Ravine

E. Charles Kurtz

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

"Starting in Utica, High Point Trail winds down thirteen miles and intersects with County Road #27. There are curves, hills and dark, green mountains and Theodore Dunday knew he should keep his new Mustang GT around forty, but mental temperament has quite a bit to do with driving style and he was simply not in the mood to keep it under the limit; Dunday pulled on his lights as the Mustang jumped up over fifty. It had been a long day and he wanted to get home."

Cover Page Footnote
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Dunday's meeting with the people from Ridge Paving, Inc. had not gone well. There was just no way that he could deliver twenty-five tons of gravel to Rochester by April 30th. They hadn't been happy about that. Dunday hadn't been happy either. That's just the way things go sometimes, Dunday reflected as he pushed his car around another curve and cursed as it began to snow.

Fluffy snowflakes settled onto Dunday's windshield, immediately turning into little droplets of water cascading down the incline. Dunday flicked on his wipers and thought about dropping his speed a little. *Fuck it!*

New York State is beautiful — summer, winter, spring and fall. The area around Utica consists of mountains and valleys, with tiny spots of villages dotting the country side. At night, driving through the hills, little splashes of light mark the isolated farms and homes. The mountains are home to a people with a little slower life. Dunday enjoyed the solitude. He loved the scenery; he loved driving at night. *He hated the snow."

Three minutes away from his driveway it happened. If he had left that meeting ten seconds later he would have missed it. But he didn't.

Most accident victims remember little about the actual incident. At least that's what Dunday had heard. You couldn't prove it by him though. For Dunday it was like a slow motion replay on Monday Night Football. And every detail burned into his brain for eternity.

"*Shit!*

The only illumination came from the Mustang's headlights, and he didn't see the deer until it was there. *Right there.*

The front left of the GT hit the right front of the deer, nearly tearing its leg off. Dunday could see it was a buck. *Nice rack,* he thought, as the edge of his hood opened a six inch gash on the deer's shoulder. Dark, red blood spurted out in a stream and changed his car into a two tone. The force of the impact drove the deer up into the air — straight into Dunday's windshield, and *Dunday.*

Dunday watched these events unfold, yet felt as if he were simply a spectator. He knew the deer was going to hit the windshield; he knew the car was sliding into a skid toward the ravine to his right. He knew, but he didn't quite understand.

A car's windshield is built to withstand a certain degree of antagonistic force, but not a two hundred and ten pound buck. The force of the car's forward motion propelled it right into the air-borne deer, even as Dunday's foot jammed the brake pedal into the floorboard.

The deer came through head first. Ten sharp horns rammed towards Dunday's chest. Dunday lunged — left — toward the door. Two of the spikes plunged savagely into his right shoulder, tearing up muscle and breaking his collarbone. The same instant his bone broke, his car left the road.

Ten feet down the steep ravine Dunday's car hit the first of several trees. The driver's side door flew open and Dunday separated from both the car and the wildly kicking deer. He saw the door open, felt himself going out and felt the warmth of his blood soaking his chest and arm.

As he fell, Dunday watched the car door close. There was a large part of Dunday's brain which understood that it would have been easier if his leg hadn't still been inside when this happened. But again, that's the way the night was going. So far, he had one business deal down the tubes, a totaled car still doing twenty-five down a steep hill (*sans driver*), a broken leg, a bleeding busted shoulder, and it wasn't even eight o'clock yet.

Dunday's GT hit a large pine and began doing a series of rolls that would have been interesting to watch, except Dunday was busy looking at the two birch trees he was about to hit.

There are usually good points and bad points to any given situation: the trees broke his fall farther down the ravine; they also broke his other leg — in two places. Mercifully, Dunday passed out before the pain came.

Dunday came to sometime around seven-thirty the next morning. He was fairly sure he was about to hit the ground and looked about. Dunday gathered it didn't find this half-dead man particularly interesting because it turned and scampered across the forest floor. *Then the pain came.*

*Christ! No one can live with pain like this,* Dunday screamed to himself as he clenched his teeth and watched his knuckles turn from blue to white.

