

The Mountain

Andy Nelson rose stiffly, early every morning from his two bedroom cabin as the sun came up with his dog Riggs, a red Irish setter at his side. Letting Riggs out the front door to do his duty he went into the bathroom to relieve himself; stroking his six month growth of white beard, he looked in the mirror with his deep blue eyes and scooped up cold water with his hands on his tanned slightly wrinkled face and rosy cheeks. Immediately after he looked out his large window from his living room a hundred feet from the lake at the reflection of the mountain in its emerald water with smoke rising high above and a little amount of ash scattered around from the activity. All was calm. For a month and a half there had been one hundred and seventy-four shocks, earthquakes measuring 2.4 to 5.1 on the Richter scale resulting in a fiery steam venting in episodes from the mountain. The last shock had been two days ago.

“Ah, you devil what are you planning in your sleep? I know you better than you think. I have watched you for forty years and you have let me live but now you are angry. For two months you have roared and spit and kept all awake but now you are silent, I know your game you devil. How long are you going to give me before you take us? I will not leave; I do not fear you, I will be here till the end.” Andy let Riggs in, went to his bedroom put on his brown khaki pants with two extra zipped up pockets and a long sleeve faded Columbia gray blue cotton shirt. On entering the kitchen while tucking in his shirt and zipping up, he turned on his propane stove to heat the water for his coffee in a tin coffee percolator.

“We are going fishing Riggs old boy; we might as well make the most of this life while we are still here.” Riggs wagged his tail as the old man put a cup and a half of dog food in his bowl with a piece of fish he had caught two days ago. He poured himself a large cup of coffee and cut himself a piece of bread spreading some wild Huckleberry jam on it that he had made from the berries that grew behind the cabin.

“They are coming to get us, but we will be long gone by the time they get here.” Riggs looked up after finishing his fish and a little of the dry dog food.

“You better finish up; we will be on the water for quite a while. Go on now eat up, we have to get the boat in the water to get those early buggers while they are hungry.”

Andy grabbed his weaved straw colored cowboy hat with a half inch leather band and he left the cabin with Riggs tagging behind. The weather was crisp with a slight morning chill. Andy looked up to the mountain its reflection still on the lake, the smoke spilled above the water and slowly moved across the state until it disappeared in the atmosphere. Andy pulled the cord starting his fifteen horsepower motor to launch the fourteen foot aluminum boat from the dock. He headed out a half mile into the five thousand acre lake to the northern cove.

“Look! I just saw one jump, there goes another! We should have a great day fishing today: the weather is perfect, the mountain is quiet, and the fish are hungry. I bet we can catch a big one here.” He navigated the boat twenty feet away from a steep shore where the forest shaded the water with pines, and fir trees provided cover, food, and protection for the fish. It was a clear calm morning; he cut his motor and drifted slightly.

" This looks like the perfect spot," he said to Riggs looking around to see which bugs or flies were flying around and floating on the water that morning. Reaching into his kit he selected the fly he thought would do the job and attached it to his line. He whipped the line out and laid the fly just about where he wanted it- on top of the clear blue emerald water for a few seconds then pulled the line back with his right hand, brought it back over his right shoulder, and whipped the line back out over the water. Just before the fly hit the water a fourteen inch trout struck and spun in the air hitting the water and running as he let out the line.

"Go for it you bugger, give me a fight. I got you." He slowly worked the fish, letting the line out when the fish made a run for it, and bringing it in as the fish headed back to the boat. Slowly he reeled in the line as the fish got tired and brought it closer to the boat until he was able to put out the net and bring it aboard. "What a beauty, we'll keep this one," he said to Riggs, hitting it in the head and placing it in a metal ice chest. Riggs barked his approval and wagged his tail knowing some of the fish would be shared with him. There was no one else fishing on the lake. This time of year there were usually at least twenty or so boats out fishing. There was also no one on the shore line. He also noticed the few cabins and a couple of small resorts were empty; this was no surprise to him for throughout the last month people were slowly evacuating the area. As the morning went on, the old man caught ten fish ranging from twelve to twenty inches in length. He released eight back into the lake and kept two for himself and Riggs. It was getting close to noon and they headed back to the cabin. Upon getting close he saw a white truck and a man walking around. This was Charlie, the Park Ranger. Charlie was waiting at the dock. The old man pulled up.

"A great day for fishing," said Andy. Riggs gave a friendly bark and the Ranger helped tie the rope.

