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Mountain Men

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Mountain Men

Abstract

This is a piece of fiction about love, drugs, death, and giants in no particular order. Todd and Heather, a young couple a year or two out of college, are camping in the woods and smoking a good deal of weed when the mountain they've pitched their tent on stands up and begins laying waste to the countryside. While the stoners are trapped on the body of the colossus and forced to work through some relationship issues and possible head trauma, an elderly widower and his dog on the forest floor have their home remodeled by a giant's foot.

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Comments

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James O. Lincoln

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Stephen Crane Fiction Prize

Mountain Men

At this point, I was almost certain we were on the thing's dick. Or at least where the dick meets the rest of the "crotch" region. There's probably a real word for it but at the time I had other things to think about, like, "Does this mean that these trees are pubes?" I'd always been one to ask the hard questions. I had gotten familiar enough with the way the now man shaped mountain moved that I was able to release my death grip on the now horizontal tree trunk jutting out from the ponderously swaying cliff face and chance climbing further out. Peering over the edge, thighs clenching the trunk with enough force to crush a cantaloupe, I saw a massive column of mossy stone swinging hypnotically back and forth, making a thunderous cracking sound every time it collided with the upper thighs. Forearms the size of buildings swayed into view on either side of me every minute or so. I could barely see its feet through the mist, which was fine. I didn't really want to see the people that were almost certainly being flattened like little meat pancakes. What would that feel like, being squished? I was in the middle of imagining all my guts spewing out of my head when a familiar voice called out from behind me.

"Todd! Jesus fucking Christ, can you please just come back? I don't like this, I felt better up on the rock! This was a shitty idea!" The voice of reason filtering into my pot rattled head was Heather, my girlfriend of four years. This was a title I was, for whatever reason, still uncomfortable using since I'd been in a state of utter bafflement since the day I told her I had "romance feelings" for her and she didn't punch me until I died. Today was not our anniversary, or her birthday, or even Arbor Day. It was a better than average summer morning and our

schedule included camping out at the only scenic view in central Pennsylvania and smoking a little bit more weed than there was in the world. Then the mountains got up and started walking away. We had ruled out a while ago the possibility that what we were smoking was laced with anything. Whatever section of Appalachia we had camped ourselves on had just sat straight up with us on it. Cuts, bruises, and our seemingly inevitable deaths aside, no one could deny the quality of the view... provided you didn't look directly down.

"I THINK WE'RE ON ITS CROTCH," I shouted back, louder than I needed to, "THIS THING'S GOT A BABY WEINER! YOU KNOW... RELATIVELY SPEAKING!"

"TODD!" She screamed back at me.

"Okay, fine, I'm coming back. It's really not that bad out here, you really get into the rhythm of it and shit." I said this with a confidence not at all mirrored by the cautious shimmy I used to reach Heather at the now upturned cliff face. She always looked so much more fashionable than me, even covered in dirt, twigs tangled in her fantastically curly hair, blood starting to soak through the rushed bandage job we did for her head. It was almost as if she had meant to look that way. Anyone looking upward would see our tent still staked to the ground, now sideways. I was pretty proud of that. After I clambered up the section of the cliff we had earlier declared as "safe enough, fuck it," sat down next to her, I was welcomed back with a punch in the arm. "You're such a fucking spaz," she reminded me, resting her head on my shoulder. Warmth spread through me, which I soon realized was her blood soaking through my shirt.

"Do you want me to change that bandage?" I asked.

"Probably."

"I think I have some of that hydrogen peroxide shit in the car, you want me to get that?"

“You mean the car we parked on the side of the road.” She glanced up at me, one eyebrow raised. I looked up above us to where the road most likely was now and wondered who must have died to let me graduate high school.

