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Walking Out

By David Quammen

You have a good year?
Uh, yeah. Sure
well, you sure grew some.
This year we have a moose tag.
A moose.
Yeah. I got
one picked out.
A bull.
I stalked him for two weeks.
Up there.
At the crazies.
Way up.
There's still
plenty of time to scare up
some grouse before dark.
Come on, David.
Put your legs into it.
Let's go!
We're burning daylight.
Remember, David, what did
I tell you about grouse?
I don't know.
Grouse are stupid and slow.
Not like ducks or grebes.
They even sound stupid.
Not like a quail, huh?
Come on. Let's hear
your best quail.
I really don't remember how.
Of course you do.
You were getting good
at it last year.
Louder.
Louder.
Loud enough for me to know
where you are
if we get separated.
It's how hunters say, "I'm here"
without tipping off the prey.
Your mother.
How is she?
Uh, I don't know.
She's... Alright.
Are you friends with her?

Am I friends with her?
Um. Yeah. I guess.
Is she still a beautiful lady?
I don't know.
What do you mean,
you don't know?
Of course you know.
Yeah, she's still a
beautiful lady, I guess.
She tell you
any messages for me?
Yeah. She..
Said that I should..
I should send you her love.
Well, thank you, David.
That's kind of you to say.
The next one's yours.
We're not going home
until you get
your first bird.
Now!
Find him.
Get behind him.
Come on up on him.
Come on up on him.
You blinked.
David! David!
It's alright, relax
and get your dinner.
Come on.
Breathe.
Safety.
Don't close your eyes.
You can't quit.
It's hard, I know.
Then it gets easier.
Alright?
All of a sudden
it gets very easy.
It's not easy.
It'll never be easy.
You'll get a bird.
I know you will.
Just use your muscle memory.

Easy, easy.
You hit him.
- You sure?
- Yeah, I'm sure.
You winged him.
He faltered and dropped.
I don't understand it.
You crippled him.
He couldn't have gone far.
I probably just didn't hit him.
You hit it, David.
I don't know how
you couldn't see that.
You never leave
what you shot behind.
If you had a dog, we could
find it right away.
We had a dog when I was little.
Why don't you have one now?
Since you're..
You know...
Already alone.
Isn't that what dogs are for?
I don't know what
dogs are for, David.
All I know is I don't give
that much love
to a creature
who would only live
a dozen or so years.
That bird must have
run off and hidden itself
to die in the darkness.
I'm sorry.
You used to sleep like a puppy
in the crook of my arm.
I remember that day.
It's like a memory of a memory.
Yeah.
That whole damn set-up
was your mother's idea.
She even got me to put
gunk in my hair.
That's a good picture

of grandpa.

- Did you take that?

- Mm-hmm.

You remember him at all?

Your grandfather?

I remember his funeral.

Oh, wasn't his best day exactly.

That's all I really
remember about him.

That and his face scratching me
when he kissed me.

Oh, yeah.

- Sandpaper.

- Yeah.

He always smelt of pipe tobacco.

Gunpowder.

Jack pine.

What about those moose?

What about moose?

Are they stupid and slow,
like grouse?

No.

No, moose are different.

They're regal.

Up in Alaska they get so tall
a grown man can walk
under a moose's belly
and never touch fur.

Oh, yeah. You'll see.

So... Why kill them then?

If they're so... Royal?

Well, they make 600 pounds
of delicious meat.

A winter's worth.

It is way better than
a Thanksgiving Turkey.

I told mom I'd call her
when I got here.

Well, you won't find
a signal up here.

Should have called her
from town.

About time you cut loose from
Katie's apron strings anyhow.

What, so there's..
There's no way
I can talk to her?
Well, there's always the
two-way in an emergency.
Emergency.
Are moose dangerous?
They're no joke.
Won't be like
one of your asinine games.
Can't start over at the
first sign of trouble.
This year we hunt big game.
This year you'll get
your first kill.
David.
Put that away.
Well, put that damn toy away.
I don't want to see it again.
If I do, I'll smash it
to smithereens.
You wearing long Johns?
It'll be freezing up above.
Long Johns, wool socks, mittens.
Mom went over
that checklist you sent
and doubled it.
She remembers
how cold it gets up here.
Mittens.
Mittens for her kittens.
Here.
Here's something
she didn't double.
That's simpler than
the over-and-under
you used yesterday.
It's heavier.
Packs a hell of a punch.
This is the rifle I shot
my first moose with
when I was 14.
Your grandfather
gave me this gun.

