

Buck Hale-Part 2-The Canyon

The climb down into the canyon was never easy. Even for a young man of, say, twenty-five it would have been tricky. For Buck, and his sixty eight years, there was no pretense of bravado. He picked each step with care mindful that one misstep would quickly and easily send him plunging to his death. And that death, if not instantaneous, would be a long, bitter and painful exit. Dying alone with infection from broken bones was not Buck's idea of a vacation well spent.

No, Buck was precise during his descent. Once at the bottom he found himself in his much loved and singular, if not rugged, paradise. There was only one thing to do now. He quickly shed his clothes and standing, as he stated it, "With ass, dingle and balls in the wind!" plunged into the pool formed by the cascade. His "dingle" instinctively cried "holy shit" and fled into shrinkage as the cold water immersed it and Buck. Even before he surfaced there was a smile of abandonment on his face. The complete extraction of civilization pulled out of him like a tumor. The extraction for which he had so long craved. Heaven on Earth? He wasn't sure that it was but it was certainly the next best thing. Whatever "it" was "it" was right. There was no wrinkle of wrongness in this. Nope, not an iota of evil or awkwardness or restriction. Freedom. Plain: and simple.

For nearly an hour Buck swam, dived and splashed like a three year old. When he dove he spotted Rainbow Trout gently fanning the sandy, rocky bottom as pyrite glinted in the sun's rays back to the sky. When he surfaced he would yell at the top of his lungs and listen to the echoes fading in ever more silent repetition; like a passing freight train disappearing in the distance. This was home. This was surcease. This was natural exhilaration as God meant it to be when He created us. At least, that's how Buck saw it.

Eventually, he got out and grabbed his bar of biodegradable soap from his backpack and bathed. Even with biodegradable soap he was cognizant not to over-do the lather. It didn't sit right with him watching the suds float down and away from him. Just enough soap to rid the smell of three days hiking and then he laid out on a rock in the sun to dry.

When he had first arrived in the forest he had not known what to bring along. so, of course, he had brought everything he could think of including a Coleman cooler and lantern. Freeze dried food of every variety and three novels to wile away the time. Before long it became quite apparent that, in the forest, there was little time to wile nor was it practical to have a lantern or cooler or even three novels. It wasn't a month before he knew that paring down his supplies was a necessity. Almost instantaneously his pack shrunk for 55 pounds to 40 pounds. That left him grinning and shaking his head and also made life a bit more bearable and hiking nearly a breeze. Three weeks in he had become a backpacker and the heaviest thing in his pack was his old Svea 123 stove. The Svea was a godsend of practicality. A little self-contained brass cylinder about 4 inches round and 6 or 7 inches high which took white gas; carried in two pint containers. He had even managed to keep the pin to clean the orifice along with the handle and cup. The complete stove weighed less than a pound but sounded like an espresso machine when fired up. It's staccato roar when lit was comforting and reassuring as tea, water or coffee (freeze dried) was brought to the boil. To Buck this little invention was a thing of inestimable beauty of both design and function. Besides which, there were no fuel canisters to carry and, worse, to have to haul around empty until they could be properly disposed of.

A peculiarity of persona was his knife. He wanted a folding hunter with a case but, because of said peculiarity, decided on a Schrade rather than the one which carried his first name. He wasn't sure why this was but it had worked out well if not

a bit of an odd reasoning. He didn't want to be mistaken, if found dead years later, for the inventor of said blade. It made little sense and Buck knew this but went with it anyway.

The afternoon was getting on as Buck noticed the sun dip behind the canyon wall, His familiarity with time and no watch told him that it was right around 3:30 in the afternoon. Time to set up camp, gather firewood for the evening and see what he was going to have for dinner. Over the past few months he had been running low on freeze dried food and had made the decision to try polenta as part of his diet. Watercress, Sierra style, was his main vegetable and he found it almost everywhere on the river's more quiet eddies.

Once the fire was lit and burning nicely he warmed himself, cooked his polenta with a touch of cinnamon and pinch of salt while chewing on water cress and drinking Darjeeling tea. It was delightfully quiet and still once the Svea was shut off with the first stars peeking through just above his head.

He had pulled up a log carried here by the last winter's storms and laid his head against it just looking up at the stars as they glimmered on and drifted off into thought. The quiet was absorptive, calming and peaceful as only being in the forest can cause them to be