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The Ranch

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The road was dirt and gravel. It dead-ended at the ranch where the two of us lived in the foothills of the Colorado Rockies. A blizzard that had rolled in from the mountains two days earlier was blowing like God's wrath. The road wouldn't be cleared anytime soon."

Cover Page Footnote
The Ranch

The road was dirt and gravel. It dead-ended at the ranch where the two of us lived in the foothills of the Colorado Rockies. A blizzard that had rolled in from the mountains two days earlier was blowing like God's wrath. The road wouldn't be cleared anytime soon.

Coffee was hot on the stove when I awoke; Steve was already at work in the animal shed. The chores were light, mostly just taking care of the animals and keeping fences and buildings from falling down. We had brought in a cord of fire wood the week before; I remember sweating in the hot sun as we stacked it. Now we were wearing our winter gear and stoking the small cast iron stove in the kitchen. The weather was Colorado cold. Sometimes we put antifreeze in the toilet or crawled under the floor with a torch to unfreeze the water pipes. After the chores our time was our own for a few hours. Steve wrote while I either read or walked.

On this day I walked, braving the storm to again explore what felt like an Old West museum. The ranch had the remains of anything that had ever been on the place in the last hundred years. It had an ancient horse drawn wagon, old harnesses, sheds, and corrals. A truck lay derelict. Tools rusted. Fences and buildings tottered. Whatever hopes and dreams that other people had brought here were gone now, leaving only a clutter of artifacts, nothing for recorded history, just evidence of a life.

After wading the drifts for a couple of hours I came to the irrigation ditch and the foot bridge that spanned it. Wind had blown the span clear of snow. I crossed to the middle and sat. Legs dangling over the edge of the planks, I hunched my shoulders against the cold and rested.

The bridge was ridiculous. It was about eighteen inches wide, forty feet long, and twenty feet above the water. Made of the poorest scrap lumber, it was a miracle of endurance. Structural integrity had nothing to do with its continued existence. Someone's "belief" that it was a bridge must have accounted for its survival. I sat there trying to believe that faith was keeping me out of the water below. I couldn't do it. In reality I depended on the bridge. I rested briefly till supper time, then headed in.

Once back in the kitchen I thawed by the stove, which had a small kettle of stew bubbling on top. While having dinner we talked about what Steve
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Once back in the kitchen I thawed by the stove, which had a small kettle of stew bubbling on top. While having dinner we talked about what Steve
had written. Questioning and probing, he took life more seriously than I did. The conversation was often intense. He spoke of meaning and possibilities; I spoke of today. The words he used were plain enough, yet the essence eluded me. I hung on, listening as long as I could, then reminded him that it was getting dark and we had to feed the animals.

Once in the shed we worked quickly. We were loosing the light but still had to search for the pony who was in one of the pastures. She didn't like the shed; she had to be out in the thick of it, no food and no shelter. We found her in a gully standing tail first to the wind. She greeted the arm loads of hay we brought with enthusiasm. We all just stood there for awhile keeping each other company, and since she seemed happy right where she was, we decided to let her stay.

The wind lashed us as we headed back to the line shack. We couldn't see more than a few yards because of the blowing snow and I wasn't sure which way to go. Steve said "Follow me" and strode off with his particular blend of strength and purpose, straight into that swirling white. I followed, of course. After all, that was why I had traveled across the country to see him. My own strength and purpose had vanished sometime before and luck wasn't going to see me through.

We made the line shack at dark. Steve loaded up the stove and cut the damper so the fire would do a slow burn to last the night. We talked quietly until I began to nod off. I climbed into my sleeping bag on the couch. From the middle room I could see the soft light from the kitchen table as Steve continued to read and write, late into the night. I closed my eyes, my sleep pounded with dreams.

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Slope Dope

The temp. is 24 outside
The windchill makes it 18.
Rushing down through powdery paths,
I follow the trail of the precedent.

My hands grasp the pole’s grip.
Totally controlled plants.
Each corner I maneuver is perfect.
The dissected circles show experience.

My bent knees rest on the boots.
Skis straight ahead are parallel.
Once into a turn they break slightly apart.
The gap distance shows the degree of the curve.

On the WALL, I see a mogul.
As I helicopter over it and land
My body is comfortably numb.
My eyes water with another skiing high.

Polly Lynne Christina Fitzgerald