

From *Inside* Out

It had been a long time since Neil lay with his stomach to the damp cold earth – to him, a reminder of childhood. It was dark, but with his chin resting on a Douglas-fir root, he could still see his right hand carve a two-inch v-shaped notch into a section of exposed root. Neil felt at home in this rainforest among the moss-covered stumps, beneath the sixty-foot conifers. Hovering inches from the ground, his nose relished the musty smell of the earth, lichen and mushrooms around him. The ground strewn with pinecones and other organic remains in various stages of decomposition made the soil rich and dark: a soil that Neil had been fond of eating as a child -- to the queasy screams of his friends Butch and Cathy. He remembered the pungent taste, like coffee-grounds or the crusty edge of a grilled steak. He carefully pinched a little into his mouth -- memories bestirred from more than fifty years ago.

Neil turned on his back and gazed up at the canopy of converging treetops; they made a jagged hole in the sky above. Neil was tired and closed his eyes; he felt as if he might fall off the earth into the hole of sky above; he dug his fingers and heels into the mossy earth and held on. His mind drifted back to those times on the ranch growing up with Cathy and Butch. Cathy, Neil's child-hood girlfriend, lived down the street; their mothers had teased them about getting married, though, they were only five years old. A real beauty, Cathy died many years ago in her late twenties, leaving behind a husband and two young daughters. Butch never returned from Viet Nam.

Neil opened his eyes. The sun, just beginning to rise, made the sky, through the jagged space above, brighter than inside the dark canopy where Neil lay. It looked like a target. He pointed up -- which seemed like down -- into the serrated sky with his right

hand and closed his left eye as if sighting down the barrel of a gun. His finger perfectly lined up on the hole in the treetops. He closed his right eye and opened his left; his finger jumped twenty feet to the right of the mark. Neil repeated this back and forth a couple of times. *I must be right-eyed and see the "outside" world through my right eye. If I were left-eyed would I have a different perspective on the world?* Neil needed a new perspective, because he was lost right now.

Neil had always thought of the world as "outside", because Neil, since very young, imagined himself living in or actually being a terrarium. His thoughts, his memories and eyes enclosed by glass -- his body, the trees -- particularly the trees -- and people were separate, outside and beyond. He could see them and feel them, but not in a penetrating way. No matter where the terrarium was placed: 30,000 feet in the sky or 50 feet down on a coral reef, he felt the same, like a camera being moved from one location to another -- while what he observed changed and seemed distant and elusive -- possibly not even real.

As he lay, holding on to the ground, Neil pondered whether or not the world he perceived was the only world in which to exist. If others existed, would he be the same - - still wondering what the fuck he was supposed to be doing there?

Neil's strange thoughts may have arisen from being tired. With very little sleep over the past few days, Neil had arrived on the edge of the Sandhurst Town and Country Club golf course in Oregon long before sunrise and after an all night drive. But his weariness, too, stemmed from a general disgust of his 67 years that included a 35-year career in New York advertising. His life had been exciting, fast-paced and in some ways rewarding, but in others seemed like being caught up in a long-lasting tornado, then spit out an old man with a failed marriage and millions in assets laid waste by economic upheaval.

Neil started his young adult life hoping to find some meaning in the world. He educated himself well and worked hard and smart. He made a lot of money, married a beautiful and bright marketing manager at a startup dotcom business, had twenty years of pleasurable marriage, and then in 2008 the business and the marriage came apart just as efficiently as it all had come together. During this process, however, Neil found no sense of meaning whatsoever.

Neil was a mess, but in a predictable manner: he drank too much and hooked up with inconsequential women. Eventually he woke up, quit drinking and mindlessly fucking every woman he ran into. He decided to make a total change. Now, two years later, in a different place, he felt better, but knew that he had to break out further: to find real meaning in his life.

After Neil's life fell apart in New York, he made the decision to leave the East and move out West. A close friend recommended Sun Valley, Idaho. Neil associated Idaho with potatoes and Hemingway; Hemingway was an allure, but he had no interest in potato farming. His friend, who had spent time in the Wood River Valley area where Sun Valley was located, convinced Neil that he would love it, and this old college friend of some forty years was to be trusted; he knew Neil like a brother.

