



Chapter 9: Deer Hunting at the McGrew Ranch

1968-1973

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Somehow, because I'm hiding from the police and forced to sort through these boxes to please my father, I can't stop thinking about all the wrongs of my childhood. Scottie constantly exploited me without any consequences. He could blame me and call me degrading names and my parents scolded me when I tried to stop him. Scottie was much more than mischievous and full of *snakes, snails, and puppy dog tails* as Mother liked to say. He was a spawn of the Devil. But when I was a skinny and shy little girl, I could do nothing except wonder why boys like Scottie and his buddies acted so mean.

My mind rattles with resentment. My heart throbs. My breathing becomes shallow and rapid. *Who do I resent most? My parents or God? Was I put on this planet just to delve out resentments? Do I hate my life? No. You did this to me. No. You did it to yourself. You're a pitiful poophead* I can hear my brother say when he was being nice to me.

During the times my father was between jobs, he sometimes took us camping and fishing at Glacier National Park or Yellowstone. But our main trip each year occurred in late September

or early October during the annual deer hunting campout at the McGrew ranch in Eastern Oregon, near the Strawberry Mountains and John Day. For most of those years Daddy drove a Rambler station wagon and pulled our '63 Shasta trailer-house that my grandparents had given us after they bought an Airstream in '65. When my entire family went on these hunting trips, the sleeping arrangements got rather crowded in that stupid little trailer-house. My parents slept on the foldout table, Philip and Charlie slept on the foldout couch at the back, Scottie and his friend got to sleep in the station wagon, and Tracy and I slept on the high bunk bed over the back couch. More precisely, Tracy slept at the edge and I slept crammed against the wall. The air was so stale I could barely breathe and sleep through the night. But I couldn't change the arrangements. One time I asked to sleep in my grandparents' Airstream but cousins were occupying all their extra beds. Then Daddy scolded me for being such a pest.

The drive from Butte to Pendleton, Oregon lasted ten hours. Whenever we passed the Pendleton Woolen Mill my father liked saying *That's where they make our red plaid hunting shirts*. During those drives, when my whole family came along, I spent endless hours sitting in the back seat between Tracy and Charlie. Mom sat up front with Philip, her baby boy, and Scottie and the friend he always got to bring along played with matchbox trucks in the back. They folded down the booster seat so they could pretend to be on a flat-bed truck or a motor boat, a space ship or whatever boys liked to imagine.

When Scottie and his friend got tired of running their little trucks across the back window ledge and over the wheel covers, they played guessing games. Scottie called one of these games "4-hole punch" after the Buick models that have 4 portholes to indicate the number of cylinders under the hood, at least that's how the boys would explain it. Sometimes Scottie asked me to play along. I usually didn't mind breaking away from my TV magazines about the Monkeys, the

Supremes, and Star Trek. And I liked it when Scottie was being nice to me. Tracy and Charlie were too old to join in the games and they pretty much kept to themselves. Charlie read *Boy's Life* or Dad's *Field and Streams* and Tracy read endless romance novels which she continued reading throughout the deer hunting week, usually on a lawn chair outside the Shasta trailer-house. Rarely, if ever, during these long drives to the McGrews, did Tracy or Charlie notice when Scottie was being mean to me. They pretty much ignored whatever was going on. And so did Mom and Dad.

The objective of 4-hole punch, Scottie explained, was to spot an old 4 punch Buick passing by, or a Cadillac, or whatever model the boys decided upon, and then whoever first spotted the selected car would yell "4-hole punch." The winner then got to punch the other players in the arm. It was a stupid boy's game but I played along. One time, Scottie's best friend Martin had come along on our trip and he told us to look for a '64 Buick Electra. I spotted one before the boys did and I yelled, "4-point Buck." No one laughed at my joke and Scottie disqualified me from the game. I always lost anyway and Scottie took pleasure in bopping my head or punching my arm a little too hard. He got away with it because we were playing a game and I had agreed to play along.

"Are we there yet?" Scottie and Philip would start complaining after we passed through Pendleton onto 396 south to John Day. I would quietly sit back because whenever I complained Daddy would say to me, "Nobody likes a whiner!" It was something he never said to the boys. And Scottie would echo whatever Moe said and then call me a crybaby, a tattler, a tag along—the list goes on and on.

Each year when we arrived at the McGrew ranch both Mom and Dad loved to remind us kids that we were close to the Oregon Trail although they never actually showed us this famous

wagon train road. The McGrew ranch stretched across thousands of hilly acres filled with scrub brush, juniper ridges, and Douglas fir valleys. Back in the 1920s, my mother's great uncle had ventured farther west than Montana and established the McGrew ranch. Lawrence and Ester McGrew owned the spread when I was small and I called them my aunt and uncle although they were really distant cousins. They collected rocks and had a rock polisher in their ranch house which they showed me during one of my trips. They even gave me some of their polished jaspers, agates, and red, green, and turquoise stones with mossy patterns.