“Yup,” she responded to my silence, then sat up and started looking through her backpack. She pulled out a yellow shirt of hers and handed it to me. “Just put some pressure on the cut, that’s what you’re supposed to do.” Still thinking about the car, I did what she said. It was such a remarkably average car and I loved it; it had all my Credence tapes in it. In my life so far, I’d habitually avoided getting into fads or having opinions on pop culture even if it meant fading into relative obscurity in middle school. I don’t think I’ve ever touched a Pokémon card. I especially never got seriously into cars because nothing is worse than talking about cars with other people who are super into cars. The last time I talked cars with a group of guys, I revealed that my car had automatic transmission and I was immediately informed that I suck big gay cock. I had not known that previously.

With this train of thought going on the way it was, I didn’t notice the whole mass of the earth gradually swaying backwards, so I was not at all ready for the inevitable crash forward. When it came I grabbed a root in one hand and Heather in the other with remarkable reaction time considering the amount of weed I’d been smoking. There was the loudest boom I had ever felt and a high-pitched squeak; it might have been Heather, or most likely me but that wasn’t the noise I cared about. The noise I cared about was the jovial sound of The Credence Clearwater Revival growing closer and the sound of something heavy hitting every tree on the way down.

George woke up with part of a mountain in his bed where his wife used to sleep. At a younger age he might have leapt out of the bed in shock but the years beating on his mind and

body had worn away any such self-preservation reflexes as well as the physical capacity to leap at all. His dog was barking at the mountain, the way dogs do with any intruder. The fact that the intruder in question was roughly a mile high, made of granite, and had just obliterated half of the house did not seem to faze her at all. George creaked as he rolled out of his formerly queen-sized bed. Picking up his glasses off the end table and wiping away the plaster dust that had also coated the entirety of the remaining bedroom, he turned to his dog, who seemed confident the wall of stone would surrender in no time to her merciless verbal assault. George grumbled at the dog to quiet down but figured it was best that they don't both waste their voices. He never could get the dog to stop barking. That had always been Mallory's thing.

He shuffled over to his closet and got dressed slowly but deliberately. He was not going to let this potential apocalypse rush him, not at his age. After covering his balding head with the fishermen's cap Mallory had always hated, he turned back to his bed. Right down the middle, his wife's half of the bed was flattened completely under the mountain. George smiled slightly. No one had of course slept in that half of the bed for a few years now and George now felt justified in never sleeping there himself. Hobbling over to the door, he grabbed his cane and returned to the rock wall to give it a prod. The dog started barking louder. Just as he turned around to scold the dog a second time he felt movement behind him. The mountain had taken a step. Harsh morning light and a little debris flooded the room like water crashing through a burst dam. George shielded his eyes, struggling to see what was moving the mass of stone above his head.

It looked and moved like a man, not a perfect representation though. Whatever had made it had an idea of what a man was but didn't quite have all the details ironed out. The mountain man was still a silhouette to George's eyes, which were still adjusting to light being let in by the new bay window in his room. When the full figure of this colossal beast came into sight, George

could only marvel at the second most beautiful sight he'd seen in his life. The enormity of the thing was all that occupied his mind. The house-sized boulder that had lodged itself in his bedroom was revealed to be the smallest toe on what he could only assume was the foot of this towering stone giant. George could hear distant cracks echoing through the valley as the trunks of trees shed from the giant's back splintered against the forest floor and he felt a chill as its figure briefly blocked out the light of the sun. He could feel the corners of his mouth instinctively trying to form into a smile. The feeling that swept over this old man who had thought he'd already seen every beautiful sight the earth had to offer him only made what he saw in the corner of his eye that much worse.