Neil located a reasonably priced, small cabin for rent on the Circle C ranch in Carey, Idaho, just south of Sun Valley. Sun Valley, a tourist town and very expensive place to live, differed greatly from Carey, more of a ranching community. Sun Valley had become home to movie stars and tycoons. The owner of the Circle C, Tony Lamb, was a great guy and helped Neil settle in. It took a few days of hanging paintings, unpacking and organizing his considerable book collection before Neil began to feel at home. He spent the next couple weeks cooking his own meals, playing the guitar that

he hadn't touched since college days, reading and wandering around the ranch getting to know some of the ranch-hands. His only time away from the ranch became his ten-minute jaunts for groceries in Carey.

The country around the ranch inspired him: high-desert mountains towering two to four thousand feet above Carey in striated shades of pink-, gray-, and green-tans. This was high-desert beauty. The gullies, probably formed from run off, created dark shadows as the sun traveled past, and ran from top to bottom right down to the edge of lush green pastures of irrigated alfalfa and hops. Bordered by sage-brush covered grasslands, the fenced pastures were populated by roaming cattle, horses, antelope, elk and every once in a while wolf, coyote and mountain lion; these to the displeasure of the ranchers, but a joy to witness from Neil's perspective. The sky was big, and the rising and setting sun and moon astonishing.

One Friday night Neil decided to venture out and meet some of the town's people. Tony suggested Jack's Saloon in Picabo, a small town twenty minutes west of Carey. Jack's had a long list of Idaho-brewed ales and the famous Juicy Lucy – a large Angus burger stuffed with cheese. Hemingway, in the sixties, landed on Picabo's grass runway when visiting Sun Valley up north, and the town sat on Silver Creek, one of the country's finest trophy trout streams and natural preserves. The area reminded Hemingway of northern Spain, home to the Basques, with whom he fought in the Spanish Civil War, and the valley was filled with Basque sheep farmers. A guide of Hemingway's, at 92, still lived in Picabo.

Tony didn't know that Hemingway was one of Neil's heroes and his favorite writer, or that for Neil one of the reasons he chose Tony's ranch and the Wood River Valley as a place to start his new life. Cuba would have been Neil's first choice, but that was out of the question. Neil respected Hemingway's sense of daring and fearlessness

toward death. So much of what Hemmingway did in his life: the wars; airplane crashes; safaris; hunting; sea adventures; and boxing, seemed to tempt death and injury. For Hemingway, it appeared to Neil, this confrontation with death defined what it was to be alive and to be a man – to be true, as he had said repeatedly about himself and his writing.

Of course, Neil understood that Hemmingway was also a peculiar person: heroic and talented, while egomaniacal with a bravado that clouded his sense of self with regard to others, particularly fellow writers and his wives. Stranger still, historians and aficionados now attribute that cloud to a lack of self-esteem and insecurity – odd considering, at his time in history, he was perceived as a giant-of-a-man. Then again, maybe Hemmingway came upon the same conclusion before he killed himself.

Neil found Jack's in the center of town across the street from the ranch supply store and grain elevator. A large weathered-log structure with several neon signs blinking from beneath the full-length covered porch, Jack's looked as if it had been around a long time.

Neil entered the saloon. Empty except for an old hard-ridden cowboy sitting at the bar talking to the bartender, The bar was dark and mysterious. *It's still early*, Neil thought, and headed in the direction of the bar, *better not take a seat at the table, it might seem rude*. The cowboy was drinking an O'Doul's and next to his bottle lay a pack of filter-less Camels -- *the probable cause for the yellow-brown fingers on the his right hand*. His hands also looked like a chain saw had gotten ahold of them. His knees were wrapped in chafed-leather braces, hand-painted with elk and Indian symbols . . . *pretty cool!*

The cowboy turned to Neil, tipped his sweat-stained cowboy hat and smiled, "Kind of lonely here right now, why don't you belly on up and I'll buy you a beer . . . besides, you look as if you might need one."

"Thanks," said Neil as he slid onto a stool next to the fellow. "That bad, huh?"

"Yep, purred the cowboy . . . you must be new around here? Can't say that I've seen you before and I have been around a long time, right Tim?" He winked at the bartender.

"I am brand-spankin' new," responded Neil, getting into character . . . "just got into town. I am Neil . . . you?"

"Well, it depends upon how you know me," the cowboy said, tilting his head slightly and squinting a smirk. "Most people call me Crash, but I've been known as Snap Daddy, Strut, Speed Monkey and several other names that I can't mention in public. My God-given Mormon name is Robert Rudy Rupert Hamm, III."