Using his left arm, Dunday pushed his back up against one of the birch trees. The sun, still low in the sky, began to warm up the ravine. It appeared as if it would be a beautiful April day, Dunday thought. *If only you live to see it, Teddie!*

Grimacing, Theodore Dunday began to take inventory of what was left of his body. His right arm was useless; his shoulder felt as if a white hot poker was doing a fox trot inside. The arm itself was completely numb. His left leg...
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There are usually good points and bad points to any given situation: the trees broke his fall farther down the ravine; they also broke his other leg — in two places. Mercifully, Dunday passed out before the pain came.

Dunday came to sometime around seven-thirty the next morning. He was fairly sure his feet and hands were frostbitten, but the combination of a half inch accumulation and a thirty-two degree overnight low had stopped the bleeding from his shoulder.

Dunday watched as a gray squirrel ran down the trunk of a tree about ten feet away. The squirrel stopped when it got to the ground and looked about. Dunday gathered it didn't find this half-dead man particularly interesting because it turned and scamppered across the forest floor. *Then the pain came.*

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Using his left arm, Dunday pushed his back up against one of the birch trees. The sun, still low in the sky, began to warm up the ravine. It appeared as if it would be a beautiful April day, Dunday thought. *If only you live to see it, Teddie!*

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had two clean breaks of the fibula. Flashes of black pain shot upward through his pelvis and pooled deep inside his lower abdomen. Dunday shifted his weight a tiny bit to get a better vantage on his other leg. What he saw made his eyes flash — black/white/black/stars. Don’t faint now! Not now, you might not wake up, Teddie, he thought, slowly swallowing a mouthful of dry spittle and forcing himself to look at his leg again.

His stylish, brown slacks were matted with dirt and drying blood. Theoin had ripped out and he could see the white of his bone sticking out through his pelvis and pooled deep inside his lower abdomen. Dunday saw made his eyes flash — black / white / black / stars. Don’t faint now! Not now, you would have bled to death for sure. I wonder if that wouldn’t have been for the best.

The sun was burning off the light snow of the previous night as it rose into the mid-day sky. Dunday blinked. The sun was in his eyes when he woke up. He hadn’t even realized he had fainted until he saw how far up Sol was in the trees. He thought the branches took on a rather surrealistic look as they moved in the breeze, each tree melding together to form a woven cover for the forest.

“Ah — Mr. Gray! I see you have returned,” Dunday said, watching his squirrel bounce along a storm felled tree. Then the pain came. Always the pain.

The previously gorgeous jet-black Mustang GT had come to rest fifty feet down at the bottom of the ravine. It was blocking a small stream that cascaded down a succession of slate flats. Pent up water was beginning to form a growing pool behind the GT. Think there’s anything in there that can help you, Teddie? Fuck — the way you’re busted up that car might as well be in Madrid.

The sun was gliding slowly through the afternoon and Dunday was beginning to wonder why no one had seen the wreckage and gotten him some GOD DAMN FUCKING ASSISTANCE DOWN HERE.

Teddie shimmied his way around the birch using his one good appendage as a pivot. Wave after wave of the old, familiar, black pain broke through his brain. Almost went out again didn’t you, Teddie. Let’s not do that again, he thought, finally settling back against the tree.

From his new position Dunday could look up at High Point Trail. Looking up, Dunday began to cry. It started with one or two tears rolling down his cheeks and escalated into heavy sobs. The road that he had so rudely left some nineteen hours earlier — Nineteen Hours! — was straight up. No great wonder no one had stopped. No one can see me! I’m going to fuckin’ die down here!

Roger Burt sat down on his breeze way steps, just outside the kitchen door, and slipped his feet into his L.L. Bean boots. They were the nuts for fishin’, and it looked like tonight would be dandy for his favorite — rainbows.

Trout season had been open for two days and after work Roger had gotten his limit on both of them. Like many of his fellow sportsmen Roger Burt had his “luck spot”. He finished lacing up his boots and allowed his mind to drift towards that perfect trout pool.