On our way to the hunting campsite, where at least twenty McGrew and Davis families were staying in tents, campers, and trailer-houses, I was always the first one to spot a deer along the roadside and I did so from the middle of the back seat. I felt proud of this ability I had above everyone else. But no one seemed interested in that fact. Scottie would even mock me about it or claim to have seen the deer first. Or he'd say, "Lucy doesn't know anything about deer. And if she does, no one cares!"

But I did know about deer. In fourth grade, I wrote a report about the white tail, black tail, and mule deer from information in the school's World Book Encyclopedias. My teacher Mrs. Gifford had asked me to read my report aloud in class, after several students had read their own stories. Then the class voted on which was the best story. Of course, no one voted for mine because I was the least popular girl. The funny thing is that the very next week Mrs. Gifford asked another set of students to read their reports. She called on the most popular girl, Jan Talt who had long blond ringlets, to read her report but Jan hadn't written one so she privately asked me if she could read mine. I gave her my report about deer and the class voted her story as the best one because Jan Talt had read it. No one even realized it was the same story I had read the week before. Not even the teacher. I didn't feel too bad about this. In fact, I felt proud that the

class voted my story as the best even though nobody gave me credit for writing it. Throughout my school years I was kind of a nonentity but I did know about deer and I always spotted one before anyone else.

Before the week was up at the McGrew hunting camp, dozens of skinned deer were hanging from pine poles wedged in the Douglas firs or over pickup trucks. The carcasses, pelts, and deer heads attracted scads of wasps and flies and the campsite reeked of raw gamy venison. During the campfire meals at night all the hunters sat around eating boiled potatoes and fried venison liver and onions which I detested but my grandmothers forced me to eat it. "If you're going to hunt deer, you're going to eat liver and onions," they both would tell me.

The women at the camp did the cooking and the cleaning up and the men did the praying at the nightly campfire. Cousins Ed, Lawrence, Bill, and my father would read from their Bibles and lead prayers of thanks for the 4-point buck and doe. Afterward, they discussed the white tail deer they had missed that day or the one they killed and how they tracked it down and then fired the kill shot. They all wore Pendleton shirts and orange vests and caps to keep other hunters from mistaking them for deer, and they carried Remington and Winchester rifles and Bowie knives to gut the deer and make it lighter to drag back to camp. Even the women hunted and butchered their deer like pioneer women on the Oregon Trail. Both of my grandmothers hunted and so did my mother and her cousins Torchy, Wilma, Ruth, and Maisy. *Did the women drag their deer back to camp by themselves?* I don't remember how that worked. Tracy had refused to ever learn how to hunt. She was a beauty queen and hunting is a dirty and messy ordeal. Charlie tried it one year and didn't like it. But when I was little, I wanted to be a hunter and I used to say *I can't wait until I'm old enough to hunt* and my mother would reply *Not until you're at least sixteen and*

then Scottie would chime in with some degrading remark like *You're too stupid to hunt and if you did, you'd shoot yourself or someone else. Nitwit.*

WHO'S THE NITWIT NOW? YOU NITWIT FUCK! I think as I crumple the hunting pictures and throws them in a trash bag. They are fading anyway and it's not like I'm giving this stuff to my children. Siblings don't count. Parents don't matter. *At least mine never have.* I suddenly begin thinking about my present predicament. *Did I do something I can never undo? Did I hunt and kill a deer or two? Three? And why do I care about my fucked-up childhood? That's all in the past. I have to look ahead. At some kind of future. Some kind of goal. Having a baby would be nice. I'd like to be a mother. Brian! Do you hear me. I want your sperm. I want to have our love child.*

In 1973 I turned nine on October 9th. I started my period that year, earlier than most girls, and Mom got sick with MS and had to stay home from the deer hunting trip. Philip stayed with her because he was mommy's baby boy. Charlie and Tracy had already stopped going on our annual trips. I didn't want to go that year because Scottie was going along with Martin and no one else would be around. Scottie had been inappropriately touching me for perhaps two years. After he had tricked me into going down to the basement, I thought I would never let Scottie trick me again but he kept it up. He would corner me in the bathroom or in my bedroom while Tracy was talking on the kitchen phone and Philip was in front of the living room TV and our parents and Charlie were away. He'd tell me that I deserved what he was doing to me because I was a stupid girl. It made no sense, and yet, Scottie made me feel guilty, ashamed, and worthless deep inside. Whenever it happened, all I could do was pretend that it wasn't happening because if I resisted or told on him, Scottie threatened to kill me and I believed that he would. I was

afraid of him and I had no one to help me. No one to turn to but God and many times I asked God that my brother die, but he didn't die.