"Andy, you have to get out of here, that mountain is bubbling up from the pressure and it might blow at any time now; it is not worth taking a chance that it won't. You have to leave now, everyone else has left."

"There is no way you are going to talk me into leaving, I am going to stay. If you think it is going to blow you need to get yourself out of here, you have a home away from here and a family. This is my family: Riggs, the forest, the lake, the wild life, and Charlie like I told you in the past, I have nowhere else to go. I intend to die here."

"Jesus Andy, if you go with me now you may be saved, all the others have packed up and gone you are the only one left, you can come back when it is safe."

"What to? If everything is destroyed I will have nothing left, my life will be gone as I know it. What will I do then, rebuild in a desert? I am too old; I would rather die with the forest. Riggs and I are both old we don't have long to live anyway."

"You can move in with me for a while, my wife and kids think the world of you, they have spent many a summer here fishing under your guidance, you are like a grandfather to them. "

"And they won't have a father either if you insist on staying any longer yourself. This is my life and everything around is a part of me, it is my blood, you go now before it is too late for you."

“Damn it, alright if you insist, but what am I going to tell the others when I go back empty handed? “

“Just tell them I am a crazy old man.”

“Damn, I’ll never forgive myself.”

“By not forcing me to leave, you have given me what I want, my own place to die as I see it now. It would kill me to see this place destroyed. If I go with it, it will always be the same to me. If you truly want to be my friend, you will leave now and save your own life, for that I will always be grateful. “

“You are a crazy old fool, but I understand, I would probably do the same thing if I didn’t have a wife and kids to look after.” Charlie shakes Andy’s hand and puts his other hand on his shoulder.” Take care Pops, maybe you will survive somehow.”

Andy smiles as Charlie turns away and heads for the truck with tears in his eyes. Riggs barks twice and Charlie drives off.

“It’s just you and me Riggs; let’s make the most of it while we can.” They head for the cabin to an outside wooden table and sink, Andy takes out his knife and guts and cleans the fish.

“We are going to have a feast tonight.” He goes into the pine wood cabin with the fish to rest before cooking dinner and pours himself a small glass of brandy.

Andy awakes in the morning as the sun rises from the east through his bedroom window; he walks through the living room, opens the front door to let Riggs out and readies himself for the day. He goes to the kitchen and turns on the stove to boil the water for his coffee. Riggs scratches at the door and Andy lets him in.

“Riggs old boy,” rubbing the dog’s head. “I think we should have another go of fishing today. It looks like a perfect day, how about it?”

Riggs barks his approval.

“Well, that settles that.” At eight o’clock while he is loading the boat with his gear, Riggs starts barking. Andy looks around but sees no one. Riggs has not moved from his side but continues barking and looking at the mountain. What’s up old boy, do you know something about that mountain that I don’t know? Riggs jumps up on Andy’s leg cries out still looking at the mountain, and then looks at Andy.

” Alright old boy, you are trying to tell me something. I guess we better wait awhile and see what comes of it. We have plenty of time to fish, and anyway I have wood to chop.”

Andy goes to the porch to get his ax but Riggs follows him and won’t leave his side.

At eight twenty three there is roar like no other, the ground violently shakes. Andy stumbles to the ground gets up tries to steady himself as the ground shakes, he looks up at the mountain and sees a whole section of it sliding straight for the lake, and behind it super-heated gas, searing ash and pulverized rock is exposed.

Holding Riggs at his side “You were right old boy this may be it.”

A few minutes later the slide hits the water and creates a giant wave six hundred feet high emptying the lake behind it and heading for the forest and Andy's cabin.

"Oh lord we are going to our maker, this is the end." Andy holds his hands out as to catch the wave. "You devil come and get us," but the twenty four megaton blast of hot pulverized rock and ash passes the wave. The cabin, forest, and all life for miles are destroyed.

A month later, Charlie and a pilot fly over in a helicopter. They see that everything is covered with ash for miles and miles around: a large portion of the mountain had blown away, the cabin is gone, no trees are left standing, and the lake does not exist on Andy's side of the mountain.

"If I didn't know better I would say we were on the side of the moon," said the pilot. "Where did you say your friend's cabin was?"

"I don't know? Everything looks the same, turn to the right over there; he lived on the south east side of the mountain."

"It's useless we have been out here circling for two hours; not a thing is alive."

"Let's go back," said Charlie. "I have seen enough. When I can get through with my truck I'll see if I can find his remains. At least he deserves a final burial."