"That's a mouth full," responded Neil, "I'll call you Crash if that's OK? An interesting name: I'll bet there's a good story there?"

"Buddy - a long and painful one," Crash said, shaking his head . . . "I picked up the name a couple years back when my paraglider collapsed, coming off Baldy, which is up the road a bit." He pointed back across the bar and upwards. "I plunged 1800 feet into a cliff, woke up two days later in the hospital with two broken legs . . . knees in mangled parts . . . and a definitely deflated interest in flying." Crash looked toward the ceiling. "I thought giving up alcohol, weed and coke was tough, but this getting to know the side of a cliff at 60 miles an hour made my years on the wagon seem like child's play." His head swung around facing Neil to accentuate his point.

What was this guy doing in a hang-glider at his age?

Crash went on. "It took ten surgeries, cadaver parts and a long time in a wheel chair before I could walk . . . but I feel pretty chipper now, shuffling around in my new knee braces," he laughed . . . "you like the painting on them?"

Neil nodded.

"That's my work . . . I am an artist when I am not laid up and the mood suits me . . . or I need some scoots, right Tim?"

Tim laughed, " Yep we set up a New York-style art gallery right here in the bar and I'll be damned if he doesn't sell out."

The bar began to fill with cowboy-looking guys and gals, and the jukebox started pumping out odes to hard-lived lives, drunken sprees and cheating women. The barmaids appeared as if by magic, swaying around in their short skirts and cowgirl boots – a tantalizing look. Neil and Crash sat at the bar for most of the night. Neil learned more than he needed about this gregarious man, including that they both were the same age, which surprised Neil. Crash had served two tours of duty in Vietnam as a sniper, had been a commercial fisherman in Alaska for twenty years, jumped out of airplanes, skied almost every mountain in Idaho and Washington State, traversed many square miles of the Rockies looking for elk, deer, goat, badger, trout or any animal he could eat or hang on his wall and spent a year in rehab.

If this is all true, then Crash's physical condition and age are understandable, thought Neil. Not many guys like this hanging around New York.

Neil turned and faced Crash. "If you don't mind my saying so, you don't fit my picture of a Mormon."

"I am what's called a Jack Mormon, said Crash. "My great-grandfather came out west with Brigham Young and settled in Saint George, Utah; my grandfather was sheriff of the town. Pops couldn't wait to get away from that ridiculous and stifling

religion. He joined the army at the outset of World War II and was gone. As a family, we traveled the world. I was born in Geneva, Switzerland and went to private school there. We owned a ranch here in Idaho for awhile, and by my senior year in high school Pops retired from the army and we settled in Lakewood, a small town in Washington State near Fort Lewis.”

“I was raised in Washington State too,” said Neil surprised, “but on a small ranch in the mountains near Enumclaw. My parents sent me off to school in the east, where I stayed for college, and then started a business. I’ve been out there until recently.”

“Ever get back to Washington?”

“Sure, for holidays and short visits in the summer.”

“It’s a great place, and beautiful on the few days it doesn’t rain,” laughed Crash. “Were you raised a good Christian like the rest of us?”

Neil thought this an odd question, but figured Crash had his reasons for asking. “Yep, my mom was a Lutheran, my dad indifferent. I am really not into religion; seems it’s done more harm than good.”

“Can’t argue that . . . but then, what do you believe in?”

“ Nothing . . . I am agnostic and wary of people who reason based on belief systems: to me, things either exist or they don’t and no amount of fantasizing will change that. Neil looked up, “Am I offending you by saying that?”

Crash shook his head. “Not a problem with me, but I am not entirely in agreement.”

Crash and Neil spent many hours over the next six months sharing war stories and ideas while hunting elk, deer and birds, fly-fishing, skiing or hanging out with friends

at Jack's. Neil came to realize that Crash was a good guy, but that he also had a major chip on his shoulder. Crash disliked the government and how it now worked. This chip may have had something to do with his experience in the service or his parents' struggle to live a respectable life. Crash's old man, Pops, for whom he had a tremendous respect, had worked hard his whole life, serving over thirty years in the military, risking his life in WWII, the Korean War and three tours in Vietnam. In the end, his father felt betrayed by his country and began to doubt the purpose of the lives he had taken and the time he had spent in the service. Although nearly blind when Neil met him, Pops had seen a lot more than most men, and the bearded sage was as hip as any person Neil knew back in the sixties.

