

The Sharps

by Larry Strattnr

He breathed a series of four-by-fours, inhale for a count of four, exhale for a count of four, slowly tightened his finger on the trigger until the rifle bucked, seemingly of its own volition, the boom from the forty-five-seventy Sharps rolling down the hall of giant trees.

His great-grandfather's, grandfather's and father's rifle in turn, the Sharps was an elegant tool for killing big game and men. Its long arm reached out and the target was often dead before the sound of the shot caught up with the bullet.

Firing at a tree some six hundred yards distant was most all the shooting he did these days. A Redwood tree would calmly eat his bullet and chew on it for another thousand years or so.

Killing was out of the question anymore. He had killed enough. But addiction to the power and skill required to deliver a bullet out one thousand yards was hard to break. So he shot big trees and spots he picked on distant boulders. These targets shrugged him off, living on in the world of too much death.

As many tools men devise, the Sharps' beauty cloaked havoc; its elegance, destruction; its power, extinction. The oiled and lovingly cared-for rifle prompted thoughts of beings who withstood it. His mind turned to ultimate destinies. What was wanted for the world? What was required, or perhaps even demanded by its architect? All his questions were prompted by the existence of awesome power and accuracy created by mere men.

There was in fact an architect behind the forest, he was certain. How could a leaf be an accident, let alone a redwood tree? The question was, what did the architect intend? What did the architect desire? Nature could be observed, its laws divined. Was the final reality tooth and claw? He thought not. Bullets would not be the reality either. Bullets were merely game pieces to posture one's self as powerful. Games are of the mind. The bigger the brain the more it fools itself with grandiosity. Slipping on a small pebble on the trail

can bring an end to the smartest walking man, no matter his weapon or how carefully polished.

He looked up at the sky, its profundity, the underside of a world's abstruse cocoon. He continued walking into the mysterious forest the Sharps resting heavy in his hands, as does all power not absolute.

