



THE GORGE OF THE  
MANGO TREE

JAMES KOZLIK

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First edition October 2024

*Book design by James Kozlik*

ISBN 978-1-4767-4660-9 (ebook)

[www.inspiredbookwriters.com](http://www.inspiredbookwriters.com)

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## By James Kozlik

“As you walk, you must make the universe understand that you are extremely determined to reach your destination no matter how many obstacles intercept your path! When you do this, obstacles start disappearing one by one!”

— **Mehmet Murat ildan**

*By Charles M. Skinner, 1896*

Although the Crow feared the geyser basins of the upper Yellowstone country, believing the hissing and thundering to be voices of evil spirits, they regarded the mountains at the head of the river as the crest of the world, and who so gained their summits could see the happy hunting-grounds below, brightened with the homes of the blessed. They loved this land where their fathers had hunted, and when they were driven back from the settlements, the Crow took refuge in what is now Yellowstone Park.

Even here, the soldiers pursued them, intent on avenging acts that the Crow men had committed while suffering under the sting of tyranny and wrong. A mere remnant of the fugitive band gathered at the head of that mighty rift in the earth known as the Grand Canyon of the

Yellowstone — a remnant that had succeeded in escaping the bullets of the soldiery, — and with Spartan courage, they resolved to die rather than be taken and carried away to pine in a distant prison.

They built a raft and laced it on the river at the foot of the upper fall, and for a few days, they enjoyed the plenty and peace that were their privilege in former times. A short-lived peace; however, one morning, they are aroused by the crack of rifles — the troops are upon them.

Boarding their raft, they thrust it toward the middle of the stream, perhaps with the idea of gaining the opposite shore, but if such is their intent, it is thwarted by the rapidity of the current. A few among them had guns that they discharged with slight effect at the troops, who stood wondering on the shore. The soldiers didn't fire but watched, with something like dread, the descent of the raft as it passed into the current and, with many a turn and pitch, whirled on faster and faster. The death song rises triumphantly above the lash of the waves and that distant but awful booming that is to be heard in the canon. Every Crow had his face turned toward the face of the foe with a look of defiance, and the tones of a death chant and in them, Smoothen of mockery no less hate and vaunting.

The raft was then between the jaws of rock that yawned so hungrily. Beyond and below were vast walls, shelving toward the floor of the gulf a thousand feet beneath — their brilliant colors shining in the sun of the morning that sheds as peaceful light on wood and hill as if there were no such thing as brother hunting brother in this free land of ours. The raft was galloping through the foam like a racehorse, and, hardened as the soldiers were, they could not repress a shudder as they saw the fate the Indians had chosen for themselves. Then the brink was reached. The raft tipped toward the gulf, and with a cry of triumph, the Crow men were launched over the cataract into the bellowing chasm, where the mists weep forever on the rocks and mosses.

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## Introduction

There is a body, curled in a fetal position. It is at the bottom of the canyon, laying on a large flat boulder that was warmed by the hot sun and radiated warmth through most of the night. There is an object laying next to the boulder, on a small sandy beach. There are some clothes laying on another large rock. And there is a slow current of water that passes the small beach. It gives rest to the weary river rats who dare to navigate this deep canyon that some call Grand.

## Chapter 1

He slowly stretches out of the fetal position. Naked, chilled and disoriented. He rolls over on the hard rock and slowly opens his eyes. Groggy, he wipes the early dawn from his eyes. But what dawn? Where is the sun? He looks up as if looking through a hollow trunk of a tree. It's hollow branch reaching to the sky, offering a small glimpse of a morning sky.