Safety. Click.
It's not moving
like those grouse though.
Well, if we come up
on that moose quiet
like we're meant to,
he won't be moving either.
Be a tad bit bigger
than a coffee can too.
His heart's about the same size.
Now breathe out slowly.
You won't need that
where we're going.
What if it keeps snowing?
Or we get lost?
You worry too much.
Like your mother.
I'm just not used to being so..
Remote.
Well, you're not remote.
You're with me.
And we are here.
Just up that drainage.
At the head of the creek.
How far is it?
Five miles, give or take.
We won't barely break a sweat.
Is that where you saw the moose?
No. That's where I saw
the Sheepman's hut.
The moose is up further.
How much further?
All the way further.
It's up on top.
We have to sleep in a hut?
Yeah.
Why didn't we just bring a tent?
Why should we
haul a tent up there
when we already have
a perfectly good hut?
I..
I don't want to sleep all
squashed up next to you..

In a smelly Sheepman's hut.
You just think what
you'll tell those kids
back in briar Meadow.
Hm?
How primal you'll feel
knowing you came home
from a good kill.
I don't want to kill a moose.
It's an old Sheepman's hut
and it's near
where we're going to hunt
and I can fix it up
dry and warm and good.
I thought you might like that.
I thought it might be
more fun than a tent.
But we don't have
to do it, alright?
We can drive back to town
and buy a tent
or I can drive you back
to the cabin
and we can hunt birds.
Whatever you want to do.
Or I can put you
right back on a plane.
One leaves every single day.
No, I..
Want to.
Are you sure?
No. I just..
Just want to.
Oh! Whoa, whoa,
whoa, whoa.
- You alright?
- Yeah, I'm fine.
- You okay?
- Yeah.
Who made this trail
anyway? The Sheepman?
No, deer and elk.
They know the shortest way
between the seasons.

I thought you said the
moose were above the hut.
At the top.
We have to be careful now.
We may scare up a bear.
- A bear?
- Yeah.
Dad, you didn't
say anything about a bear.
Yeah, there's no need
to worry. Okay?
You don't have to
be faster than sir bear.
Just faster than your old man.
Come on.
Come on.
I don't think I am faster
than my old man.
You're stronger than you know.
I know.
I was you once.
Yeah, well.
I lose every race
at school, so..
Well, they don't have
actual bears
out in Briarwood, Texas,
now, do they?
No.
I'll put myself
between you and any bear.
I promise.
So what's the story
with the Sheepmen?
Spaniards from near
the border with France.
They weren't wanted there
so they migrated here in clans.
Kept to themselves.
Were quick with knives.
Sometimes you can still
find their sardine cans
and snuff boxes.
This was some kind of

wild out here back then.
Back then?
Here's to the Sheepman.
So far from home.
Red Fescue.
Crusted wheat grass.
Cotton woods.
Killdeer.
Choke cherry.
Kingfisher.
Buffaloberry.
Your grandfather always
let me be fire master.
He brought me up on this
mountain when I was 14.
Well, that was the last year
he hunted big game..
First time I tasted whiskey.
You want some?
No. No.
And I was the same age as you.
Did you know he was
50 years older than me?
And I'm almost
30 years older than you.
And someday you'll have a son
and you'll be
30 years older than him..
And you'll want
so badly for him to know
who you are that you could cry.
You know?
What do you know, David?
What do you really know?
Um..
Nothing much, I guess.
Nothing much, I guess.
I don't know
what you want me to say.
Why was it
the last year he hunted?
Grandpa Clyde?
He was 64 damn years old..
But that wasn't the reason.