It was another man, noticeably smaller, hanging from the big oak tree outside. George maneuvered his way through the rubble of his house to get a closer look and felt his stomach get heavier with each step. His neighbor, Russell had been an odd sort of man, but the only other person who lived within a mile and the only person who George could honestly call a friend these days. He'd even taken George hunting once, a few years ago. He was hanging from his neck, eyes bulging, a stool kicked out from under him. George's focus was drawn down to a cardboard sign. Written on the sign in black sharpie was, "I'd rather not." An arrow on the sign pointed up to a second noose right next to Russell. Next to the arrow it read, "For George." George sighed to himself and went back into his half house; one part of him appreciated the offer but the other part was sick to the stomach. George disappeared around a corner and returned a few minutes later with a knife and a shovel, dog following at his heels. Giants might be walking the earth but there were still things people had to do.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck, Todd, it's definitely broken."

“I guess we’ll just have to cut it off.”

“I’m being serious! Jesus fucking Christ!”

“Chop!” I made a motion with my hand, “and it’s done. It’ll be like those old civil war hospitals. Didn’t you say you wanted to go to a reenactment someday? Besides, I got like, nine more.” My ring finger was a very vibrant shade of purple, and bent at a slight angle. Heather was digging through what I had begun to believe was a magical endless bag all while reminding me that us dying on this colossus was a very real possibility and that having an injured hand was not going to make the climb down any easier. I’d broken my finger keeping Heather and myself from flying over the edge when the colossus lurched forward. The bloody t-shirt we’d been using for her head injury was the only casualty of the incident, lost in the forest below us somewhere. I was playing it cool and keeping all the new and exciting swear words I’d been inventing over the past few minutes to myself. That last thing I needed to do was give Heather a real reason to worry about me; she already had plenty of those. Part of me started to tune her voice out. Not in a disrespectful way at all. I thought it was absolutely amazing that she had the focus to worry about my broken finger in the midst of this geological clusterfuck.

A figure had begun to appear over the horizon, miles away from us, off to the right of our giant. At first I thought the mountain man we were on had walked far enough that we were at another mountain but it dawned on me that the second mountain was moving too. I probably should have picked up on that sooner since the shape in the distance had a head. A small part of the forest sat on each of its shoulders, probably filled with squirrels and deer losing their goddamned minds. It swayed lazily as it walked, each limb must have weighed roughly a few metric fucktons. I couldn’t tell if the thing was going anywhere. It looked as though it was just wandering around the same way our colossus was or the way I would on a Sunday morning, too

hungover to think and puzzling over exactly what pants were until Heather woke up and reminded me how to be a human being.

“... and what I’m trying to get here really, is that I don’t want you to die of gangrene, is that a crazy thing to want?” Heather’s voice pulled me back into the world, as was her unique power. She continued, “And on top of all that you’re going to get all loopy and truthful and tell me that I’m a bitch and that you’ve been sleeping around or something and I don’t really think I can handle that right now.”

“Babe, you’ve seen me with women, you know that’s never happening.”

We sat in silence a moment watching the horizon rock back and forth with each movement of the mountain man. I scratched at the stone surface with a small rock.

“Do you think the stone is its skin or is it more like its armor? Maybe there’s some big fleshy thing inside.” I pondered out loud.

“Not now, Todd.”

I looked up at my car, four trees above us, impaled through the windshield on a massive oak branch. The frame was bent nearly in half, every window was broken, and one of the wheels had come off, and nearly taking me out when the thing hit the tree. Despite all that, the cassette player somehow survived and had been providing the soundtrack for our harrowing tale of apocalyptic survival. So far we’d heard *Bad Moon Rising* eight times in a row, so saying the tape player survived might have been a bit of an overstatement. The detail of the wreck I was most interested in was hanging off of the open passenger side door. I’d had that backpack since my sophomore year of high school. We’d been through thick and thin and all that. Chet Williams took a shit in that backpack senior year and that wasn’t enough to make me throw the thing away. By the end of college it was probably more duct tape than fabric but I like to think that

meant it's even sturdier than when we started. If you were to ask Heather, she'd tell you that I have a hard time letting go. One of us was right.

“Hey toots, I'm thinking I should climb up to my bag. I've got the first aid kit in there. We can get your head all fixed up, have a Kashi bar, and look into finding a way off this motherfucker... Heather?” Heather was slumped against the rock. She had dozed off. I'd always been told that people with head injuries shouldn't do that.

