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Only the fourth day the snow stopped coming down and the skiers complained it was too much of a good thing. Forty inches of powder dumped on ungroomed slopes made it dangerous, avalanches were coming down, already. Andrew Lindquist-Johanson just arrived on Homeless Man Ridge, but he did not worry since high school seniors do not worry. He picked the spot because he heard the story of Homeless Man and wanted to see the place. He decided to meet Mark there right after the lunch.

“This is the place I told you about, Mark. The story about that homeless guy.” Andy said. Mark knew one of the versions, too. “Cool” he said.

Everybody had a little variation on the tale and as it is with cabernet sauvignon, the flavors of the tale became more complex and interesting with time.

(Version one: the simple truth was that one day in spring, a few years ago, skiers alerted ski patrol to a man in baseball cap and jacket trotting up the mountain in deep snow, high on the mountain, quite far from the lift, off the tracks.

Patrollers found the tracks, followed them for couple of hours, lost them in the open, where blowing snow covered them. They called rescue helicopter, which scanned the slope and located a man sitting on snow on the top of the side ridge. The creature moved, still obviously alive. The rescuers in the helicopter extracted the man, which was not easy, since he did not cooperate being snow-blind. They flew him down to Big Sky and then by ambulance to Bozeman, to the hospital. As the story goes everybody gathered in amazement around the survivor in sneakers without socks, tweed jacket torn on the back, towel around his neck and a baseball cap.

After his few frostbites were attended to, analgesics administered for the painfully damaged corneas, he was found in a good shape for surviving the impossible. Then all the nurses of Bozeman came to spoil him, combed his few hairs, applied creams to his face, brought tons of treats, even sneaked a few cold Silver Bullets from Coors Brewing Company, just to hear his story. The old man used to own several companies - but did not know how many. He used to have a family but can't remember having children. He did not remember how he lost all

and everything in his life, all was a fog. Except a face, he told the nurses. Face of Naomi he met skiing on the side ridge of Lone Mountain. He always knew exactly where, because he could see her face through the mist which clinged on everything else. He told the nurses that he went to the mountain because she would be there waiting. Of that he was sure. He was unhappy now and cried at night. He could not see her, he mourned, because he was snow blind – and some men took him away from there.)

Andy did not wait long for his pal. Mark bombed down the slope and stopped just a couple of feet from him, stopping in a fraction of second, as if he was a rivet pounded into the ground with one blow. He sprayed Andy with snow, took his goggles off. Andy brushed snow from his face and faked a right uppercut at Mark's chin.

"Sickbird!" He said.

They looked at each other and laughed like madmen. Andy and Mark started their (semblance of) friendship with lightning speed because they both communicated in simple sentences, sometimes with word's meaning hidden even to scholars in linguistics, sometimes with just grunts and hand signs. They understood each other well, since they have no ambitions in life, save getting layed, plural. In school they both were in the lower than fiftieth percent in social studies, because they had their own social studies. The boys loved dogs and all animals – which puts them to the category of good people with whom one would not mind being a castaway on deserted island. When it came to their motor skills on snow covered ground they were exceptional; their sense of snow, coded by their autosomal chromosomes, allowed them to perform feats for which they should share the Nobel prize for physics.

"So this is the place of the homeless guy?" Mark said.

"Yap, uh." Andy.

"Cool" Mark.

"Radical – let's do it," Andy pointed down - and then one by one they dove over the snow lip down the steep run with hottrodders' exuberance. The turns performed neared perfection, smooth, skis obeying in perfect parallel made them feel very good.

They were good skiers, they mastered all the white-knuckle shoots, all the black diamond runs like Kilifer and Calamity Jane, even Hangman and Lobo and Devil's Crotch, with those 35 degree shots, which keep the yahoos away. They enjoyed the easy runs on the freshly groomed corduroy, too, where on the pillow lines they could show off

three sixties, and those smooth like honey stem christies, with flawless elegance of which even Nureyev would approve, but could not improve. And when nobody was around to judge imperfections that was time for crossovers, worm turns and outriggers. There was always the danger of being humiliated by being grabbed by “snow snakes” or devoured by “mogul rats” – in plain language: wipe-outs.

As the afternoon was getting older, as the repertoire of fancy skiing was being exhausted, Andy’s eyes were returning to the peak of Lone Mountain more often. It was reflecting the setting sun in color unnatural, salmon pink and in some places with a blue tint, all sprinkled by blinding deBoers diamonds, Swarovski glitter. It has been a forbidden place for Andy because of the very deep snow, sometimes powder, other time heavy firn, and threat of avalanche. Dangerous and therefore tempting.