We took a moose
and a goat that year.
God, that goat.
Every inch of its hide
was covered with ticks.
I don't know why he quit.
I'd say it was my mother
dying so young.
You know, I guess
when death is in the air..
When a man feels himself
getting older..
He didn't much
want to kill anymore.
And I was just then
getting the taste for it.
Out.
Hey, dog.
Cranes.
Your mother loved them.
Flying home.
Later..
Years later
he'd still go out
after birds by himself.
So he didn't
stop hunting completely.
He usually just went out and
missed every shot on purpose.
Rise and shine.
Rise and shine.
We're gonna get our moose today.
You know, landmarks
can save you.
In case we get separated
or if you get lost
you go to high ground
and find them.
That bull pie snag
with the forked crown?
It marks the head
of the creek valley.
From there, we can wait
and watch

the whole Meadow
without being seen.
Is this..
This whole mountain's ours?
Well, today, yes.
We own it.
I'm hunting moose
with my father.
I'm getting my moose today.
Where's that bull pie?
Over there.
Let's go!
Better wait for your old man.
Sir moose comes once
in the morning.
And once again in the evening.
Least that's
what his tracks say.
He may not come for hours.
Or at all.
You can't tell.
If you could,
it wouldn't be hunting
it would be shopping.
He may even know
this is the last week
of the season.
So he may be on his guard
and go somewhere
less open to drink.
But he may not be
all that clever.
He could make a mistake.
Hey.
David.
What is that?
An old male griz.
- Are we gonna shoot him?
- No. No.
Why not?
Because we don't want to.
Because that's not hunting
for the meat.
That's hunting for the fear.

- He saw us.
- No, he smelled us.
They can smell a hundred
times better than we can.
Let's take a look
at that beaver pond.
Stay close.
Yeah, there's something
rotten down here.
Goddammit.
Three days. Maybe four.
Four days since what?
Someone tracked me tracking it.
Come closer,
you need to know this.
Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen
seventeen, eighteen.
Eighteen goddamn bullets.
From some pissant's
goddamn squirrel rifle.
Why'd they do that?
Goddamn asswipes!
You think they're still around?
I hope so.
You hear me,
you redneck fuckers?
You goddamn hear me?
Goddamn it.
Goddamn it.
Two weeks I follow you
two mother-loving weeks.
Get to know your habits
your scent, your scat.
Get taken by some
goddamn tourist.
Follow one's star, huh, Katie?
Yeah, you bet you followed it.
Right on back to Texas.
You couldn't hack it here.
What did you ever know
about me anyhow?
Did you ever even know me?
Musk thistle.
Milkweed.

Kinnikinnick.
Oh, Steller's Jay.
Steller's Jay.
Steller's Jay.
You look like a damn koala bear.
Or one of those cat posters?
"Hang in there."
Hang in there.
That's funny.
You sure as hell aren't
gonna sneak up on anything
clowning around like that..
Especially not the bull
elk we've been following
these last two miles.
A bull elk?
See these tracks along here?
Walk one,
wait five. Okay?
Don't skyline yourself.
Stay low.
Shh.
Sometimes the best stalking
is standing still.
Yeah.
There we go.
Shh, shh.
Gun down, gun down.
Put your gun down.
Right on top of that
ledge right there.
- You see it?
- Yeah. Yeah.
Quiet yourself.
You gotta be so quiet right now.
It's way up close.
- Alright? Just follow me.
- Yeah.
Alright.
You got eyes on him?
Alright, safety off, safety off.
Now, deep breath now.
Yeah.
Just let it out as

you squeeze the trigger.
And then you pull it soft,
but sure.
Alright?
You got it!
Always approach from behind
so he can't lash at you
with his hooves.
Get hold of his rack,
in case he's not dead.
Good. Get it out
of your system.
I need you to help me
dress out our elk
before nightfall.
We'll drag him to cover
and quarter sir elk
in the morning.
You ready to gut him?
It's right here.
Take it, David.
Hm..
I guess I'm getting to be
like your grandfather.
He was a railroader.
Route manager.
After school
I'd stop by the station.
He'd be asleep,
face flat on his desk
timetables damp with drool.
After we checked mom
into St. Anne's
for the last time
it became chronic..
They called it narcolepsy.
It got him his pension..
But I think he just
didn't care much
for being awake alone
for so many empty hours.
It used to be a tablespoon
and then she wrote in
half a tablespoon.

Ah..