Where am I? Where is she? Him? My body feels as if it was beaten. I have to get up. I hear the flow of quiet water. I see walls all around me. Grays, reds, beige, and streaks of glistening quartz up high on the walls of this prison. And that's when I see a spit of sky. Blue, bright and distant is this small opening to the life outside of a surrounding fortress. I look down and on a rock I see some ripped clothing laying flat as if it was put there to dry. I slide

down this smooth flat altar, carefully. I can feel the tender skin along my hips and across my buttocks. My legs have black and blue marks. I reach back and feel my glutes and recall the spankings. Who spanked me? I am older now and I thought that he was gone from my life. Not gone as dead, but as a father. A father who thought that his discipline was for my good, but his compassionate eyes betrayed his action. I am grown now and nobody spanks me. My eye settles on an object. A broken paddle. An oar? I pick it up and try to recall the night of exhaustion. I notice some scratches along my breast and arms. There are rope burns down my lower forearms and wrists. I am beginning to feel scared. Was I a sacrifice? I begin to recall a group of people. Laughing, whooping it up then screaming hands grabbing me, bodies smashing against me. One after the other.

I am standing on the small sandy beach now. I slowly walk to the edge towards the water. I want to cleanse myself from what? I look up stream and down stream, from one bend in the walled canyon to the other. And even though I hear rumbling water, it is calm. The water is calm. I slow my breath now. That's what I learned, slowdown the breath, go to your breath. Is it shallow? Is it racing? Am I even breathing. I smile at that thought. I can feel the burning abrasions as I ease into the calm of the water. I can wade out up to my waist. My toes are comforted by the cool mud. I sink down, into a soft barge of warm mud. What warmed up this small island of mud along this river bank? Sun? I look up, I wonder how much sun I will see in this prison on a daily basis. Maybe, this hot, muddy earth is a connection to something?

(Psalms 103:14, "For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust"; compare

Genesis 18:27; Job 4:19, etc.), and of his mortality (Genesis 3:19, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou ...

Return to where and how, I always wondered. I feel so frail now. No food to fill my belly. No warm body to hug and love. No quick memory to understand what has happened to me. Just bruises, and scrapes and sore limbs. And here I stand naked, in this prison of the earth. Wait, my preacher father quoted me this every time I was in disagreement with whomever woman I formed a relationship with...

"The woman's canoe is men's; they rise or sink Together, dwarfed or godlike, bond or free. She must live and learn, and be All that not harms distinctive womanhood. For woman is not undeveloped man, But diverse. Could we make her as the man. Sweet love were slain, whose dearest bond is this, Not like to thee, but like in difference; Yet in the

long years liker must they grow, The man be  
more of woman, she of man; He gain in  
sweetness and in moral height, Nor lose the  
wrestling thews that throw the world, She  
mental breadth, more fall in childhood care.  
Till at the last she set herself to man, Like  
perfect music unto noble words."

WOMAN AS GOD MADE HER; THE TRUE  
WOMAN. by REV. J. D. FULTON,  
(TEEMONT TEMPLE, BOSTON.)

As I rise out of the warm mud, and wade in the  
water joy overcomes my dismay.

She was with me. I look around and nothing. I  
shout now HEY! HEY! JOY! And  
the echo is long and distant. There is no  
response. I slowly walk in the shallow water  
down current. What I am looking for I do not  
know. And whom am I looking for?

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Where am I? Where is she? Him? Was I dragged here as a sacrifice on this alter? Drugged? My body feels as if it was beaten. I have to get up. I hear the flow of quiet water. I see walls all around me. Grays, reds, beige, and streaks of glistening quartz up high on the walls of this prison. And that's when I see a spit of sky. Blue, bright and distant is this small opening to the life outside of a surrounding fortress. I look down and on a rock I see some ripped clothing laying flat as if it was put there to dry. I slide down this

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He looks down stream again and instinctively begins to walk along the bank of the canyon. Opposite of the side of the canyon and small beach where he started from. The canyon walls start closing in ever so slightly. He realizes the narrowing of the walls, and anxiety surfaces as he hears the roar of the river. It gets louder the further he walks. Suddenly he feels as if his feet are going to be swept out from under him. Again pure instinct overcomes his state of confusion. He grabs for overhanging branches from a tangle of willows. It steadies him. Cautiously he pulls himself ever so closer to what is a spit of earth at the base of the canyon wall. His breath eases. He feels safer and slowly makes his way back to the lesser current. He stops and looks around. He was so fixated on the side of the river he was maneuvering to get a better look around the bend, he never noticed what was caught on a large jagged boulder.

