History Of The No Goose Supper

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Abstract

WE DECIDED to pot a goose. It had been a long day in the hoglots up to our jeans in hog muck and we were hungry. Gary was sitting on Chevytruck and I was atop the sagging cab of Fordtruck. We were watching the prairie sun go down behind a mountain sixty miles away. Sixty miles of Wyoming smouldered red in the sun. A flock of geese drifted high over the red Wyoming...
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by
Dave Losure
Science Special Grad

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We were going to eat horse cock sandwiches for supper. That is not gross. The fine print on the long round packages was gross. One pound and a half had beef and beef byproducts and pork and pork snouts. We quit reading labels. We ate it because it was easy and cheap and called it horse cock and made sandwiches out of it. The geese ate corn and wheat in last year’s stubble fields because it was easy and cheap. We watched the geese and decided to pot one and sizzle him in goose juices.

We had only seen the earliest of the geese. We did not see more until a week later. The new geese flew high and did not stop for us. Gary watched them from the hoglot. I watched them from a tractor on the dryland. We oiled the guns and waited.

I had just met Gary. He had blonde hair down to his shoulders and a degree in sociology. He had ended up a pig farmer in cow country. He needed spring help. I was nobody too. I was on my way through cow country in a junk Rambler and a beard and I needed money to buy gasoline. The police had just caught a hitch hiker who had a hacksaw blade in his belt and subversive literature on his person and he was their guest. They would have liked to scorch my goose too but I owned five dollars and all I did was sleep in the snow in the park and go to the employment office. They locked the park
restroom. Anyway, this was how I met Gary. The state government introduced us.

Under the conditions, I was not looking for a good time, a four-month career or a friend. I was just hoping to find a red-necked son of the plains who would keep me in transit. I asked the Chugwater postmistress final directions to Gary Covey who raised pigs.

"Four more miles of oil top and two of dirt," she said. "Pigs are dirty and disgusting," she also said without being asked. Her eyes said, "And I hope they eat you."

There have been a lot of cows in cow country for a long time now and they have given rise to a lot of cow people who are immune to foolishness and foreigners. There are people who would have liked to lie on the hill and shoot Gary's hogs, but they are usually no real trouble unless they are police. Gary put it this way, "The way around here, a hippie'll pick up something and beat the shit out of a cowboy, smile and say, 'I hate cowboys.'" Gary had been in Vietnam and he wasn't a cowboy anymore.

When I got to Gary's farm, he was the youngest part of it, except for animals and machines which are always coming and going anyway. The sheds hadn't been painted for years, the house was made of three shacks that had been pulled up from a ghost town in the south pasture. A long time ago the farm had been known as the greasewood ranch and had been a tough place. The nineteenth century was closer to things than where I was from. Gary was twentyseven. His father was a blacksmith across the line in Nebraska. His father could remember when people wore guns to buy groceries. The farm had history lessons, a ghost town, a lot of old machinery, three trees, a hundred acres of irrigated, a thousand acres of dry; it had packrats and rabbit dens, it had visits by coyotes and antelope herds and golden eagles and Canadian geese, but it did not have rattlesnakes. At least not around the farmstead. Pigs hate rattlesnakes.
We got our first real chance the last week in April. It was early morning and we saw a flock of Canadas feeding in the corn stubble a mile away. We left the pickup a half mile from them and began sneaking up the irrigation ditch. It was no good. They began sidling away as soon as the truck stopped. They watched us with beady goose eyes, assayed our purpose and were gone. We sat on the oil stove in the livingroom shack and ate our cold sandwiches and waited.

Spring seeped slowly into Wyoming. It was fifteen degrees when I was sleeping in the park. We did not plow until May. It was very wet in the spring. Wet and green and beautiful. The hot summer winds had not started. The south pasture was alive with wildflowers and native grasses and even on the dryland morning glories bloomed. The days were sunny and fresh after night rains, the view far and clear.

We had to be very careful. We did not want to be noticed by the geese and we did not want to be noticed by anyone else. There is a 500 dollar fine for poaching a goose in Wyoming. We lost a week of on and off chances because someone abandoned a pickup in Clyde Kadikoy’s rangeland behind our cornfield and it was just far enough that we couldn’t tell that it was never moved. We thought someone had staked us out staking out geese.

We had coffee in town one morning and learned that the pickup was defunct. We remounted our campaign. We tried driving past the cornfield very slowly with a deer rifle out the window. The geese either were too far away or flew when we slowed enough to get a decent shot. We could not afford to waste noise on bad shots. Poaching is a game at which geese play hard and well.