I still love that part.
Stomach cancer.
Your grandmother Chloe
was only 51, David.
And her last three years
were total hell.
Don't you dare let me
go out that way.
You never told me
about your moose.
You said you, you killed a moose
when you were my age.
Oh, yeah.
For my birthday
my father gave me
the .30-30 I gave you.
He said it was lucky.
Said it was a man's gun.
I was so sure I'd get my moose
my hands were shaking.
Your grandfather
called it buck fever.
My heart was in my
throat. My mind was mush.
What does a moose look like?
Did you just ask me
what a moose looks like?
What's he gonna do
when he sees me?
What kind of thing is he
gonna do? I need to know.
Right.
He's gonna be pitch-black,
a little stupid.
He might not even see you
or he could charge you.
Alright?
Hey..
Just don't mix this up.
I'm the ugly one in
the Elmer-fudd hat.
Alright?
I was furious with myself.

And I was sure that
moose would be gone.
You're done in.
You'd best get to bed.
Big day tomorrow.
Let's go, David.
Now.
Come on.
The snow is not our friend.
I had half a mind at breakfast
to let the bull lie
and pack us straight
down out of here.
Probably smarter,
easier in the long run.
I could come back on
snowshoes next week
but by then it might be
three feet deep
and starting to drift.
We'll get two quarters
out today.
It'll make it easier
for you later.
Is that alright?
I expect I ought to
leave it up to you.
The snow...
It's beautiful.
If it stops soon,
we're fine, but..
No, dad... I don't want
you to do
anything different
because of me.
I wanna know how to do this.
David.
Fresh kill.
Here you go.
That blood's still warm.
What happened?
It looks like
the work of our griz.
No. No, it must be

a mother bear.
She's got a cub with her.
How can you tell?
Do you see those smaller tracks?
It looks to be wounded,
dragging its feet.
That might even be two cubs.
Dad.
What is that?
Dad.
Oh, Christ.
That's one of the cubs.
A yearling.
Brains have been
licked clean out.
Come on, David. Now!
Quick, follow me now.
What?
What?
Good sight lines,
all directions.
The brains.
Why did she do that?
Oh, she didn't.
Another bear got her cub.
A male. She fought him
for the body and won.
If we see her, you pick
the nearest big tree
and you climb it, alright?
If she comes up after you
you stick your gun in her
mouth and you fire.
- Okay.
- You can't miss.
- Okay.
- You got it?
Yeah.
- Is your rifle cocked?
- Uh, hang on.
Cock it.
Put on the safety.
Yeah, we'll make fast work
of Mr. elk

and be headed home.

Hey.

Eating snow takes more
energy than it gives you.

That's surefire dehydration.

I'm thirsty. Dad.

Alright. Alright.

Why don't you fill our canteens?

It's heavy work hauling meat.

You stay where I can see you.

David!

David!

Aah! Aah!

Get up, David!

Grab hold! You climb!

That sow, she's gonna
come back for her cub.

- Now, come on!

- Dad.

Climb as high as you can.

Come on!

- David, take this.

- Ah..

Dad, I can't hold on to
the tree and the gun. Dad.

- David.

- Dad, I can't do it.

- David, take it.

- Dad. No, dad.

- I can't breathe, dad.

- Hurry!

Dad, I can't hold on
to the.. Ah!

Dad!

Dad.

Dad!

Dad!

- Uh..

- Dad!

Dad! Dad, the bear!

Come on, dad, get up.

Get up, dad.

Dad, the mama bear!

Get up!

Dad.
Wake up!
- Dad, I'm scared.
- Alright, it's alright.
We're both gonna bleed to death.
Let me see your hand, David.
I'm not gonna hurt you.
Okay?
How bad is the exit wound?
It's bad.
It's a really big hole.
It's, it's a lot of blood.
Tourniquet.
It went through my knee.
I'm not gonna be able to walk.
Here. Help me
get to that tree.
- Come on. Here.
- Ah!
Come on.
David, you can find your
way back to the cabin.
- You can.
- Dad, no.
Dad, I'm not leaving you.
Alright, you listen.
You listen carefully, alright?
We don't have to worry
about freezing.
And your hand is
gonna be alright, okay?
The doctor will fix it up
good as new.
I promise you that.
If I try to walk out on this leg
it's gonna bleed
and keep bleeding.
I could bleed to death.
You hear me?
I'm staying here
and burrowing in
and you're walking out
to get help.
I'm sorry.

It's what we have to do.

You can't possibly
get lost. Alright?