Situated on the other side of the river where an eddy swirled out of the flow of the strong current. He started in that direction, across the river from where he was at. But almost got swallowed up into the current again as the rivers edge dropped abruptly. He back peddled quickly as fear and adrenaline saved him from getting sucked down river. Towards the roar! He backed up to the willows edge, stopped and looked across river again. Something wasn't right about that object hanging on for dear life to the jagged boulder.

Think, think, what happened to me? He scratches an itch on top of his head. He feels a roughness, where he is scratching. He feels something, ever so subtle on his fingers. He looks at his fingers and notices some blood. Just a light film nothing too drastic. But blood none the less. He looks back up stream and sees what appears to be a small beach on the other side. With a big flat boulder and some

grassy meadow behind it. What is that? He starts his way upstream a little more, then with the flat boulder across from him, he makes his way wading in the shallow, calm stretch of river. He looks at the clothes on a rock next to the boulder and feels his naked body. His hand running over his chest, down his belly and over his genitals. Around his hips where the skin feels rough and burning. He gently rubs his tender buttocks and looks at the broken paddle laying beside this rock. He picks up the tattered shirt that has been ripped.

Did I have this shirt on. How did I rip it? Pants, those seem familiar. Where are my shoes? With pants and shirt now covering his nakedness, he looks up at the hole above him and the sky is bright and blue. He looks around nothing but walls of rock and this small beach and grassy meadow. He looks down river and sees what looks like a big rock

with something on it. He takes a deep breath and starts to walk towards it. What did daddy used to say? There is nothing to fear but fear itself. Fear of the past failures is what he meant. But I don't recall my past. I only know now. I don't remember my past and what does it matter. But I would like to know how I got here. And how I ended up on that flat rock that looks like an altar.

"He has to wade again, but the water is shallower on this side of the river and the current is slight. And now he is in front of the jagged boulder. But he does not see the entire boulder from this angle. His hand reaches out and touches a rubbery vinyl. It is wrinkled in one section and full of air in another. He bends down and...Is this a boat, a raft that I was in. All of us? The people that took me here to be tortured? I can't recall what the trauma is that I am living through right now. Now I am here. There is nobody else.

Where did they go? What is this? A knapsack. There is something in it. I think I will open it. I'll take it over there on some dry land. He opens the backpack and dumps out the contents along with some water a slew of candy bars and protein bars hail towards the ground. He picks one up and rips open the wrapper. He takes a bite and relishes the sensation of taste. He sits on the ground and slowly eats his way through the snack.

He looks up, through the hole, high above this narrow gorge. He gathers the candy bars and shoves them into the backpack. He slings the pack over a shoulder and slowly makes his way back to his altar. I must stay here, at least until they come back. I must see if there is a way, another path to follow. And so he walks a short distance and eventually wades in the water. What am I hearing now, a song sung in my daddy's church? "Wade in the water,

Wade in the water, children, Wade in  
the water, God's gonna trouble the water..."

And he comes to hear the roar of the river  
again. As he gets closer to this bend in the  
river, the current wants to push him back.

This is feeling like a trap. Nowhere to go. I have  
to think. I will go back to the rock,  
where the paddle is. He screams..."JOY,  
JOY, JOY!!" And there was Harvey? Yes, yes  
Harvey the guy with the long beard. Who  
else was there? Where are the others?

He looks around at the steep canyon walls.

Okay, I have to figure a way out of here,  
despite my pain. Maybe I was punished about  
something I did. I feel guilty but I don't know  
what about. There is nobody here to support me.  
Tell me what happened. Tell what to do next. I  
do know I can't go down river, or up river.