Crash believed his destiny was to redeem his dad's life and revenge the treatment of all Americans betrayed by the plutocrats now controlling and, in Crash's estimation, ruining the country.

"You know what, comrade," Crash whispered to Neil one night at Jack's, just before closing. "I have some ideas about how we can straighten out this fucked-up country of ours. It won't be easy, and may be dangerous, but you are the first person I have known with whom I'd share these thoughts. If you're interested, I'd like to have you over to my hacienda Saturday to throw around some ideas?"

Being invited to Crash's house was a big deal. In over a year of spending time with Crash, Neil had never met his wife or seen his house. Crash was a very secretive and private man.

"Sounds good to me." Neil agreed, "Can I bring some beer?"

"No, my friend, the beer and food are on me." Crash drew a map to his house on the bar napkin and handed it to Neil. "See you Saturday buddy."

Crash's house, a lot like the other houses in the farm development where he lived, sat on five acres, but Crash's place unlike the others, had an artistic feel. A yard, filled with metal sculptures of elk, deer and palm trees, surrounded the tan and sage-green trimmed house. The walks were all hand-placed stone and the grass well manicured. Metal cutout suns decorated the peaks of all the dormers. Neil knew that Crash had little money so he deduced that Crash took care of the place. Being the son of a Sergeant Major definitely had an effect on Crash and explained much about his behavior: the perfectly manicured lawn, spotless old truck and the soft-pressed crease in his Levis – but too, all this seemed contradictory to Crash's insane personality.

Music blared in the back yard, so Neil headed in that direction. Crash sat at a newly stained teak chair and table on a circular stone patio with a fire pit in the center. Crash drank an O'Douls and puffed away on a Camel. As Neil came around the side of the house, the door from the kitchen opened and out walked a woman whom Neil had known many years ago. His heart stopped.

"Neil, I want you to meet my better half. Jill, this is the dude I have been telling you about from New York."

"Well how are you Neil," said Jill showing absolutely no sign of recognition. "I have heard so much about you from Rupert, that I feel like I have known you my whole life."

"Well, maybe you have in a sense . . . like in another life or something," Neil awkwardly responded.

"See," Crash said, "I told you he was odd as two-headed pig" . . . he turned to Neil smiling, "I mean that as a compliment of course."

Neil laughed and walked over to Jill and shook her hand, and then took a seat opposite Crash at the round teak table. Jill offered to run in the house and get him a beer and Crash said he had to take a piss and tossed his cigarette into the pit and left.

Neil felt a quick relief when they were gone; it gave him a minute to ponder his situation. *How weird.* Neil had known Jill many years ago, but her name had been Mary Sawyer. He first laid eyes on her in sixth grade and had fallen madly in love. Mary was a dark exotic beauty, with a Turkish or Indian influence. Given her WASP last name, her mother must have given her that look, or she might have been adopted. Regardless, she was the most exotic girl Neil had ever seen at that stage of his life. She stayed in school for that one year. Her father, a famous doctor, traveled the world as a Senior Fellow to psychiatric departments for various periods of time. Unlike Neil, Mary came from a different class of people: she dressed in the latest expensive fashions, accessories and hairstyles, and ran around with the in-crowd, which at that age meant a lot. Neil didn't have the balls to approach a girl like Mary, and although he had sent her anonymous love letters, she probably never knew his identity.

Neil had heard, through friends who had kept up with Mary, that she had lived an adventurous life: she had gone to Wellesley for two years before hooking up with a Black Panther activist and moved to New York. When she left school, her family disowned her: probably for the black part more so than the leaving school part of her decision-making. Later, Neil heard that she had almost died from a bad case of syphilis.

"Here's your beer my friend?" said Jill as she flew through the door to the patio.

"Thank you," responded Neil. "If I might ask . . . how did you and that crazy man meet?"

"We would need a couple hours alone to answer that," Jill answered. "Let's keep that for another time, OK?" Neil nodded, and Jill quickly disappeared back through the kitchen door.

God, she's as beautiful now as in the sixth grade.

Crash then came banging through the door. "OK, my compadre," he announced, "let's get some work done. Nothing we discuss here today can leave this place or be heard by anyone else. Agreed? If anyone else knew what I was planning, they'd have me thrown in the clinker or worse the nut house."

Neil nodded as he heard the kitchen door shut tight from within.