The boys were down at the Poma lift station. Mark had to go home. Andy said: “Be cool. I’m gonna go up the Mountain... Just have to.”

“They will not let you on the chair lift up there, Andy, you’re too small. You’re a nut case... Good luck, though!

“Well, if I make it, Mark, we’ll do Gas Chambers, tomorrow,” Andy hollered.

Andrew Lindquist-Johanson got on the Poma gondola, first stage of his ascent to the Bowl. He tried to assure himself, that if it would be too difficult, he can always traverse, zig-zag it down. The sun was getting low. Andy was scared and it was not the fear which induces a pleasurable feeling – but the more common one, the one which knots the stomach and lumps the throat (so he had a very secret hope: the chairlift to the top might be closed; he kept this secret even from himself.)

He rechecked the buckles on his boots and the binding on his new parabolic rockered Rossignoles with steel edges so sharp skier shave with them. At the top station the Poma gondola jerked, squeaked and stopped. Andy stood outside just few steps from the chair-lift going to the top. Blinking his eyes in the sunshine, he put on his orange goggles, kicked into his Solomon bindings and slid to the chairlift. There was nobody else going up. Andy got on the double chair, when attendant said “hurry up, you are the last one.” Then attendant woke up from his daydream and called “where are you going, boy,” when Andy was in the air already.

The top of Lone Mountain was very close and looked different than from the valley. The flag of flying snow decorated the rocky peak; it changed direction and size every moment. Both sides of the disc-like Bowl were marked by avalanche tracks, the Bowl was smooth. Powder stuffed acres in front of him, and on it there were no powder hounds to be seen. I'll be alone, all right, Andy whispered. Time was short.

He rechecked his equipment and started the descent by a long traverse several hundred feet, then turned down the hill. It was not easy, he almost lost balance on one wind lip. He did not lean back enough and the tension forced him to angle too much into the hill, his feet quite apart. He was not relaxed, fear does that, he had to carve carefully. He corrected, and after another turn felt he might not die. He was getting more control of the deep powder; while knowing he is no powder king, he felt he was starting to understand the snow. He stopped to rest his legs, which were trembling with tension. He made it about half way down – a reason for optimism, a beautiful feeling of achievement, for “progression”. He looked around.

There were unexpected ski tracks underneath him; he followed their direction and was amazed. The horizontal tracks ended before reaching the edge of the Bowl. The tracks just did not continue – it was not logical, the skier who made the tracks could not have evaporated into the air, couldn't fly away. Andy investigated the mystery and at the end of the track he found a man. The man was painted snow-white, without a cap, his hair matted by crystals, laying on his side, buried from the waist down, one ski sticking from the snow in an odd angle. He was greeting Andy by mantra “my friend, my friend, my friend.” The man was confused but, it seemed, not in a true shock, yet. His eyes were bulging out, but his nose and ears still not frozen white. He might have been about fifty.

“ I'll get you outa here, worry none, you'll be OK”. Andy packed snow into a platform, took off one ski and started digging with it. He dug like one possessed, he did not want to think about the sun setting. Beyond anything he did not want to think. He took off his parka sweating. Soon one leg with a ski was free, then the other one, then he asked the man to move his legs, and the man did so, and there was no obvious bone fracture, ankles not sprained. Andy thought that if he would not have found the man, the ski patrol who will find him tomorrow, or day after, would be surprised by the corpse so intact, in

such good shape. The man rotated out of the hole, Andy helped him to stand supported by ski poles.

“My friend... you are one hundred percent!” The survivor repeated this complete sentence couple of times. Andy smiled. At that moment he knew he was the happiest human in the whole wide world. Hundred percent! (It stayed with him all his life.)

Andy led the way down, making a wide track packed for the man to follow, without falling even once. It took three traverses to the Poma station. The place was deserted already, but the red emergency telephone on one of the pillars worked and after some explaining to the patrol folks down in Big Sky, the lift was restarted and four experienced ski patrollers arrived with a stretcher and Hudson Bay Company woolen blankets in which to wrap the now shivering man. They gave him hot rehydration fluid and assurances. On the way down in the gondola the man appeared better, he was escaping the calm creeping state of deadly hypothermia. All of the patrolmen slapped Andy’s back, silently.

At the down station the ambulance was already waiting for them, the transfer of the stretcher was perfectly professional. The saved man tried to lift himself up. His eyeballs were retracted now with the feeling of safety, and he gave Andy one hooded look and shook his head as if in wonder. He raised his voice saying: “You are hundred percent, son. One hundred percent!” Then the stretcher disappeared into the technological marvels of an emergency ambulance.

Andy flew away on the wings of total, elated happiness, not knowing yet that the wings will change into appendages of Ikarus, when he would approach his father.

