

Aluminum Canoe

by Gabriel Orgrease

Karl fumbled around in the dark then pulled Ezra's parent's aluminum canoe out from under the balcony porch of the lake cottage and down across the water washed shale pebbles to the edge of the cold dark water.

"Load it on," he says. And that is what they did. The load was not engineered as much as intuitively balanced. For the most part they had only an empty skeleton of painted and unpainted sheet metal with levers and buttons and multi-colored wires to dispose of. The glass left in the weeds where they had hacked it into various sizes of shards.

But it was tricky to handle just the same.

"Don't stab me with that," says John.

"You two make peace and paddle," Karl orders. Always there is someone in a group that is fed up with the silly antics of clowns, the waste of wasted time, and this was often the case with Karl that he was always anxious for a conclusion, a sense of closure... to get to the end of things with efficient swiftness. Get it done and over with quickly. Efficiency.

Wendell in the rear and John in the front and the bulk of the dead cig machine in the middle they paddled clumsy away from shore.

Wendell, short and dark hairy with a weasel-little mouth, was on exchange from an Eastern European nation. His real name was long full of jumbled syllables -- nobody around Krackton really cared to pronounce it, and particularly not his friends who quickly Americanized his surname...

Winledinjingwonndmoyocoyazerliskonwcokedori is what it sometimes sounded like on the rare occasion when Wendell says it -- and he always says it too fast, kind of like a native speaker, so why bother.

The ideal American surname of to-day is a meaningless word of from one to three syllables; the sort of blurb picked up on an entry tour at Ellis Island. Stepincowshit, Stanley, a throw away from a

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dirty burlesque joke, would have been easier for his friends all to play with a name, but Wendell was not so fortunate to have been born with an easy name or even a face that looked particularly Amerindian.

His was a face with topography, indentations, craters, valleys and mountain peaks that flowed down from the glacial formation of an overly large forehead. Subject to a perennial Bells Palsy, his face like a vat of slowly congealed wax let loose of winter would flow down in spring then congeal and solidify in summer heat.

Wendell worked at being a true blood Indian just like John worked at being an ass. It was a ritual game that they played together, a secret society without name -- get waffle faced, confess youthful peccadilloes then put on a mask and parade around and goof and moon. A sweat lodge brotherhood with hair knotted peckers. You could never tell them apart if all you looked at was sheer energy and both their astral aura glowed a slightly seared shade of magenta.