There is violence in both directions. I can hear it. The roar of anger. He looks in a direction. Up there, I can see something green. Maybe I can get up to that ledge. See what I can see. I feel strong even though I feel pain from the bruises. I can climb despite that. Maybe I should go check the raft again. There might be a water bottle. Yes, there was something else that fell out of the backpack, but I didn't pay attention to it. I better start to become more aware of my surroundings. Not concern myself with how I got here. There it is a water bottle. Ah, it feels full. Okay, look around and not just at eye level. There, I see something that looks like a narrow sort of path going up the rock wall. I'll start there, maybe it goes to the green area. I see some rope up ahead lying on the beach. How did I get these burns on my wrist and forearms? Maybe I will need some rope. Okay, this is a nice length of rope. He starts his climb. He is vary aware of the present and knows nothing about his past. Yet

he is trying to recall how he got here now. And that is his mental predicament. He has ascended, on an angle of about thirty degrees, at least fifty feet but only sixteen feet vertically. He looks across the way, to the opposite canyon wall. He stops. Looks up and sees a way to climb upward. He does not know where that might lead too. He starts his climb, grabbing onto rock, making sure its solid before pulling himself up. He feels for foot holds. He studies the route so he doesn't find himself in a no return situation. He stops to ponder.

So this I have done before, it seems so automatic, and not new. It's as if I have been here before. Not here, in this canyon, but free climbing. Where? When? It does not matter now. I seem to have found a little ledge to rest and get my bearings. Ah, yes I can see a way to shimmy over to the tuff of green grass. Okay, let's go. "Easy pizzie", I got this. I got

this. I feel strong and one with the mountain. Mountain? Did I free climb mountains? When? Where? Oh, my right hand is in some mud. I need to find a better area to grasp. I slowly look and see a rock about 4 inches to the right of the mud. Oooh, that changes my balance. Ok can I shift my feet and left hand to maintain this solid hold I have on the rock. Yes, okay move the right hand, tense the fingers, pull up and continue to move up and to the right and yes! I am here, sitting in damp, muddy, wet earth! Eureka, a spring coming out of the rock. Water! Shadows have formed, the canyon is getting darker even though the sky is still visible above. The hole that lets in light is like a tunnel to heaven. I think this will be a good place to stay for the night. In the dry, soft grass. I wonder how chilled I will get. I can still feel the warmth of the sun that heats this canyon. The sun, a real life saver that nourishes this planet. So how did I get here? My daddy, that's who I can

recall right now. He being a preacher? God - Sun - Solar System - Earth. He preached the Bible and said God created everything, the entire universe. Wait, what is coming to me now? Big Bang? What is that? Seems like some sort of explosion? Who was with me in that raft?

I'll bet Joy knows and Harvey knows. I wonder if...JOY, JOY, HARRRrveeyyyy! He shouts and hears the echo reverberating but does not get an answer. His mind is tired of thought. The silence of this space quiets his mind for now and the peace is calming.

## Chapter 2

He awakes as the first light filters onto him. Like a special ray from heaven. The brilliant sunlight. All I know right now is to climb. I fill my bottle with spring water. The sun warms my body. The night wasn't too bad. I can see the raft from here. I can see up river just barely around the bend, where the water looks rough and punishing. As I peer down below, I associate the rough water with my anger. Sometimes I use anger to punish people. What I say and how I speak has an impact on others. Maybe I need to be kinder. I look up and see a new route to start this day. And I do what I know. I grab a crevice in the rock with my right hand, I lace my left hand over a protruding surface of rock and with my right foot I push off the ground and my left foot finds something to steady me. Now how did it know that there was a place to put that foot so I could gain upward propulsion? I am

being guided, by instinct. But why can I remember how to free climb but not what happened to me? Maybe that is not important right now. He goes up, and up, one methodical hold after another. Slow, always staying on a route that has a slight incline so he can rest into the canyon wall once in a while. The rough rock feels like a worn mattress, but comforting none the less. Better that than open space with nothing underfoot. What is this? A deep, vertical ravine with moisture in the crack of it. Wow, a God send! Now I am able to position my feet differently and maneuver like a crab. Like a crab that is escaping the frying pan. A story I heard long ago. The other crabs trying to pull him back into the pan. To live the life that is so predictable. Like the Johnathon Livingston Seagull story. Oh, is this some memory? I see more sky from here. Now the small hole is below me. I just see the small speck of river. This ravine feels safe. Where did everybody go? Who was grabbing

me when the raft capsized? Remember, who.... He screams, JOY, JOY, JOY HARRRVEYYY! The echo is not so loud now. He looks up and reaches for the sky. GOD, GOD save me! But who is God, a form? Maybe he is the Sun! Maybe he is that cloud that just passed overhead. Maybe HE is just something or someone to believe in? My instinct seemed to guide me on this route. I recall the wisdom my father told me. To follow my instinct. He used to say, "your instinct is the Divine voice that can show you the way when you are lost."