“Rackufrackums”

The new and exciting swear words needs some work.

The doorbell had rung about four times before George was able to answer. This meant the dog was about ready to chew through the doorframe to greet whomever was on the other side. George barked back at the dog to shut up as he shuffled as fast as he could. He did not see himself ever getting used to the cane but doctors will be doctors and arthritis in the knees is still arthritis in the knees. George opened the door only to be greeted by Russell's beard. It wasn't the largest beard in the world or particularly distinctive looking but it stood out against the all camouflage outfit. A sack smelling of meat and salt was immediately presented to George. The Dog was ecstatic.

“Uh, hey there neighbor, I made you some venison jerky,” Russell's face screwed up with thought momentarily, “that's deer meat... just incase you didn't know... well of course you know what-”

“Hey there Russell,” George spoke up, not sure how long he was willing to allow the poor man to suffer. “That was real kind of you. You want to come in?”

“Uh no, I mean, I’d rather not. I don’t want to trouble you none. I just thought I’d come and extend my condolences, Mallory... she was a great woman. I was real sorry to hear about what happened so I thought I’d, uh...”

“Just come in, Russ.” George turned down the hallway, leaving Russell no choice but to follow. Russell had already been living in the house next door by the time George and his wife had moved to this secluded tract of land. The houses had belonged to a very rural, family owned bed and breakfast, and before that had been a pump house from the time an oil line ran through that part of the state. Neither George nor Mallory had much in the way of close family as she had wanted to spend retirement writing and getting more in touch with nature rather than the cribbage board at the old folks home. As she had always put it, “Just because Thoreau did it first doesn’t mean I can’t write about ponds too.” Russell was the definition of a mountain man. As far as either George or Mallory had been able to tell, he’d lived there alone for a while. He had a hard time showing it but Mallory had always believed Russell was glad to have the company. George was happy with the lifetime supply of venison jerky their friendship provided him with.

With great difficulty, George managed to convince Russell to have a cup of coffee. Russell suggested, after a great deal of awkward dodging around the topic of mortality, that the two of them go hunting. George figured he didn’t really have much going on.

The door to Russell’s cabin creaked open. George stepped out of the threshold, cane in one hand, and dog leash in another. Strapped across his back was one of Russell’s hunting rifles. It had parts to it that were made of wood, and George, who knew very little about guns other than where to point them, took this as a sign that it was a more reliable weapon. George also had very little idea of why he had taken the gun. The colossus, which had made it a solid quarter mile

since George started ransacking the neighboring house, did not seem to be the type of creature that bullets could bother, let alone kill. Regardless, George set off into the woods, following after the crater sized foot prints. The dog was excited to be going on a walk.

George listened as he walked. The valley was a cacophony of thunderous booming footsteps, intermittent echoes of gunshots, and the sirens of at least three different small towns, excitedly heralding the first excuse their mayors' had ever had to use these noisemakers. There was an eerie silence too. None of these sounds were alive. There were no birds calling or flapping, no squirrels leaping through the trees, no deer rustling in the brush. They had wisened up, George realized. The only living things for miles dumb enough to stick around were the people. "Hurry up, pooch." George jingled the leash as he tried to convince his dog that now was not the best time to acquaint herself with all these exciting new plants.

The dog did not follow as she had found a smell infinitely more interesting than days old deer urine. She found a bloody yellow shirt. George bent over with great difficulty and looked it over. It was a woman's shirt and the bloodstains were still wet. George felt stones land in his stomach. Using his cane, he pushed himself up off the ground. He fastened the dog's leash around his wrist and slung the rifle off of his back, only managing to get the strap caught on his coat twice. The only time he'd ever held a gun before was on the hunting trip he'd gone on with Russell. Despite all the prep and safety tips Russell had gone through with him, George had never gotten to fire the gun. Hunting was less like what he'd seen in the movies and looked a lot more like two cold men in a tree being disappointed. He still remembered how to load the rifle, and at present, that was about all he needed to know. George had decided to do something reckless, and the colossus seemed to notice that something on the ground had issue with it because it stopped and began to turn around. George had never fathomed hunting colossi before

but he was pretty certain it resembled a man and dog, in a forest, looking like they had no idea what they were doing.