"You see, I believe we need to do something drastic to get this country back on track," Crash began. "Most people don't think shit, and the others think that revolution is the way to go. We can't change Congress through the electoral process when big business controls it."

"I can't imagine a revolution would be smart," said Neil, . . . "against the strongest military in human history? That isn't going to work."

"No my friend, it isn't, but I have a better idea. Surgery. And with a very sharp scalpel – I mean guerilla tactics. We cut enough of the cancer out so the rest shrivels up and dies. We surgically remove about thirty handpicked, influential bad guys in a way that will turn the heads of the other self-centered bums. We take them out in their own back yards, on their yachts, at the movies, standing right next to their families and friends – when they think they are enjoying their stations in life. It's the same tactic we used in Nam -- called hit and run; we sniped the leaders and the rest retreated. Of course if it doesn't work, then we may have to take out out forty or fifty . . . but at some point these shitheads are going to get it. We can win this war with very little collateral damage. Look what happened in 9/11 -- the change that wrought."

“It makes sense,” Neil responded, “but who would be so crazy as to do this?”

“Crash grinned with a shit-eating look in his eye: “Old buddy . . . you and me!”

Neil furrowed his eyebrows and shook his head.

Crash burst out: “Hell, I took a greater risk in Nam; I killed more people in that stupid war and never once got shot . . . there were armed gooks everywhere . . . and for what? Trust me, we can do this and not get caught . . . if we are careful. I know, because I am trained for it. We can change the future of this country, maybe even the world. We, the people, are at war and we can win.”

Neil gave Crash a disbelieving look, but knew deep inside that something had to be done -- and soon, but he had mixed feelings about the approach.

“I’m going to have to do some thinking on this,” countered Neil.

Unlike Crash, who had lived on the fringe of society since his Vietnam experience, Neil, although hip, after the 1960s, lived the American dream. Coming from lower middleclass stock, Neil became the first in the family to complete college and gain financial success. Although his parents had ended up pretty much the same as Crash’s, which made Neil sad and mad, he didn’t blame the government. To complicate issues, Neil had always been a pacifist. He detested the Vietnam War and finagled out of the draft. He had also been prepared to go to Canada to avoid participation – a major sacrifice considering his family history. Someone in his family had fought in every American war from the revolution on, and probably fought Indians before that.

“Look Neil, I understand your reservations” argued Crash, “but those greedy people have damn near eliminated the middleclass -- the strength of our country. They control the government and the media, and are dumbing us down, keeping the masses occupied with crappy entertainment and bullshit religion so the people don’t realize

what's happening to them. Someone has to get the ball rolling before it is too late. Why not us?"

Neil had to admit that most of what he'd been taught garnered little meaning in this new world. Politicians were butt-lickers, corporate executives overpaid at the cost of the shareholders, and the bankers greedily brought down the entire world economy.

"Can I get back to you in a day or two?" asked Neil, "I need time to think."

"Of course man; this is a major decision, but I am convinced that someone has to do this, and I know that I will be one."

The next day Neil mulled over his decision. He knew Crash was right. Neil was just as disappointed in this country. Neil's family settled here in the 1600s; his great-grandfather had eventually died from wounds suffered in the Civil War and Neil's father had served five years in WWII, from which, Neil felt, he had never recovered. His father drank too much and had problems communicating with his kids. He was emotionally isolated.

Neil lay awake for a long night thinking about Crash's idea. *Shit, maybe it is time for me to play my part. These people are far more a dangerous to our country than the North Vietnamese or the Iraqis . . . and maybe this will finally give me what I have been searching for.*

The next morning, Neil called Crash. "I am in! Let me know when you want to get going."

Crash and Neil spent several months planning their attack. They compiled a list of more than 100 people who had been documented in the news as, what they called "the bad guys." Most were businessmen and bankers, but the list included two supreme-court justices and several congressmen.

“We have to be careful with government officials,” cited Neil, “they’d put us to death . . . I doubt they would for bankers or businessmen.”

“I want an insurance executive,” declared Crash. “I’ve always thought the insurance business was a rip off and should be not-for-profit. Why should someone gain from the fear and peril of their fellow man?”

Neil and Crash decided to limit the first thirty to businessmen except for one Supreme Court justice who had been taking bribes from Texas businessmen and was primarily responsible for the Citizens United Decision that allowed corporations to be treated like citizens when it came to election donations -- something that helped the plutocracy.

