Crossing Frozen Places

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Crossing Frozen Places

A boy stood on the frozen bank of a river, his feet on a gray, snow-dusted rock. The wind whistled as it moved through the trees and the snow floated down from the gray sky and fell on the boy’s eyelashes. He smiled at his brother.

“Dare me to walk across the ice, Jasper.”

“Why do you want to?”

“Because. I’m gonna do it,” the boy said.

“Okay.”

“Dare me.”

“What?”

“C’mon Jasper, just dare me to do it.”

Jasper looked through the bare sticks and branches at their small country house. The river was a good twenty-minute walk but it took longer when they had to walk through the snow. It was getting darker now as the clouds moved like tectonic plates, shifting and grinding against each other, gashing holes in the sides and spilling snow out. The snowflakes grew as they clumped together and started falling harder.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea, Len,” he said.

“C’mon Jasper.”

“No, I think we should get home soon. It’s snowing harder and it’s a long walk.”

“Just one walk across the river. Just one. Then we go home.”

“I don’t know,” Jasper said.

“Then we came all this way for nothing.”

“That’s okay.”

“No it’s not. Just let me walk across the river.”

Jasper paused.

“It’s not even very far. I’ll go across and come back.”

Jasper looked at the ice. It’s been cold for awhile and the river seemed solid. Probably frozen to the bottom.
“Please Jasper.”

“Sure, whatever. There and back.”

“Okay.”

“Then we go home.”

“Okay.”

“Just walk fast.”

“Okay.”

The boy hesitated for a moment then stepped off the rock and slipped a bit as he set both feet on the ice. He started walking, one timid foot after the other. He pulled his coat tight against his chest to keep the wind from getting beneath it. The older brother watched anxiously, rubbing himself to stay warm. The boy turned to look at his brother and waved as if to calm him by signaling he was okay. He turned and started walking faster. Jasper thought he heard the ice groan in warning. The boy reached the other side and grabbed an overhanging branch for stability. The snow curled and tumbled in front of the boy’s face.

“Okay, I’m coming back.”

We Forgot to Warn the Turkey

There are three ways to do it. For my family back on the seventies, it was significantly less-precise than it is today. The first was electric stunning, which was effective, but too expensive and too modern for my father, who preferred to pretend he was living in a time when farmers were actually integral members of society. The second was to take it into the field and use a long blade to cut the Achilles’ tendon, immobilizing the animal (a sitting cow, I suppose). This would render it easy to finish off with a couple semi-accurate blasts from a shotgun. But the easiest and most popular technique in the Midwest was to use an old school cattle gun. Carry a gas tank into the stall, connect a long hose to the tank, place the end of the hose between the eyes, turn on the gas, release the valve, watch the blood drip. Cake. When visiting home over Thanksgiving, Dad asked me at breakfast if I wanted to give it a go, “just for old-time’s sake.” I decided to oblige. I had done it so many times before, what’s one more?

I walked across the yard, watching the birds play in the snow that sat on the tree branches. It had been years since I’d last killed a cow. You may wonder whether such a thing is a common occurrence, or you may wonder