Ah, the sky is changing color. I best find a place for the night. Now, I must continue up this vertical ravine. And so he continues, and with each grip, and each movement he admires his body dynamic. The fingers rigid, gripping with strength. The veins and tendons causing ripples on the top of his hands. The forearms, are tense muscle. All in

a pulling motion. He feels his legs in action. All the muscular structure of his body working in unison. Then, he looks up and sees a rim of grass as he makes his next grasp. And his instinct has him scramble like a crab and he is flat on solid ground! He turns his head and looks up to his right. His fingers are scratching at dirt and pebbles. He pushes himself up and sees that he is on a path! A path to follow! And it is going up! He rolls over exhausted now. The sky turning dark. He closes his eyes. And his quiet mind breaths a soft thought of comfort, and compassion for himself. And gratitude for finding a path to contemplate, to follow. But for now, it is just breath. And deep relaxation.

Suddenly...

There are bright lights, he can't see as he is blinded. A voice startles him.

"Harvey, Harvey, you alright?"

"Is that you Joy? Your voice, I am so glad to hear your voice!"

"Harvey, did you fall asleep under the Mango Tree?"

"I'm not sure what happened. I am having a hard time to recall my experience."

"Oh, my love, looks like you have a scrape on top of your head. Did you hit it on the frame that holds up this Mango tree monument? Did you have any self realizations in this magical tree, Harvey?"

"Okay, turn the light out of my face Joy. I want to see all of you. Thanks. This is better. How long have I been inside this tree?"

I told you I wanted to hike some. But you insisted on staying in the tree trunk. So I hiked by myself. I saw a beautiful sunset."

"Joy, I think we should cancel the Grand Canyon raft trip we have planned."

THE END

### Author's Notes

The story relates to a very old Mango Tree that was turned into a monument and is perched on a heavy metal frame. One can crawl under the frame and stand inside this hallowed out trunk. There is a thick - main branch - that is also hallow and the end was once sawed off so that one can peer up through the hole and see the sky. It is displayed at a turnaround in Boddhi a place to hike along trails or up into the mountains of the Ekam properties. The new Lokaa Foundation office can also be found

near by. I had the opportunity to visit this special tree along with a "Dasa" who actually discovered this tree and saved it from getting sawed to pieces. He felt the ancient wisdom of the tree. As we contemplated and admired the outer appearance of this natural art form, one by one we were invited to spend some time inside the womb of this great tree. I observed others as they entered and exited the tree. Some people had to sit down, others had looks of awe and comments that didn't make sense to me. So I crawled under the frame and stood up, inside this tree. What I can recall about my short time in the womb was that I could not still my mind. I did not spend much time inside. When I was out and observed others again, all of a sudden my eye rested on the exterior of this gnarly trunk. I saw features of an Elephant head with a trunk in it's mouth as you would see an elephant eating. I saw baby Panda Bears climbing up towards the outstretched arm of the tree. I saw a Manatee

swimming out of the tree. I saw the uppermost neck of a Giraffe looking over the top of the Manatee. I saw a massive, slinky body and head of an Eel. I saw a Crocodile with mouth open and a bulging eye. I saw what appeared to be demons, something you might find in Dante's Inferno. And then I saw deep canyons with the sliver of a river at its bottom.

### Acknowledgements

One day I was at our locale printing shop in Livingston Montana. I spotted a spiral book that someone wrote and The Main Street Printers produced it. Well, I thought that to be a brilliant idea to save money on publishing. Then I got to thinking and next thing you know I was invited to write a weekly column of short stories. The idea is to invite other locale writers too. So I started with this story as my first endeavor. I am so happy to have this



opportunity and I thank Steph and the gang at The Main Street Printers. It's several months since I wrote this. I don't write the column anymore. Nobody took up the offer to write in the column. I got busy with writing other books. But the inspiration to go public with my writing gave me humbled confidence.

