They decided to pull this off on their own. Taking all thirty at one time would have been great, but it would involve too many people and a better chance of getting caught. Taking out two at a time, as concurrently as possible, seemed the best approach, and then hanging back for a short period before taking out two more. They each swore, if either got caught, they would take the plan to their grave -- chances of both being caught were slim. It would be the obligation of the remaining fellow to sign up another kindred spirit, not a difficult task in Idaho and Montana in this economy. The new pair would carry on.

Crash’s first target would be a guy from Chicago, Stanley Schwartz, founder of a private equity and financial advisory firm who had taken home over a billion dollars in salary that year. “A billion!” Crash cried out. “I don’t even know what that means.”

Neil added, “A billion, while paying 17% in taxes. The asshole still complained, to a congressional committee that the tax was too much, and he told congress it wasn’t his fault that people in this country are stupid and lazy.”

Neil chose another guy he'd had on his radar for some time now: Robert Fairfield, CEO of one of the largest credit card companies in the world. The company was under investigation by the S.E.C. for illegal business practices that had cost its shareholders millions of dollars and for fraudulent customer-acquisition practices, trapping unsuspecting credit-card users with outrageous interest rates. Neil's mother was one. Fairfield also made over sixty million dollars a year.

Neil had read somewhere that Fairfield divorced his first wife, his high-school sweetheart, once he started making big money and married a flight attendant with whom he had been having an affair for years. He then won over his daughter from the first marriage with expensive gifts and requested from her that she live with him and abandon her mother. Neil explained to Crash, "On the plus side the guy had been praised for being a great dad to his now three kids, and had donated substantial money to good causes."

"Probably out of guilt," said Crash, "these pigs are insidious when pretending to give a shit about the arts and other causes they actually know nothing about. I love it when they are diagnosed with some incurable disease and fund a foundation to find a cure."

Crash and Neil completed the research and planning in about a month and soon set the day of deployment, as Crash called it. They determined where both of the targets would be the first two weeks of April by following Facebook and news reports. Driving would be the least traceable form of transportation, so they bought two old used Dodge Caravans, inconspicuous cars. They would use cash for all expenses and steal local plates the day of the sortie. Burner phones were to be used only in an emergency and then destroyed later with the car. The rifles were sighted in the week before.

On the day of departure, the two comrades ate breakfast at Jessie's in Bellevue, Idaho. They toasted to their success with coffee.

"To a better world," cheered Crash.

Neil, double-thumbed up.

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Neil's thoughts were interrupted by a loud rustling in the pine tree to his left, followed by a trilling chatter: he had fallen asleep. Not four feet away, a large red squirrel crouched, scolding him. Neil sat up. "You little bastard, you scared the hell out of me."

Neil rolled onto his left side to stretch his stiff back and checked his watch: he still had time. The rain had ended early in the morning, and a glistening mist covered everything. He could feel the cold moisture on his legs, soaking through his jeans. The light from the sun rising over the far hillside behind him now slanted through the trees highlighting the deep green of the wide-open, manicured grass rolling away in the distance. He watched the sunlight evaporate the mist as it crept across the landscape.

Neil's watch alarm vibrated. It was time. Neil unzipped his father's fine leather case and gently lifted out the custom Wild Cat 300 Weatherby. He set the walnut forearm into the notch, carved into the Douglas fir root earlier in the morning, and Neil lay still in wait.

Ten minutes later a golf cart with three guys rolled up the hill a couple hundred yards off, and like clockwork a man got out, strolled over to the second tee, and set up his ball. He stepped back and took two healthy practice swings.

Neil looked through his 3x9 Leopold scope and identified the man standing broadside by his signature Payne Stewart knickers. He was Robert Fairfield. Neil

chambered a Sierra 175 gr. Spitzer Boat-Tail bullet in the Weatherby as the man approached the ball. In that instant, Neil remembered a day many years ago while hunting with his father in the Cascades. His old man had wanted to shoot an elk with his new custom Weatherby, but never got off a shot. He died in his sleep that same year of a massive heart attack. On that hunt, Neil recalled coming upon two elk skeletons attached head to head, antlers entangled. It was apparent that the one elk had eventually died from dragging around his dead adversary. Neil's father had remarked, "Never underestimate the opponent."

Neil took in a deep breath and slowly let the air out between his lips while softly squeezing the half-pound trigger.

The glass of his terrarium exploded into a million glistening splinters.

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