Roger and Rosemary had bought their farm three years ago. Roger had been a good boy, working for Lambert & Lambert, Syracuse’s largest (and best) law firm, for forty years. Then, after retirement, they had bought the farm.

Five months ago, the good people of Gateway had seen fit to draft Roger as their overwhelming choice for Town Justice. He was extremely well liked and respected. So much for a quiet retirement. But he enjoyed his new job. Not much went on in Gateway anyway, so he was only busy with his duties a few hours a day. That still left plenty of time for picking blackberries with Rosemary or taking Charlie, their Lab, for a stroll. And, of course — fishin’.

Rosemary had loved the quaint old farmhouse; Roger had needed that little trout stream that wound back and forth through the bottom land; Ms. Tasker had been a very happy real estate agent. It had been her third sale that month.

Roger grabbed his trusty, old, bamboo fly rod off of its hooks under the kitchen window in the breeze way, picked up his tackle box, and strolled out the door.

“Be home in a couple of hours, Honey,” he called back over his shoulder, just as the door slammed shut.

“Come on, Charlie. Let’s go find some more of those feisty rainbows.”

Charlie looked up from his spot under a big oak in the side yard. His body felt every day of the thirteen years he had spent going fishin’ with The Man was stretching it awake from one of several afternoon naps.

Going fishin’ with The Man was one of the few treats Charlie had to look forward to these days. Charlie and Roger had both given up birds a couple of years earlier. The last time out Rosemary had thought they were both going to croak after they had gotten home from a day in the fields, and that had been that. Most people thought Roger wore the pants in the family, but when Rosemary’s foot hit the floor — it stayed.

Now, from one of the kitchen windows, Rosemary watched her “two boys” trudge across the back field and her heart gently warmed.

“Lets try that pool near the big willow tonight. What do you say, boy,” Roger said as the pair neared the stream.

“Rooof!”, Charlie replied as enthusiastically as possible.
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His stylish, brown slacks were matted with dirt and drying blood. The inseam had ripped out and he could see the white of his bone sticking out of a gash a couple of inches below his knee. The meat of his leg, around the protruding bone, looked like a piece of tripe someone had left out for three or four weeks. The skin was broken and bruised all around his leg where the door had slammed it.

Well Teddie, you've really done it this time, chum. Good thing it was cold last night or you would have bled to death for sure. I wonder if that wouldn't have been for the best.

The sun was burning off the light snow of the previous night as it rose into the mid-day sky. Dunday blinked. The sun was in his eyes when he woke up. He hadn't even realized he had fainted until he saw how far up Sol was in the trees. He thought the branches took on a rather surrealistic look as they moved in the breeze, each tree melding together to form a woven cover for the forest.

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Twenty feet further along Roger pulled up with a start.
“Damnedest thing, Honey,” he said twenty minutes later, as he pulled off his boots at the kitchen table, oblivious to the mud tracked all over the floor. “Never heard of a stream drying up in the spring. Did you?”

The sun had gone down about two hours earlier and Teddie was getting cold. Bone cold. And some of them were out in the breeze enjoying the night air.

Shortly after dusk, Teddie had become certain that if he didn’t get his ass up to the road he really was going to die. Dead certain!

It had been a long afternoon. The longest of his life. The longest in anyone’s life. Fucking long time!

He had gone out again when he had tried to use the belt from his coat and some birch bark to splint up his right leg. The only thing was, he had had to get his bones and the tripe back inside the skin before he could do it. It had been after he pushed down, with all his remaining strength, on what yesterday had been a working leg, that he had gone into never, never land. Almost worked, too. But the bone had popped back out while he (and Peter) had been flying around. It was bleeding again. And the pain. Always the pain.

Teddie tilted his head up toward the road and a fresh jolt of the old, black pain shot through his shoulder like a bullet leaving the muzzle of a .30/.30. From where he sat the twenty-five feet up to the top of the ravine looked like Mt. Everest. Twenty-five feet. I should be able to make that, he thought.

With a heavy heart, not to mention seventy pounds of broken, bleeding, useless legs, Teddie started up.

