied the spring line from the cleats. There wasn't much activity in the harbor. Lights burned brightly through the windows of the live-aboards, and ripples of tide rocked the floating docks and boats rhythmically.

"Good luck out there, both of you. Hope you get lucky."

"Nothing to it," Stone said, zipping his rifle into a waterproof case. "Just a walk in the woods."

Hathaway looked up from the fuel filter in time to see Stone lean over the gunwale to kiss his wife. He tried to gauge Abigail's reaction, to see if she would flinch or pull away, but the boat swayed beneath him, and he reached for the opposing rail to recapture his balance.

"Just a walk in the woods," he said. "Unless we get eaten by a bear."

"God, Hathaway," Stone said. "You're just like everyone else who comes up here from America. All you think about is bears. You worry too much."

"Yeah, Hathaway. Don't worry so much," Abigail said. "At least *you're* in good hands."

There was something else. Hathaway strained to listen, unsure what to expect. What would it sound like? Would he hear panting, or would they roar with pleasure? Had it already begun? But another sound altogether came from the beach, downwind but not distant, pleadingly familiar.

"Damn it," he said. "I don't believe it."

The breeze whispered at his side. It pushed him slowly, inexorably toward the sound, parallel with the beach, toward the bloodied deer and John Stone's body, the silent outboard a dead weight on the transom. Hathaway scooted into

the bow and readied the anchor, uncoiling the line from the overturned bait buckets. When he reached a spot close to where he wanted to be, he dropped the steel hook over the deck plate. The line slipped through his hands, a rooster tail of rainwater fanning his face, and stopped when the anchor hit the bottom. Hathaway jerked the line to set the anchor, gave it some slack, and tied it off to a cleat.

Still the fawn bleated. Its cries curled with the night and carried on the wind like burrs, clinging to the legs of Hathaway's pants and the sleeves of his jacket, heavy with rain, digging sharply into his skin.

"Get over it!" he yelled, cupping his hands around his mouth and facing the shore. "She's gone, and she's not coming back. Can't you see that? You're on your own. And if you stick around, you're going to get yourself eaten. *Damn.*"

How could nature have failed so blatantly? The fawn couldn't survive the night. It wasn't ready to be alone, unprepared to face the world. The world was a rough place. Especially Alaska.

The sky had turned pitch black al-

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ready, and it was still only early evening. He had a long night ahead of him. There was a handheld marine band VHF on Stone's belt. He'd wait until daylight and see if he could get to it. Maybe tomorrow someone would come from the logging camp in a boat, watching the beaches for deer, or a helicopter would pass overhead and he'd shoot to get the pilot's attention.

He thought of Abigail, wondered what she was doing. He pictured her at the coffee shop reading Virginia Woolf, her lips sweet with tea; or watching the window for headlights in the driveway that meant he hadn't gone through with it. The image of her brought a bitterness to his mouth, a taste of bile that surprised him. Was that a possibility she'd even entertained? That he might fail? Maybe she'd already driven into town to the police station to report her husband and his deckhand overdue from a hunting trip, her face revealing nothing, her eyes the gray of his rifle barrel, discouraging second thoughts.

On shore the fawn bayed into the darkness, steady as the rain. It reminded

Hathaway of a beagle he'd had as a child, an incessant barker his mother had banished to a chain in the backyard. The punishment only exacerbated the crime, and the barking continued around the clock. It carried for what seemed like miles through the flat treeless neighborhood. Neighbors called. The police showed up a couple of times. One day he'd come home from school and the dog was gone. His parents never mentioned it. He never asked.

From his drybag he pulled a headlamp, yellow plastic with an elastic headband, and slipped it over his wet hat. The beam barely reached the shore. He couldn't make out any shape from the shadows, and didn't want to get any closer than he already was. He'd have to wait until daylight. Seventeen hours away. This damn country.

Something glinted in the falloff of the halogen beam as he scanned the beach. He turned back, looking for it. A pair of eyes reflected green in the light. The fawn. Its bleating carried across the water and filled the night.

"You're pathetic!" he yelled. "You know that?"

Keeping the beam trained on the fawn, Hathaway felt for his rifle and lifted it to his shoulder, sighting the young deer in the scope. Even in the dim light from his headlamp, he could see it clearly enough. It stood on its spindly legs, mouth open, eyes wide. Hathaway braced a knee against the gunwale. He timed the patterned rocking of the boat.

He squeezed the trigger. The boat swayed. Rainwater ran from the rifle stock under his cuffs and down his arms. The sound of the gunshot rose upward through the trees and scattered resting birds into flight, ringing out along the face of the snow-covered mountain and into the darkness, echoing back from the other side of the bay, both slipping away from him and returning at the same time. ■

C. B. Bernard has lived many places, including Alaska. For the time being he roams the Maine woods and waters in company of a temperamental English springer spaniel named Shakes.



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