I shook Heather a few times. The one first-aid course I took in high school never prepared me for this. Would slapping her wake her up? That was the only solution I could think of because it's what cartoons told me would work and while I would normally let that guide important life decisions like this, I still had some reservations about the hitting my girlfriend part. My quota for hitting ladies was zero, but her head wound was starting to look gross. The only proper first-aid kit we had was left in my backpack, hanging off the door of my former car. We really should have seen the colossi thing coming. I'd never been good at planning for trips.

“Hey toots, could you wake up now? I know that's not your favorite thing to do but if you're all concussed and shit... Look, I'm going to climb up and get the goods from my backpack. Don't die or do anything dumb like that.” I stood up and was about to attempt the climb, when I did what I thought was a smart thing and spun back and around and slapped Heather across the face. She jolted awake and punched me directly in the nose. This is why you should always watch cartoons.

“Todd? Why the fuck did you-” she started to ask what in the world had come over me but I was already back up, grinning like an idiot.

“Fuck me! You hit like a sexy fucking jackhammer, shit!” I dropped to my knees and kissed her. “Good job being alive,” I said, then took a run at the horizontal tree closest to us and lifted myself up onto the trunk.

“Todd?” Heather asked, rubbing her cheek. “Why'd you... where are you-?”

“I thought you were dying of falling asleep with a concussion, so I slapped the shit out of you to wake you up and I am more sorry than any person has ever been. You can beat me to death in a bit but right now I’m going to grab my backpack because that has a first-aid kit and other things and stuff.” The giant took a particularly heavy step but I was well on my way to gaining whatever the colossus equivalent of sea legs were. I ran along the trunk towards the exposed roots on the giant’s body and scrambled up them to the next tree. I could hear Heather yelling at me to come down before I fell to my death or something but I was on a roll. I’d already made it onto the second trunk. Heather was looking up at me now. She looked very disappointed in me, which I, for whatever reason, always found incredibly hot.

“Todd, I’m sorry I punched you! Is that what you wanted to hear? I’m sorry I fell asleep, I was just tired... and high, I didn’t mean to scare you!”

My broken finger, which I’d been ignoring, decided to remind me that it was still there and that this whole climbing business was not really its style. The pain was cold shooting up my arm. It’d been a few hours since this whole ordeal started and I’d finally sobered up, though this only made my hand hurt even more. I shimmied up across the thickest branch that pointed towards the third tree. It crisscrossed with another branch. I awkwardly switched over to the second branch and probably looked just as lame as I felt. The bag was barely a few yards from me now. With a newfound but hard to see confidence I inched my way down onto tree number three and forced myself into a standing position as close to the car as I could get. I grabbed onto another branch and leaned as far out as I could to the bag. The swaying of the colossus kept bringing it maddeningly close to me only to have it swing right back.

“Todd! It’s too far, you can’t reach it! Can you please just come down now? Look, I’m feeling fine, we don’t need the first aid kit!”

“Niz dawg,” I said entirely too seriously, “I got this. This thing’s as close as that one chick’s ass was to my face when she did that stage dive last summer! God, what was her name? You remember that?” I didn’t have to see her face to know the disapproving look I was getting but I strained my neck to turn around anyway. If I didn’t have proof that people were constantly upset with me, I’d be in serious danger of getting cocky. My finger was screaming by now. I really should have just cut it off. I shot Heather a smile that tried to communicate that I was just trying to lighten the mood and that her butt was still my favorite out of all the butts I’ve ever encountered. However that was an overly complex message to try and convey and I probably ended up looking like a sweaty, nervous, and slightly cheeky baboon. “Don’t tell me you weren’t totally into that too,” I continued, “I saw you grab a handful of that ba-donk.”