Three seconds later it became glaringly obvious that this simply was not going to work. He had moved two out of three hundred inches, and his whole body burned with a black fire. His legs hurt, his shoulder hurt, he had a headache worthy of Godzilla, and he had begun to wonder if maybe he hadn’t broken a couple of ribs too.

Teddie was getting tired. Real tired. Dead tired! It was 8:05 and time for bed. “Night, night, dear,” Teddie heard his mother say. “Sleep tight. Don’t let the bed bugs bite.”

Teddie went out again, but not for beer and a pizza.

“Yeah Mark, dry as a bone,” Roger said into the phone.
Rosemary could hear Mark’s muffled voice coming from the receiver and she shot Roger an inquisitive face.

“O.K., I’ll see you tomorrow, after breakfast. Say about nine, nine-thirty.
— Yeah. Bye,” Roger hung up the phone and turned toward his wife who sat at the kitchen table with a cup of de-cafe and a slice of dry toast.

“Mark and I are going to hike up in the morning and see if we can find the trouble. Probably a tree fell down up there where the stream winds around High Point Trail. Those woods are pretty old.”

“Well I’ll pack you two a couple of sandwiches and some coffee. And don’t you go moving any trees. That’s young people’s work,” Rosemary said, getting up from the table and pushing in her chair. She continued as she stepped across to the sink with her dirty dishes, “If you two find anything you just call Tom Sheffield down at the sheriff’s and let them take care of it.”

Rosemary Burt looked over and saw her husband standing by the phone, lost in thought. My man is getting older, she thought. Christ, he’s getting white hairs in his ears now!

Standing over the sink, Rosemary lost her grip on the cup and saucer. She looked down just in time to see the bone china shatter in the sink.

Theodore Dunday had never been sure of how he felt about woods at night. Now he was sure. They sucked! The ground sucks, the trees suck, the sky sucks, the animal noises really suck.

Teddie was pretty certain that it was going to get light soon, but he wasn’t positive. Time had become somewhat discontinuous. Why didn’t I ever get married, he thought. Then someone would miss me. Nobody will miss me until next week. Salesmen sometimes don’t check in for days. My secretary won’t get worried until long about Tuesday or Wednesday. I’ll be as dead as that deer down there by Tuesday or Wednesday. Fuck it — you’ll be dead by tonight, Teddie.

Teddie had not gotten a restful night sleep. Pain had woken him up a couple of times. Always the pain. And then the coyote had come.

Somewhere in his foggy, pain-racked brain Teddie had been aware of his mother shaking him, trying to wake him up. Only it wasn’t Teddie’s mother. It was a coyote brought in by the smell of blood in the air.

The coyote took a couple of hesitant steps backward as Dunday became conscious. Teddie could just make out the shape in the dark. Then it growled.

Teddie had been scared. Real scared. Scared to death he was going to die. Not that he minded that so much. In fact, it almost looked like a pleasant change of scenery at this point. But not like this. He didn’t want to die in this monster’s teeth.

He picked up a rock that had been digging into his backside anyway, and almost passed out again when he moved. Black, black plain flew up his pelvis into his stomach. Hey! My legs don’t hurt! Of course they don’t hurt you shit head — they’re frozen solid.
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It had snowed again while he had been out and a soft blanket of white powder covered the ground — and Teddie.

He threw the rock; *Hi Peter, how's Captain Hook?*

Teddie must not have been out too long because when he came around he could just see the outline of the coyote slinking away towards the deer carcass.

“That’s right, fucker. Take the deer. This ones not dead yet,” Teddie mumbled, not able to generate much in a way of vocal power. No food and no water for what — one day, two days. He couldn’t remember. His mouth felt as dry as electric heat.

Teddie could hear the coyote ripping away at the deer’s flesh. Better you than me fella, he thought. *Serves you right for not looking both ways before you cross the street.*

Then he was out again. *Peter, I can fly!* That had been when, Teddie thought, an hour ago — two. Who the fuck knows? Who the fuck cares?

Mr. Gray was taking his morning stroll, except it wasn’t quite morning yet. He ran down a tree and jumped, from four feet up, onto the forest floor, landing in a russle of leaves, then scurrying away. God Damn squirrel sounds like a Mack truck in these woods at night, Teddie thought.