Mom forced Dad to take me along that year. She apparently didn't want me around it now seems to me. *For some reason no one could love me because I was just a stupid, pathetic little girl who twisted around the truth. No. That's not what happened! Whenever I told the truth about what was happening, they gutted me like a deer each and every time.*

During that fateful trip, Scottie and Martin egged each other on with "boys will be boys" ideas. I tried to ignore them and hide from them among the relatives but I only made Scottie try even harder to torment me. One time, he and his buddy cornered me in the Shasta trailer-house and made me eat a piece of raw venison. "If you don't eat it," Scottie threatened, "I'll tell Dad you said 'fuck.'" Scottie and Martin smirked when I took a bite of the slimy, gamy red meat. I spat it out and ran to hide in the juniper scrub outside of camp but I could hear the boys laughing behind me. "Now you'll get worms, dipshit," they hollered.

On the day I turned nine, a huge incident happened before I could even celebrate with the cake grandma Davis baked for me in her Airstream trailer. It was early afternoon and a few hunters had returned to camp and were skinning their deer on the back of pickup trucks. Because I thought Scottie and Martin were catching salamanders upstream in the brook that flowed near camp, I decided to walk in the other direction and collected bouquets of cattail reeds in marshy places.

With a Bowie knife I found next to a deer carcass, I cut a cattail reed with a pod that was about to burst. I rolled up my pant legs and in my flipflop thongs I waded down the cold stony brook while blowing the cattail fluff and pretending it was my magic wand. The white feathery

seeds fluttered into golden aspens trees that rattled in the breeze and I asked Jesus to grant me as many wishes as I could make.

When I reached a hillside ridge overlooking the stream, something splashed in the water two feet before me. At first, I thought it was a jumping frog or a salamander but then I looked toward the ridge and saw my brother and Martin. “Don’t you see me?” I yelled. I couldn’t believe they would try to injure me for fun. But they kept hurling rock missiles that splashed water on me until one hit my forehead and made me bleed. I screamed and ran back to camp.

The incident ruined my ninth birthday because my father and uncle Lawrence had to rush me to the emergency room in Pendleton for stitches. When we returned to camp Daddy acted more upset with me for interrupting the evening and being a pest than he was with Scottie and Martin who claimed they hadn’t seen me because I hadn’t been wearing an orange vest.

Early the next morning, Daddy decided to take Scottie out hunting with him. He claimed he wanted to start teaching his son how to hunt deer but I believe Daddy was just trying to keep Scottie away from me. Martin stayed in camp and fished at the stream because Daddy didn’t want the responsibility of teaching someone else’s kid how to hunt. I watched my father and brother head up the juniper ridge then I helped wash the breakfast dishes before Grandma Davis headed out on the hunt.

Later in the morning, I decided to walk down the ranch road not far from camp and explore the grassy hills. I was hoping to see a golden eagle or a prairie falcon and find some unusual rocks that I could give to Lawrence and Esther for their polishing machine. I didn’t want to play at the stream because I knew Martin was there.

As I walked down the dirt road, I pretended to be Sacagawea on the Lewis and Clark expedition. Every school child in Montana knows Lewis and Clark traveled through Ft. Peck,

Great Falls, and Missoula, Montana, near my grandparents' farms, and on to Oregon even before pioneers established the wagon train route known as the Oregon Trail.

After about fifteen minutes, I thought I heard a rattle snake and I became worried. Then I remembered Daddy warning me that wolves, bears, and mountain lions sometimes wander onto the ranch from the Malheur National Forest or the Strawberry Mountains. But I had assumed he was teasing me or going along with something Scottie might have said. Then I noticed turkey vultures circling the sky overhead and I stopped to carefully listen for a predator and I began to feel afraid and powerless against these wild beasts.

Suddenly, I heard a car approaching from down the road and I thought it might be Lawrence but it wasn't the McGrew's jeep. It was a large green 4 door Land Rover and I assumed it was someone from a neighboring ranch because I didn't recognize the vehicle. I worried that maybe I had wandered off the McGrew property even though I hadn't meant to go very far.

I'm not sure why but I ran up the hillside to hide behind the sagebrush. Maybe I felt shy because I wasn't used to strangers and didn't want to answer their questions. From my hiding place I watched the Land Rover pass by while the occupants stared at me. When they were far enough away, I ran down the hill and decided to return to camp because the encounter had rattled me. I'd been feeling content in my own little make-believe world and then these strangers had unexpectedly come along.