Then there it was for a second. I got a smile. Sometimes I think that’s what I live for. If I could, for one second make Heather forget that we still both work dead end jobs, or still have student loans to pay off, or that we might die on top of a giant moving mountain man, I count that as a win. If I could do that by talking about butts, I get points for style. I also managed to finally get ahold of the bag, which was cool too. Hanging by one hand over the abyss of leaves and mist I let ring my battle cry, “EAT SHIT, GIGANTOR!”

“Todd!” Heather called up to me, “Can you please just pretend to be scared at least? It’d make me feel a lot better.”

“YOU WANT SOME OF THIS?” I shook the bag over my head, challenging the distant second colossus on the horizon and almost losing my grip as the mountain shook again.

“Todd, please, we could die up here and I don’t think you’re comprehending that fact! Just stop with all the dick jokes and take this one thing seriously! You can go ahead and not care if you die but I’m not ok with that, not at all! Do you even give one shit about what I think?”

People say or do things that can be downright awful when they're drunk, high, or just having a shit day and I'm not the type of person who'll hold that against anyone. Heather doesn't do well under pressure and I don't mind that because I'm not the kind of person who holds everybody to some angelic standard. It might also be because I do even worse under pressure although most people wouldn't believe that if they'd met me. Unfortunately, it had been a pretty rough day for everyone. Let he who is without sin and all that.

"You think I'm not scared?" I shouted back, almost angry, "Do you think I'm so gung ho and cocksure that I'm not terrified to fucking death of dangling out over the fucking dong of the colossus trying to get this bag? If my bowels had any less dignity I'd have probably fallen from the sheer weight of shit in my pants! Do you want to know why I make all these dumbass jokes all the time? It's because I am so scared! I'm scared that we'll die on this giant fuckoff mountain man, or have to kill ourselves because we ran out of food! I'm scared that this thing might have full on fucked up the only town I've ever wanted to live in! I'm scared that I might have wasted four years of my life and more money than I'll ever see again getting a degree that is not going to do shit for me! The only good thing that ever happened to me in college is you and I'm scared that you'll realize you can do so much better! I'm climbing this fucking thing because for whatever fucking reason, I've convinced myself that the only thing that'll convince you that I have any sort of goal in my life is in this bag!"

Heather began to get that look on her face that only ever showed up when I said something that made sense. This was only the second time I'd ever seen that face but I was on a roll with the rant and was not about to stop and appreciate it. "Do you think the only reason I suggested we come out here is so we could smoke weed and have sexy tent sex in the woods?" I paused for a moment. "Which, by the way, was phenomenal. You're really th-"

Crack. This wasn't a crack like a tree branch cracking. This was one of those distant cracks that echo around the forest for a while. You hear it when the hunters are out, which apparently they were because I'd just been shot in the hand at the most inopportune moment of my life.

“Oh tits.” Famous last words of Todd Hopkins, spoken at the moment he fell to his death from atop The Colossus of Dong. Synapses fired faster than they ever had before. The seconds that made up my potential final moments felt like minutes. I thought about maybe saying something different; maybe confessing my love for Heather one last time as I fell to the forest floor. But that would have been a shitty thing to do. Sure, it'd be a nice bit of closure for me but then she'd be stuck up there with the empty promise of a soon to be dead man. She didn't need that. Plus, how stupid would that sound? “IIIIIII LOOOOVVvveeeee youuu heath-” I wouldn't have been able to say all the things I'd meant to tell her before I hit the ground. Not even a parachute would help me with that. Not even one of those cool wing suits, with the jets on the feet. So “Oh tits” was what some random neuron decided my legacy would be. I didn't even scream. Just, “tits”.