Just follow that trail
down the way we came up
and you'll come to the
Meadow and the pond
and you point yourself
toward that big pine
with the forked crown.

You remember?

- Hey!

- Yeah.

- You remember?

- Yeah.

Alright. That way
you'll find our creek.
Now, you may not, you may
not see it at first
but you make yourself
quiet and you'll hear it
okay?

You listen for running water.
And once you find that,
you follow it down
you'll pass the Sheepman's hut.
You'll come to the Land Rover.
Dad, I've never driven a car.
You haven't? No.

That's okay. That's okay.

Alright, it's simple.

The clutch is
the only hard part.

You just have to learn...

Dad, dad, dad. I..

I can't.

Just up over that hump
and it's all downhill, alright?

Come on.

- Ah!

- Come on.

Dad, come on. Dad.

Hand me your rifle.

The lucky one.

Click. The safety.

Remember?

- Click.

- Alright.

I should have made sure.

You must always make sure.

Come on.

Damn. This crutch

is useless.

Useless!

You'll have to drag me.

Okay, we can, we can make
some kind of sled.

A sled?

Yes, a sled,

a goddamn sled, David.

Okay, well, just, just

tell me what to do

and I'll do it.

I'm pretty good

at making things.

No, no, no.

Ah, it'd take too long.

We have no rope, no runners.

What we could cobble together
won't skid for shit.

We'll lose too much time.

I can carry you.

It's the one thing I'm good at

when they make us work out.

Dead lift.

Dead lift?

That's pretty funny.

- I can do it.

- Alright.

Gravity's on our side.

Yeah.

I never would have thought of it

but your dead lift

may just save you.

Save us, dad.

Yeah.

- You ready?

- Yeah, I'm ready.

Okay. Three, two, one.

Ah, god! Okay.

- Ooh.

- Okay. Okay. Okay.

- Are you okay?

- Yeah.

Whoa!

We'll stop for a while
and let you rest.

Alright, you can
set me down here.

You can set me down, David.

I get it. No resting.

No talking.

You're not gonna
get your first kill.

Not this time around.

That's okay. Next year.

Just tell me about yours.

Mine?

Your first kill.

Your moose.

Yeah.

Sir moose. Where was I?

Stuck in the muck.

I was sure that moose
would be gone

but there it was,
bigger than life.

The damn thing honked
like 11 elephants
in a circus-train fire.

I thought it was charging at me
but it was heading
for the river.

I was as alive
as I've ever been.

- You okay?

- Yeah.

- You okay?

- Yeah, I'm alright.

I'm alright.

Oh, that's not good.

Not good at all.

We'll rest now.

- I'm not tired, dad.

- We'll rest.

- I can keep going.

- We'll rest.

I'm tired.

Yeah.

To get off this mountain..

We're gonna have to feed you.

It should cut easy.

We're not gutting him.

We just want his belly meat.

Alright. Alright.

Give me that knife.

There.

Eat it.

The fat too.

Especially the fat.

Now we'll cook the rest

further on.

I don't wanna build a fire here

and taunt mama griz.

There you go. Good.

Baby-bear Sushi.

It's getting cold.

Bitch cold. Come on.

Let's go before

your sweat freezes.

- Are we at the hut?

- No.

We're not even at the Meadow.

You're shivering, dad.

We need to build a fire.

- A fire.

- Yeah.

- Before dark.

- Yeah.

Dad.

Dad.

The, uh, the sky's clearing up.

Why?

Yeah.

Yeah, it's clearing up.

Here you go.

Thanks.
Good as any brisket in Texas?
It's better.
Hm..
Dad?
Click.
Click.
Click.
Click.
Dad?
Dad? Dad, dad,
what's happening?
Are you choking? Dad?
Dad, what's wrong?
- You're scaring me, dad.
- I'm cold. I'm so cold.
Okay. You're okay, dad.
You're okay.
You're okay.
You can't die on me, dad.
You can't die on me, dad.
You can't die on me.
You can't.
You can't.
You can't die on me.
You can't.
You can't die on me.
You can't.
Meadow.
Pond.
Snag.
Trail.
Hut.
Creek.
Land Rover.
Meadow. Pond.
Snag.
Trail.
Hut.
Creek.
Land Rover.
Road. Cabin.
Meadow. The Meadow.
But where is the beaver pond?