As soon as I reached the road back to camp, I heard the first rifle shot. This wasn't too odd because the sound of distant shooting went on throughout the mornings and early afternoons. But hunters usually trekked along the ridges and down the mountain glens where the deer were grazing and the bucks were rutting. I didn't think anyone hunted along the ranch road so close to

our campsite. But then I heard another, louder rifle pop. A hunter, I feared, was mistaking me for a deer. I wasn't wearing an orange vest or hunting cap because I hadn't intended to walk very far from camp; I had just gotten carried away playing like I was Sacagawea. One way or the other, I knew I was in big trouble. Either someone would shoot me or Daddy would kill me for not wearing an orange vest and cap.

When the next bullet rushed by my head in a flash, I screamed, "Hey! I'm here. I'm a person not a deer." I climbed back up the hillside into the sage and brittle brush and hid beside a pile of lava rocks. I again yelled out my presence but then another shot ricocheted nearby me and blew the soil into a plume. At that moment I knew someone was intentionally shooting at me and I believed I was going to die. I fell to the ground and remained motionless and the shooting stopped. But I stayed where I was for about an hour when a cousin drove along in Esther's jeep and took me back to camp.

Because of my failure to wear an orange vest, I hesitated to tell my father that someone had shot at me but I finally had to admit it because if I didn't, I believed that whoever wanted to shoot me would try it again. "Someone tried to kill me," I said to Moe while glancing at Scottie who still wore his hunting attire. He was standing by the food table making a plate of food with his buddy Martin. He looked at me and winked, as if to say *You're right. Stupid. I shot the bullets at you!*

I knew in that moment that Scottie was out to kill me for sport or to keep me from telling someone that he was touching me inappropriately. And I knew that he was going to torment me even more for looking at him as I just did.

Of course, Moe scolded me for wandering off without wearing a vest. "Are you dense?" he asked. "I already warned you about this! You have no one to blame but yourself."

“No, she’s not dense. She’s an airhead!” I can still hear Scottie saying and then laughing along with his buddy Martin.

My father discussed the incident with the other hunters and they all concluded that the shots were unintentional and that I had to be more careful and always wear an orange vest and cap even while in camp. Moe then restricted me to the Shasta trailer-house for the rest of the trip. But before I could even make up my bed on the top bunk that night, Grandma McGrew returned to camp after a visit at the ranch house with Lawrence and Esther. She had heard from the neighbors in the Land Rover that *a little girl who sounded a lot like Lucy* was hiding from them when they drove down the road. “How long were you wandering around in the range of fire?” Grandma asked me with concern, “What’s going on with you, Lucy?”

I felt trapped with no way to escape. No one took my side and apparently, I was at fault for not wearing the warning vest. “I’m not always wrong about everything I do!” I remember yelling at my grandmother and father. I felt like I was grabbing a rattlesnake by the neck. But my efforts to stand up for myself only made Moe angrier because I was talking back and being smart.

“Am I ever sorry that you came along,” he said to me. “You’ve been nothing but a problem without your mother around to help out.”

For a moment, I wondered what my father even meant. Was he sorry I was even born? Additionally, when my mother had been along on previous hunting trips, she had rarely interacted with me. She went out hunting with everyone else and when she was back in camp her attention went to Philip and to her cousins, uncles, aunts, and parents, everyone else but me. “If Mom were on this trip,” I remember protesting, “nothing different would be happening concerning me.”

“Quit sassing,” Moe yelled, “or I’ll throw you off a bridge like that lesbian did to those two kids.” I knew Daddy was talking about Jeannace June Freeman who killed her girlfriend’s young children in the early sixties by tossing them off the bridge at the Crooked River Canyon. It was a haunting and notorious story that Daddy used to tell me just to scare me into behaving.

“But I didn’t do anything wrong,” I protested. “Except go for a walk!”

“Next year you’re staying home!” Moe snapped.

“Good. I didn’t want to come on this deer hunting trip anyway,” I yelled because I was terribly upset at Scottie, his buddy, and at my dad for never taking my side.

My father then walked away, leaving me to stew in my hive of wasps, as he liked to say whenever I became upset like I was.

I never went on another deer hunting trip after the one in 1973. Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to keep away from Scottie until I was fourteen and he left home for some job, I’m guessing, or for a girl he met. I didn’t care what happened to him then and I certainly don’t care now. He is gone. Out of my life for good. Except, it seems that certain terrible memories from childhood are never really gone for good. They have been permanently stamped in the head like a stain on a delicate blouse and if you try to scrub it out, you only ruin the material.