

DANIEL POITRAS

The Mad Trapper

When I think of my father,
He was a large musky man
Unshaven and reeking of death.
Sweat drenched black hair
Concealed by those various trucker caps

I remember him talking with half smile, half laughter
About legendary hunting trips and carnivorous semitrucks.
Coldest day of winter and treading thin ice.
That bull elk half a mile, two miles, four miles away;
Still—steady surgeon hands and telescopic eyes bringing it down
Snow up to the neck, having to gut, skin, and pack in record time.

I think of those hands—massive and brown like gorilla paws.
Wrenching open rusted death traps like Hercules battling the lion.
Animal carcasses dangling ten at a time from his iron grip.
Beating and strangling life away from those not already frozen dead
Was it mercy or necessity.

I picture my father as a machine never needing rest nor reassurance.
Five a.m. wake-ups and then six a.m. wakes up at the restaurant.
Scarfig down standard trucker breakfast specials then
Waiting in silence.
Waiting for me to finish my eggs and drink my chocolate milk
Maybe conversation—silence instead.
My meal is done and now we have to leave.
A bad joke to tease the cashier and we're off again.

I stare at the window passing trees and old roads curious and lost.
My father fastened to the steering wheel mumbling words and lyrics
To old worn tapes clicking, dropping in tune cackling and bang
Cutting off Willie and Charlie mid-prayer for the lovers.

Dense enormous trees and the odd lonely pumpjack moaning and wailing.
I tried to keep up with him, falling into his snow prints cold and frustrated.
Returning with more carcasses and a stone cold look of determination.
I turn to make it to the old Dodge pick up and he would pass me again.

When I grew older I could keep up with him but I chose not to.
Shaky with a gun and cursed with bad eyesight I never dropped an elk.
His hair had gone from black to silver still hidden by truck-stop hats,

Even though they were advertised as “one-size-fits-all,”
His hats never fit nor looked right on me.
I sometimes travel with him to his trapline, still curious and lost.

Less trees and more wailing pumpjacks now.
His small bruised, broken hands clutching at carcasses three at a time.

Returning to his new Dodge truck that breaks down on a weekly basis,
I watch him trying to catch his breath and ask if he’s all right.
I would offer to check the next couple of traps
If I knew how to trap or hunt or fish like my dad.
We sit in that truck in silence, staring at the dirt road ahead,
Listening to him mumble words and lyrics.

Now I see him a broken defeated mad trapper,
Still treading thin ice and coldest days of winter at sixty.
He pays the small bush taxes with a season of useless furs
Refusing to rent or sell his bundle of sticks.
Sometimes he’ll travel there in the “off” season for the sights,
Add more rotting lumber to his lopsided, shanty cabin.

If I think about how he lives his life or what he does
I'll convince myself he has gone completely crazy
And I should put him in a "proper" home.
My dad would have none of it, sooner die out there
Frozen to those traps like his pelts waiting to be found.

I doubt I could do it, even if he asked.
He's the last of his kind
A crazy Canuck
Truly a mad trapper.