Where's the beaver pond?
The pond, dad.
Do you see it?
Yes. A bull pine.
The snag, dad, the snag.
I can't tell
if it's the right one.
I don't know where the pond is.
I... I don't know
which way down is.
I don't know
where the canyon ends.
There.
That way. Are you sure?
Yeah. Yeah.
Okay. Okay.
Okay, just talk to me, dad.
Just tell me what I need to do.
You're doing what needs doing.
Finish your story, dad.
Oh. You need
to know this.
You need to know.
Sir moose, he knew he'd be safe
if he could cross the river..
But the current was heavy.
He was swept within
20 yards of my father.
My father said he never
saw more personality
come into the face
of a wild animal.
He said that he and
the mountain were one.
Hey!
I wasn't gonna let him get away.
I got him! I got him!
- What are you doing?
- I got him! I got him!
What do you think you're
doing? What are you doing?
Why didn't you shoot him?
You had him dead to rights.
That's because

he looked me in the eye.
He knew I could kill him,
but I couldn't take him.
The river was gonna take him.
What you did..
That isn't hunting, Cal.
That's killing.
That was the last day
my father and I
hunted together.
I should have known better.
I should have known.
I should have known.
I never killed another animal
I didn't need for meat.
I'm sorry, David.
Shh. Dad.
We never should have
gone back for that elk.
We'll get to the tree
and the creek.
- Yeah.
- Yeah.
Then we can talk
some more, okay?
Yeah, yeah.
Yes.
The bull pine.
Is that it, dad?
Is that gonna lead us
to the creek?
Just talk to me, dad.
I can't find it.
I've crossed the goddamn Meadow
I found the goddamn tree
I can't find the creek, dad.
It's okay, dad.
We'll just, we'll just
keep going, right?
I get it. We'll just..
We'll just keep going.
Running water.
Okay, walk one..
Wait five.

Quiet yourself.
Just breathe.
Aah! Aah!
Okay.
No, no, no, no, no.
Oh, okay.
Come on, David.
Come on.
Oh, shit.
You can't possibly get lost.
You can't possibly get lost.
Landmarks.
Landmarks.
Go to high ground and find 'em.
Alright.
Go to high ground.
That's..
That's the wrong creek.
This is the wrong creek
going the wrong way.
Ours ran to the right.
This one's going to the left.
I know that much.
I don't care.
This will lead us to
the Shepherd's hut
right, dad?
Or to a river?
All water leads to water.
All rivers lead to men.
Yeah. We'll follow
the creek then.
At least it knows
where it's going.
Hey, dad. Wake up.
Come on.
Dad, dad.
Dad.
Here. Come on.
Here. Come on.
There you go.
Okay, just chew on it.
Okay? Just chew.
Just chew. Chew.

Dad. Dad, come on.
You gotta eat, dad. Okay?
Come on.
Here.
Come on.
No.
That's good.
Hey, dad.
Don't... don't you worry.
We'll make
it ho... home.
I'll get you home.
I promise you.
I promise. I promise.
See that sky there?
That's, that's
tomorrow's sky. Yes.
Cold tonight
and, and clear tomorrow.
It's gonna be, it's gonna be..
It's gonna be
bitch cold tonight.
It's, it's gonna be bitch cold.
Just, just, just..
Here.
This is yours.
All of it.
It only forever belongs to you.
Hope you're hungry.
We're cooking elk steaks.
Our elk.
How's your hand?
Hm.
Uh, son..
Love.
It's so cold.
It's so cold.
Burning daylight.
I'm burning daylight.
Yes. Best get a move on.
I said I'd get a grouse
and I did.
I'm damn sure I did.
We had a, uh, a Land Rover..

Parked somewhere, but..
I can't find it.
This is my father.
Oh! I've got you.
We need a doctor.
A man's been shot.
Yes, it's bad.
That's right.
Very end of river road.
Thank you.
Hey.
Here. Drink this.
Slowly.
- He what?
- Carried him out.
"Carried him out?"
- On his back. I saw it.
- How could he?
I don't know,
I suppose he couldn't..
But he did.
I'm sorry, son.
I'm gonna have
to take a look at you.
What's your name, son?
David.
David, I'm sorry.
Your father is dead.
He's been dead for some time.
Probably since
early this morning.
I know.
I know that.