Andy, his father Johanson, and Marcela rented two rooms on the ground floor of a hotel, facing the pool. Marcela was his father’s third wife, she has been his mistress for only few month before they signed the prenuptial agreement. She was nice to Andy, but watched him all the time and everywhere. She did not talk much, just watched.

“Marcela here, she was worried. It is dark, already.” Father raised his voice. “You can not think only about yourself, you know. Just look at the clock!” He pointed at the alarm clock..

“But dad, I saved a man’s life.... I went...” Father interrupted, mumbling “yeah, sure”, took pack of cigarettes and went to smoke in the hallway.

Andy stood there for a while, Marcela watched. He took off his ski clothes and put on swimming trunks. Outside he imitated vomiter’s barfing, retching sounds, pronounced unprintable words. The heated, lighted outdoor swimming pool was covered by vapors like those Yellowstone hot springs, scary a little, maybe, but inviting by the familiar odor of chlorine. Andy slid under the water, stayed at the bottom for twenty seconds motionless, emerged with a happy face. He was not alone. Man of about fifty-some years was standing near, water up to his waist.

“Good evening, Sir”.

His face was not handsome – but interesting. Something magnetic in his expression, a half hidden boyish lovability, strange eyes...maybe a shy grin? His hair was dyed, good breasts above the belly. Right at the first glance Andy felt certain he knew the man. They exchanged few sentences, the man asked about those moving fireflies on the mountain and Andy explained that these are lights of gigantic Snoocats, grooming the runs for tomorrow. He did not dare to ask where the man comes from, he suspected he might be father of one of his schoolmates, or he might be one of those who walk his dog by the house in Golden Valley. It was embarrassing not to know. And there was this southern drawl, soft, with molasses in it, which confused Andy, too. The boy and the man talked for a while, submerged themselves and emerged periodically. He was a pleasant person, Andy thought, and after a while said: “Good night, have a very nice skiing tomorrow, maybe I’ll see you on the hill.”

He felt tired after the eventful day. He climbed out from the pool and when he was with his back to the man it hit him – he imagined the pool-man in a Texan’s cowboy hat, string tie, that famous face – he must be J.R., the actor from TV series “Dallas”, yes, J.R. Ewing! Andy was absolutely sure. He turned around, approached the pool. J.R. was about to leave.

“Sir, excuse me, please, but are you J.R. from “Dallas”? He grinned nervously. The man in the swimming pool was silent for a while – and then he confirmed his identity by the world famous smirk, scheming, seemingly shy, but villainous grin, which was hated-loved by multimillions of “Dallas” watchers, which had induced schadenfreude in multitudes just imagining J.R.’s demise.

“You betch your sweet bippy, mi amigo,” the actor said and, amused, he grinned again.

Andy said wow, thanked, waved and ran.

“ Marcelita, guess what! I just talked to J.R., from Dallas!”

“What?” She rolled up her Botoxed upper lip. “ Larry Hagman? You did not!”

“I did. In the swimming pool.”

“No, you did’t”

“Yeah, I did.”

“Naa, you didn’t.”

“Yeah, I did.”

“Naa, you did not. No way.”

Father joined in, shaking his head from side to side, mumbled “you’re talking rot, cut it out,” then slouched on the sofa, opened his iPad and disappeared into it for the night. Andy looked at the ceiling, howled not unlike a wolf (*Canis lupus*) just less timber to it, put his down-filled parka over his still wet torso and barefoot sauntered out. Strangely, he walked slowly as if victorious? J.R. was gone, but a half moon arrived, bright, cold, unsmiling, in a sky powdered by stars uncovered in zillions in this high altitude. Andy found the Big Bear constellation and then Polaris – so South is to the right.

If learned psychologists and neurologists would examine boy’s frontal cingulate and amygdala they would not be able to detect any activity indicating anger, anxiety, or other negative emotions – they would find only a smiling brain. Because the Hundred Percent Young Man had a plan, the Excellent Plan.

He had studied the map of North America, measured distances to find a place, which would be the farthest, most distant from his family, preferably South. Clearly it was Key West, in the Florida Keys. Studying Google Earth and enlarging the images he found that at the end of South Street, there was a brightly painted, concrete monument announcing The Southernmost Point of Continental United States of America (and in smaller letters: 90 miles to Cuba). Next to this monument stretched the Most Southern Beach.

And on this beach, wiggling his toes in warm, blowtorch blue Caribbean, with a can of Key West Sunset Ale in his hand, right next to that southernmost monumental phallus the size of Cadillac, the new wonderful life of one hundred percent of Andrew Lindquist-Johanson would begin.

Jarda Cervenka