Gary had made a lot of bad shots in Vietnam when he was getting over being a cowboy. This is what he talked about sometimes at night sitting on the oil stove. He had not actually done the shooting. He was trained to be a medic’s aid but when he got to Vietnam they handed him a radar set
and told him to guard a bridge to a U.S. Army base. The 
U.S. Army was locked up in the compound with big guns 
and aircraft. Gary watched for Charlies. He and the other 
guys on the bridge would get tired of looking at a bush out 
in the swamp. They called artillery fire on the bushes. 
Sometimes they directed air strikes at the trees. Other 
soldiers made body counts on dead bushes and trees. The 
only Charlies he saw were kids who brought marijuana with 
no stems or seeds and short-time girls who came silently at 
night. The girls wore full dresses and came through barbed 
wire and mine fields. They never tore their dresses. We 
had barbed wire on the greasewood ranch. We had part of 
a mine field too. There are missile silos in cow country, and 
signs that told us we had better call Warren Air Force Base 
before digging in the area. We didn’t have short-time girls, 
although we tried. We didn’t have air strikes to call on 
tumbleweeds or geese.

Finally summer began in the middle of May. Puddles 
and swamps dried up. The gumbo hardened and cracked as 
the prairie winds began. There was a stream that ended on 
Gary’s farm. In 1973 it no longer had a name. It flowed wild 
and springfed out of a box canyon only to be swallowed up 
within seven miles by the politics of water rights. It ended in 
a rivulet trickling into a swamp in the south pasture where it 
evaporated in the wind. We ran out the 930 Diesel and 
hitched it to an irrigation ditcher. An irrigation ditcher looks 
like a double exposure of a horse plow; it makes a vee-
shaped ditch for water to run in. We ran the water from that 
rivulet a quarter of a mile over barren range land to a low 
area two hundred yards behind the house. Aha. A goose 
pond.

For a long time nothing but occasional ducks sat down 
on our pond. We were above occasional ducks; only a goose 
would do. Irrigating is a lot of work. We cleaned sodden 
tumbleweeds out of our quarter-mile ditch with pitchforks 
and waited.
I finished first tillage of the dryland and began plowing the corn stubble. The migration was easing up. At evening we sat on top of the trucks and watched the sun go down. It now set a good ways north of the mountain.

One morning we were sorting hogs for sale. They were feeling good, cram full of pig energy, and they were giving us a hard time of it. They ran in circles around the corral and they bolted between our knees and dumped us in the muck. They weren't even taking Sundog seriously. At last we had gotten thirty of the fattest cornered and were working them toward faithful old Chevytruck when that wild honking reached our ears through the laughter, squeals, and curses. If you do not believe that pigs can laugh, squeal, and curse, then you have never tried to put a bunch of healthy hogs somewhere they do not wish to go. We searched the sky. The honking was near, but we saw no geese. Gary looked at me and I at him. The pond! The pond! We dropped our chasing panels. We leaped over fences and scattered feed pails in a rush for the house. The pigs muttered and grinned and went back to their original lawful business.

We told Sundog to stay in the yard because she was rabbit crazy and there were probably rabbits between us and the geese. We got the guns and snuck out around back, out toward the pond. We were sneaking pretty fast. We had junk tractors and an old combine and a weeded fencerow for cover and we ran crouched over like John Wayne leading the Marines. Gary had a .30-.30 and I carried the double twelve-gauge. We were close enough that even if our goose roast flew I would have no excuse for failing with the shotgun. Our only worry was that we might both nail the same bird and render him useless for anything more exciting than stuffing a pillow.

Suddenly the dog back in the yard began yelling that someone was coming. The Marines whipped out their Abbott and Costello masks and about-faced. We dropped
our guns in the grass and exited as though we were barefooted and the Russian thistles were coming. We came up to the farmyard innocently from behind the house and looked. It was the feed man. The MoorMan's feed man. His name was Dick. He was our age. He was a buddy. If we had wanted help poaching a goose, we could have asked Dick. We stood there splattered with hog muck and felt foolish. When Dick noticed the geese flying away, Gary just said, "Yeah, been a good wet spring for 'em."

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Poem

by
Deborah Fitzgerald

Someday
through a silvery moonglow
a voice will open
a howl will scatter
the stars,
a shriek not entirely human
will split
the wavering spool of light.

somewhere
the voice will swallow a language
trapped in teeth and tongue,
will pour the sounds
like dry bones
into the dark pulsing water—
watch the words go
clattering down.