2010

We Forgot to Warn the Turkey

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“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
his middle and index fingers and leaned down and pulled the rewind hard again. The engine growled and then stopped. He tugged it harder; this time the engine turned over and roared to life and he could hear the blade spinning and imagined it looked something like a helicopter.

After cutting the front lawn, he moved to the back where he saw the boy kneeling on the ground, pointing what looked like a magnifying glass. The man released the bail, stopping the lawnmower, and walked over to the boy and bent his knees and put the cigarette stub between his lips, watching.

What are you doing? he asked the boy.

The boy didn’t look up from his glass. Trying to set this blade on fire, he said.

Is it working?

Not yet.

Why are you trying to set the lawn on fire?

Not the lawn, the boy said. Just this blade.

The boy looked up at the sun and moved his magnifying glass. The man could see the pinpoint of light on the green blade.

Here we go, the boy said. Now it will work.

A thin wisp of smoke curled from the blade. Then came the spark, then the flame that burned the blade in a few seconds, leaving only a charred piece of black ash. The boy laughed. The man stood up, his knees cracking. He looked at a tree that was quivering in the wind, then back at the boy kneeling on the ground. The boy grabbed his magnifying glass and ran through the white fence, through the courtyard and into his house. The man pinched his cigarette and breathed out a puff of gray smoke. The father came out of the same door, a confused look on his face. The man rubbed his chin and walked over to the fence. The father said he was sorry, that he didn’t know his son was in his yard. The man just shook his head and told the father it wasn’t a big deal, that boys will be boys. The father said that if the boy came into his yard again, just tell him to go home. I’ll do that, said the man. The father nodded and walked back inside.

The man scratched his nose with his dirt-caked fingernails and massaged the back of his shoulder. Then he glanced into his neighbor’s house and flicked the cigarette across the fence and walked back to his lawnmower.