Moonlight was shining in though the one window in an otherwise dark hallway. Voices and music could be heard from downstairs. Todd and Heather sat on the floor looking out the window. Todd was struggling with an empty wine bottle taped to his hand.

“Pffff- fuck, alright, it's stuck. Whatever. Who needs a left hand? I'll just learn to jack it righty an' shit'll be all squared away and whatnot. I am... veeerry adaptable”

“Todd, do you... you need help with that?”

“Oh fuckin' yus, please. I can't feel my fingers.”

“Let me see that.” Heather drunkenly fumbled with the tape but gave up after a minute.

“Welp, looks like you’re shit outta luck.”

“It’s all good. I’ll just cut it off. Like the civil war.”

“Oh god,” Heather cracked up and brought her head down on Todd’s shoulder. “So, um, you having a good time?” she asked.

“I can’t complain aside for the...” Todd tapped the bottle hand on the floor, “... bottle situation. Other than that, I’m having a fuckin’ whale of a time. Your friend throws a bangin’ party.”

“I,, thought this was your friend’s house...”

“Oh, well, whoever’s house this is, I hope the Queen sucks them off or something.” The two collapsed on to of each other laughing. Heather finally composed herself.

“You mean to say we just played Amy Winehands with everyone at a party where neither of us knows anybody?”

“I mean to say.”

“Well, sophomore year is going just as well as I expected,” Heather said, tipping her bottle up to see if any drop remained.

“Heh, I did not see myself doing this two years ago,” Todd said, poking at the tape with a pen he found he’d been sitting on.

“Really?”

“Yeah, look at me. I’m drunk out of my gourd on shit wine with one of the most wonderful girls I have ever of the pleasure of being drunk with.”

“You’re so drunk right now...”

“No, seriously, I am incredibly... fond... of you.”

“Todd... you’re fond of a ham sandwich, what are you really trying to say?”

“Fuck me... I’ve, I’ve kinda got... romance feelings for you, man. I mean, Heather, shit.

This is not-” Heather kissed Todd.

George woke up with his dog’s tongue in his mouth. The gun had kicked much harder than his legs were at all prepared for. Now the dog was doing all she could to remind her groggy owner that this was a great place to nap and all but sooner or later someone needs to be fed. George massaged his shoulder as he sat up. He was entirely too old to be going mad and trying to kill mountains with bullets. Pulling his shirt collar down to inspect the bruise revealed several other scars of a reckless youth he was paying for in full now. After another moment’s struggle, he slung the rifle off and tossed it to the side. Scratching the dog’s ears, he saw only the colossi’s back as it walked indifferently away from him. He should have known there was no real way the monster was turning to face him. George wasn’t much more than the grime on the bottom of a shoe to this thing.

After a couple minutes of checking to see that all of his parts were still in order, George started hiking again. One-man missions against the unbeatable forces of nature had turned out to be just that and he figured it was about time to find someone who actually knew what they were doing. He knew there was a reason people like him shouldn’t live alone. The dog started tugging at the leash making that frantic whimpering sound. Maybe there was still someone to tell him what to do. George let the dog lead him off the path to an object in the brush, which turned out to be a backpack. At least, it may have once been a backpack although the previous owner seemed to trust a great deal in the healing powers of duct tape. George went to open the zipper only to find that it had also somehow been replaced with tape. Rummaging through its contents, George

found three pairs of 3D glasses, a quarter of an ounce of marijuana, a change of clothes, and a ring. It was a nice ring; it came with a little box.

There's nothing quite like the feeling of falling asleep in one place only to wake up in your own bed. There is a sense of slight suspicion and confusion but ultimately you remember that you fell asleep watching Star Wars again and your parents brought you up to your room. I think a lot of people, including me, tried to recreate that feeling in college except by replacing parents with a bottle of bottom shelf vodka. It never worked the same way for whatever reason. It wasn't until I woke up back in the safety of our base camp rock with my hand bandaged and my head surprisingly not smeared on the forest floor that I was able to relive that feeling. Just replace my parents with Heather and try not to think about how weird that sounds. I knew I was alive because the ground was still moving, just as methodically as before. It almost felt natural, like getting used to the earth spinning at who knows how many miles per hour.

