

Million Dollar Redneck

By

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“Fuck you, you pissant motherfucker! Get off the goddamn road you crack-snacking cock nostril! I’ll snap your fucking neck! Get the fuck outta here!”

The driver of the white sedan was understandably upset. But what was Trevor supposed to do? He needed to switch lanes in a hurry - happens all the time.

“I’m sorry you feel that way.” Trevor said to the other driver, who had walked up the lane of traffic along the bridge to share his feelings. A hundred feet ahead, the light turned green. ‘Gotta Go! Nice meeting you.’”

He put the truck in gear, drove off onto the old highway heading out past the outskirts, past the Star-Tribune offices, past the old train station. An abandoned mine loomed large and empty on a hill along the right. The Platte River, swollen with spring runoff matched the road bend for bend as Trevor headed west, with the late afternoon sun still high in the sky.

When he passed a wooden barn with some white powdery substance spilling from its ends, he knew he would be okay. He had left Casper behind. So long suckers.

The weekend lay before him like a buffet table or a spread, willing woman. He had no plan, but whatever he did, he would enjoy it.

No paperwork, no waking up before dawn, no more broken cappuccino machine that reminded everyone how much they’d love to have a cappuccino right about now. No more of the arduous thumping and grunting against the wall from the office next to his. Hadn’t office affairs gone out of style? No more boss Rico or the cretinoids from accounting. No Casperites. The only difference between most of the people Trevor worked with and the man in the white sedan was that the angry driver had the courtesy to get right to the point.

None of that for two days. But to Trevor, heading away from town at five on Friday afternoon, two days was forever.

His destination: Clemmenson Ranch, an isolated ranch outside Shoshone, built by his great uncle who had gone insane and was hung. His mission: chill.

A few miles later the Platte vanished. It was just him and the road.

Great Uncle Clemmenson apparently never ‘ranched’ anything, despite the name of the place. Clemmenson’s Pointless Shack in Bufu just didn’t have the right ring to it.

After two miles of bladder-rattling dirt road, Trevor came upon the cabin. He had been here once the past summer, but the signs of neglect were present. Leaves and weeds poked through the wooden slats of the porch. Spider webs and burst egg sacks clotted the windowsills. A dead rat, parts of it eaten away to show different layers of anatomy, lay at the doorstep like a package.

The lock had not been damaged, which didn’t surprise him; the place was too isolated to be a teenage fuck spot, and burglars apparently hadn’t found the place yet.

The door and windows had sealed the inside in relatively good condition. Dust lined the floorboards and counters, but the rats hadn't gotten in. An hour or so of fresh breeze would deal with the dry smell. He pulled the dust covers off the couch and coffee table and decided they looked like they needed a brushing. Later. He checked the fireplace. All in order.

Trevor did not kid himself when he packed for the weekend. A small but powerful portable TV set was a last resort against isolation and loneliness.

A night alone on the prairie is different than one anywhere else, even on a camping trip. Stepping into the cabin was like stepping into a time warp. The couch and bed and stands were all new but nondescript, they would have been at home in any time. Given enough time alone out here, Trevor felt not only isolated by space, but by time, as if humanity had gone on without him. Trevor did not believe in time travel. It was Friday, April 30th, 2007. That was real. The 1800's were gone. They did not exist on some alternate plane or dimension; they were dead. The TV helped.

Trevor looked up at the wide rafters again before going to the truck to unload.

He sat on the porch to watch the sun set. His English teacher in college had urged him to observe a sunrise and take careful note of the colors, when they appeared and in what order. He hated sunrises. They reminded him that, yes, it really was time to wake up and get going.

He compensated by watching the sunsets, determined to know the colors and sequence by heart, and not go with the romantic cliché.

Clouds were present to give the sun's dying light a canvas. It swelled yellow as it dipped to the horizon, becoming bolder. The sky stained yellow and began to bleed reds. The sun was orange, squashing on the horizon like a sponge draining its light. A few streaks of pink stretched at the top of the spectacle. Then it was over and the sky was red, crickets providing the soundtrack.

It was an okay sunset.

Residual daylight lit the cabin when Trevor stepped in with the broom. He began to clear out the rafters, cobwebs and dust trailing down as he moved to a large wooden shelf in the corner, near the ceiling. He dreaded this spot, a 7 x 7 square that collected gerbil doots and dust and dead spiders like a grisly trail mix bag.

He swung the broom over the top, encountering inexplicable resistance that separated.

Trevor's stomach dropped straight through the floor, down through the foundation, through the dirt of the earth, into an endless pit. Terror electrified his limbs as the broom's burden spilled off the rafter in a shuffle of dry scale and meat.

It was so surprising, really, that such a *large* group of rattlesnakes had taken up residence in the space. They had likely squeezed through a knothole in the wall and spent the winter there, nice and cozy. For a split second, he imagined one of them yelling, "What the fuck are you doing, you fucking cock-biting asshole! Get the fuck outta here!"

But, of course, that didn't happen. All of this in the space of time before the half dozen snakes thudded at his feet, a rough and dry slapping sound.

Trevor's scream caught in his chest, sending cold terror through his pipes like ice.

In his frantic escape, his body lunged for safety before his legs could respond. He

saw what was going to happen right away, and tried his damndest to twist and turn in the air. But, this was not Quake II; once you fell, that was it, no course corrections.

In the last second, Trevor had the frantic, ridiculous hope that perhaps the coffee table would see his coming head and flee.

He was on the floor. He knew that. Maybe he had missed the coffee table. Could have happened- he didn't feel any pain. But something was off.

Ah, that was it. The cabin was pitch black. He couldn't see shit. There had been at least ten minutes of real light left when he came into the cabin, when he'd....

Shit.

He needed to get up. He was up and running out the door, fumbling for his truck keys, scrambling to get inside. He had the keys in the ignition before he realized that, while his mind had been quick to act, his body was still lying flat on the dusty slats, just as it had been. And he still couldn't feel anything

Although nervous impulses could not travel down his limbs, into his stomach and chest, into his arms and bladder, fear could. Trevor could tell you that.

Then there was an awful sound. Dry, like everything else. A sound like.....a sound that couldn't be compared to anything else. A hellish sound that could belong to the sliding of scales under heavy weight across a dry floor.

Trevor's curse had always been good hearing with bad perception. He could hear the faintest of noises, but could never place them. The farthest rasping sound could have been ahead and to his left, or maybe behind him. One of the closer sounds could have been just a few feet in front of his face or it could have been behind him. That was the worst thing.

No. Not entirely true. When he felt that weight, cold and smooth, small scratches where the scales overlapped, against his neck; that was the worst thing.

Trevor Broxton screamed.