

Flash Before Your Eyes

by Jerry Ratch

It was the dead of winter. I took my father's shotgun from his closet. He kept it wrapped up in one of those khaki-colored gun tote bags that had a zipper running the whole length of the gun. It was a 16-gauge, single action shotgun. Anyone could tell what I had in the bag as I walked down the snowy road toward the farmer's corn field that lay between Highway 83 and Salt Creek. The hard-packed snow creaked under my feet as I walked. A new snowfall was coming down pretty hard. There weren't many cars out. It was the middle of the day.

I turned into the field, after running across the highway, and started down the rows. Many of the corn stalks were still standing. I stopped midway down the first row, unzipped the bag, and pulled out the shotgun. I yanked the mitten off my left hand with my teeth and pulled a shotgun shell out of my Levis. After sliding back the bolt, I loaded the shell and slid the bolt forward. With my thumb I flicked off the safety.

I was ready for whatever might come my way.

The snow was falling in thick lazy snowflakes, piling up against the base of the old cornstalks where an animal could be hiding. I raised the butt of the shotgun against my left shoulder and tried to level the shotgun on the horizon line, where the whiteness of the field met the darkness of the trees along the edge. That was when I saw the rabbit.

He bolted from a hiding place under the base of a cornstalk. Blindly I swung the shotgun, pulling the trigger. The gun jerked back hard against my shoulder, and the blue smoke billowed from the gun, and there was an awkward side movement to the blur that was the rabbit.

I knew I'd hit him.

I ran toward where the rabbit should have been, but stopped when I saw a trail of red blood against the blank white snow. I followed the blood trail. Then I spotted the animal where it

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lay on its side. I came up to it. Its brown eyes watched me silently. I remembered those eyes. Surely I remembered those eyes. Even as I loaded another shell into the chamber, it was those brown eyes watching me, that I remembered.