"Todd. Are we alive? You're not a vegetable now are you? Because it turns out that Anders, the sexy waiter from Applebee's, is up here with us and I gotta say, my options are somewhat limited..."

"I'll kill him with my feet." I managed to force out as I creaked into an upright position. My entire body felt as though I'd been thrown through a wall by the dad from American Chopper. Heather only exacerbated the problem by crushing my probably cracked ribs with her "I'm glad you're not dead" hug, but I wasn't about to complain.

"I'm sorry I got all self conscious about my masculinity and tried to accidentally commit suicide by being a dumbass." I figured that covered all my bases in the apology department.

"It's fine, you really suck at falling to your death so I think it all works out ok."

“Good,” I croaked. Heather helped as I tried to stand and ended up doing most of the work. “Might I ask about the... uh,” I held up the hand I was fairly certain I’d been shot in. It hurt like nothing else I could imagine, though that pain helped me forget about the broken finger. What I didn’t remember was somehow dressing the wound mid-falling to my death.

“You were holding the first aid kit when I found you. The rest of the backpack fell but I guess you were able to hold onto that. You did good,” Heather brushed back her curls to show me she had properly fixed up her head, “the dismount from the tree could have been better but that wasn’t exactly your fault, I mean it was your fault you were up there in...”

“I get it, I shouldn’t climb trees when I feel like I have something to prove, in case I get randomly shot. What did you mean by ‘found me’? Where’d I land?”

“That’s the best part.” Heather was almost giddy as she walked my limping body over to the edge of the cliff. Below me, I no longer saw the phallus of stone that had been the punch line to every joke I’d been thinking up for the past few hours swinging hypnotically below my feet. Instead I saw it, fully erect, stretching out before us into the sky, like a pier over water and as wide as a two lane highway. It looked entirely too majestic for what it was. “Did you carry me up from there?” I asked, trying not to picture myself being caught miraculously by a Giant’s morning stiffer.

“Yeah, I’ve got crazy muscles, I keep telling you,” said Heather, almost indignant.

“I’d venture to say you’ve got a bigger dick than this guy.”

“Biggest in the land,” she responded, taking my hand and bringing her head to rest on my shoulder. I looked out over to the horizon, the second colossus was much closer. I could see it much more clearly at this distance and I couldn’t help but notice how shapely a figure it had. “My gut tells me we should find a way off this guy before these two need to find themselves a

room,” I said, ruining the moment. We had a good bit of preparing to do if we were to have any hope of climbing off of a moving mountain. If we were lucky this guy would want to be on bottom. I turned back to what passed as our camp but Heather didn’t move.

“Todd, what was in the bag?” she asked suddenly and too seriously for me to joke, “I know it wasn’t just the first-aid kit.”

For the second time in a day I realized I might be in my final moments, so I gave myself a second to take in the view. I rocked back and forth with the colossus in time to make it look as though the world wasn’t wobbling for once. This is the same strategy that one would use at that moment in your night out when the world’s spinning and your only choice is to hang on and try not to fly off into space on a rocket of weed and booze. I tried making a fist with my one hand but couldn’t quite make it past the halfhearted Queen of England wave position. A low rumble drew my attention to the sky in time to see what looked like two fighter jets soar over the shoulder of our colossus only to disappear from our view a moment later. The dark green of Heather’s eyes shot through the curls that flitted around her face. She could see right through me and she was looking for something there. A joke about butts wasn’t going to cover this but neither were the empty promises of this soon to be dead man. That could all wait though. The view was rad as shit.

“Honestly, I was just trying to get at our stash,” I lied.