

Smugglers' Notch

by David Ackley

Coudreau pointed past all that which for the moment mesmerized Spook, vaguely to the northwest, where Coudreau's neighboring beat came to a point at the convergence of two state borders and the nation to the north. Standing exactly there, in the deep gnarly of the borderlands, you could step east and be in this state, one step west into the other, and a step north into a whole other country.

“Right up there's what they named Smugglers' Notch.”

“What's that?” Spook said. “An invitation? Cross here?”

They got in the pickup and drove on, and after a time, Coudreau spoke again, rambling or meditative, as if driving provoked thought; he might have been talking to himself.

“Everyone around here is half criminal by our lights.”

By which lights Spook supposed he meant theirs : The Warden Service, the law books, maybe Society's at large.

“Around here they think you're plain stupid if you pass up a deer standing there looking at you, never mind the season. Meat in the freezer is all it is. Whole family's got deer licenses, eight year olds, old maid aunts. A fella brought in a deer with his grandpa's tag one time. I happened to know him. Granpa's ninety eight years old half blind in one eye and can't see outa the other. I tried to call him on it. He said Granpa was sitting on the porch and this doe walks up and starts eating his lettuce patch. Shot it off the porch with his twelve gauge. By the sound.” Coudreau laughed, shaking his head. “I let it go. What are you going to do? I caught one guy with fifteen brook trout stashed in the engine compartment of his Buick. We're chatting away, engine running, and I start to smell trout poaching, like supper. You know who he was? School principal, out to Bethel. There's a education: never stash your trout in the engine compartment.”