Then the pain; *always the pain.*

Teddie didn’t think he could take it much longer. It just wasn’t worth it. Why fight it. He knew no one was going to find him, and there was no way in fuckin’ hell he was going to make it to the road. Why fight it? Let it go. *Just let it go.*

“Roger! There’s a God Damn car in the middle of the steam. No wonder no water’s gettin’ down to our places.”

“It looks like it was a pretty good crash,” Roger replied. I wonder why we didn’t hear about it, he thought, as he moved up the left side of the ravine, watching his step in the snow, so he didn’t fall down and break his neck.

They had started out from Roger’s farm at nine forty-five. The first half of a mile or so had been easy going. Roger and Mark had followed the stream bed as it wound through Roger’s land. The going had gotten much harder, and much slower, when they had started up the ravine that cut its way down the mountain.

They had tried to stay near the stream bed, but after Mark had slipped they had opted for the top left of the ravine, where it flattens out into a rolling curve stretching three or four hundred yards over to the next ravine.

Then they found the car.

Roger and Mark picked their way down the side of the ravine. Roger slipped once and he thought he caught a quick smirk flash over Mark’s face, but he wasn’t sure.

“Wow, Mark. One would think we would of heard something about this,” Roger said as they got down to the car.

“Yeah, nice car too. Shame.”

“I wonder if anyone was hurt,” Roger asked.

“If they were in the car when it did this they’re probably dead as a door nail, Mark replied, getting up on his tiptoes to look into the side window. “Yeah. But we would have heard.”

Roger jumped from rock to rock across the stream bed that was beginning to fill up again from a small slip stream around the new dam.

“I wonder what happened to the driver,” Roger muttered, as he glanced over the car at Mark.

“Beautiful set of wheels. Bet this sucker’d do one sixty on straight way.”

Roger turned and looked up at the road. “Look at those marks on those birch trees over there,” Roger cried, taking two or three more steps up the right side of the ravine. “They must be fifteen feet up.”

Mark gazed up to where Roger was pointing. “Hell of a crash,” he murmured, moving around the low side of the car.

Roger was edging his way up the slope when he found the deer.

“Mark, there’s a dead deer over here. It looks like something has been at it, too. It’s pretty beat up.”

“Think that’s what happened? The car hit the deer,” Mark asked, coming abreast of Roger.

“Don’t know. Possible,” Roger said absently. He looked up towards the birches, then higher — up to the road, then back at the birches. And then . . . he saw it.

“OH NO!!” Roger screamed, bounding up the ravine with the urgency of driven fear. He could hear Mark behind him, asking what was the matter, but he couldn’t answer. Not yet. Not until he knew. Not until he saw. Not until . . .

Roger Burt’s face drained of every drop of blood, his arms fell limply to his sides making an odd slapping noise against his jeans as they landed.

There, below him, lay the body of Theodore Sunday. *May God have mercy on his soul; he hadn’t had any on his mind and body.*

Mr. Gray pranced across the snow covered leaves, jumped onto a tree and chattered.

THE END
It had snowed again while he had been out and a soft blanket of white powder covered the ground — and Teddie.

He threw the rock; Hi Peter, how’s Captain Hook?

Teddie must not have been out too long because when he came around he could just see the outline of the coyote slinking away towards the deer carcass.

“That’s right, fucker. Take the deer. This ones not dead yet,” Teddie mumbled, not able to generate much in a way of vocal power. No food and no water for what — one day, two days. He couldn’t remember. His mouth felt as dry as electric heat.

Teddie could hear the coyote ripping away at the deer’s flesh. Better you than me fella, he thought. Serves you right for not looking both ways before you cross the street.

Then he was out again. Peter, I can fly!

That had been when, Teddie thought, an hour ago — two. Who the fuck knows? Who the fuck cares?

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There, below him, lay the body of Theodore Dunday. May God have mercy on his soul; he hadn’t had any on his mind and body.

Mr. Gray pranced across the snow covered leaves, jumped onto a tree and chattered.

THE END