

The Moon Is Where Dead Horses Go

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The moon is where dead horses go. I know how that sounds, but my father told me so on a camping trip during which we shared our first beer. My father is dead now, but then so are a lot of fathers. As far as horses go, I've only known one. He was all white and I called him Whitey. He tried to kill me for pretending I was a cowboy. But I survived by landing on a stump. Old Whitey is probably on the moon as we speak, grazing in zero gravity, or perhaps nuzzling abandoned lunar modules.

I do not believe in castles.

Show me. Where are all the castles everyone keeps talking about?

Real life is pretending to be something you're not and then being nearly killed for it by what was, in all likelihood, a wild Mecklenberger, or perhaps an unusually aggressive Orlov Trotter.

But then I could be wrong.

To this day I have no idea what color my wife's eyes are. They seem to vary according to mood. I don't know. What's important is to find other things to believe in, by which I mean things other than castles, or wild Mecklenbergers. Believe in sandstone cliffs. Believe in electricity.

My old friend Wesley Mantooth wanted to live in a castle. Somewhere up in Islay. But he developed a pretty heavy coke habit often forgetting to call people back after he stole their cars and made midnight omelets with their wives. Of course, this was at a time in Wesley's life when he would just as soon punch you in the face for voicing your indifference to flying saucers than snort.

This sort of behavior is frowned upon where I come from. We much prefer water sports to the coked-up exchange of blows. Although I must admit where I come from there is also a river, which no one can water-ski on because three years ago

someone “freed” his or her pet piranha in it. What I’m saying is you can never be sure where that particular piranha is at any given time.

I try to relax.

Life is hard enough without the stress of piranhas. The only animal I trust is the squab in my freezer. Besides, I am at a point in my life where futility is more and more the likeliest outcome. That said, there are steps one can take to avoid total collapse. Acquire nude photographs of your next-door neighbor. Pretend you are a pterodactyl. Eat a tuna sandwich your wife made you while listening to the ball game.

For perspective I sometimes drive a golf cart packed to the gills with Japanese pilsner to watch the stars and revise my family’s medical history while dodging brambles and small children. My father was an Appaloosa man. He was a good father, but he died at the precipice of middle age in a hammock (cholesterol)—a pretty fair way to go all things being even.

“Dead horses don’t go to heaven,” he told me that one night long ago under swirling pines, his ventricles coagulating.

“Where do they go?” I asked.

“They go to the moon,” he said, the scotch on his breath overpowering the wilderness.

But those were different times, the age of red meat, and computers roughly the size of school buses. My father was a man who could drink four scotches, then drive high-performance German automobiles on logging roads in the lashing rain. He golfed only once in his entire life and never spoke of it again. The last thing he ever told me before he fell asleep on the hammock was something about love.

“Love is important,” he said. “It’s why we invented the long-bow.”