

ORDEAL IN DEVIL'S VALLEY

By DC Storm

As Glen lay in his bed looking at the dark ceiling, the words from the evenings tale ran through his mind; he recalled the men sitting around the dinner table exchanging stories about the how Carl had missed that big buck.

As Carl sat there with a red face, Jim said with a laugh, as he told everyone how Carl had missed the big one, "Ole' Carl here, hit everything but the deer. Nine shots and they all went into that big old Oak down in Devil's Valley. That old Oak now has more holes in it than a piece of wood, full of termites. Now that buck just stood there looking at him, trying to figure out why Ole' Carl here, was trying to kill that tree," then everyone began laughing.

Carl just sat there with a sheepish look.

Glen asked, "The buck--what happen next?"

Jim was laughing so hard he could hardly talk, "Well that old buck, he just kept eating his fill and finally strolled off. Now Carl with an empty gun just stood there and watched him leave. To add insult to injury that buck looked over his back one last time and with his tail in the air, showing Carl his white butt, disappeared into the underbrush."

Carl then broke in, "Yeah--but, who wanted to hightail it out as the sun started to set, old scareddy cat, that's who," Carl pointing to Jim.

Now it's Jim's turn to blush with a sheepish look.

Glen looks at Jim and asks, "You afraid of the dark?"

Then they all laugh again, but this time at Jim; Jim responded, looking at Carl, "Well, I didn't have to ask you twice to leave, --as a matter fact, you were moving pretty darn fast for someone who's not afraid, it was all I could do to keep up. I've never seen anyone move snowshoe's like you! If there's ever is a snowshoe race, I'm signing you up."

Once again, everyone had a laugh, as Carl once more sits there with that sheepish look.

Glen asks, looking at Jim, with inquisitive eyes, "Tell us again about

Devil's Valley. Is there really something in there?" Jim nods, "The Devil himself."

As Glen's Mother refills his coffee cup, he starts his scary tale, "It all began a long time ago, in late fall, like it is now. The Valley wasn't called Devil's Valley back then. It was known as Cardinal Valley, because of all the Cardinals that winter in them Cedars. They like the little berries that grow on them trees. Oh--it was a pretty sight, seeing all them Cardinals. They were the most beautiful red, and dozens of em' all in them Cedar trees. That's before it happened! Don't see any of em' now, they all left and don't come back. Now there was this old man who lived by himself in that house just as you turn onto eleventh-avenue in town. You know--the old run down brown house with the strange stained glass windows."

Jim looks at Glen and smiles as he remarks, "The one that you kids are afraid to go into after dark."

"They say it's haunted," Glen adds softly, "on a night when the moon is dark, --those stain glass windows--they glow and flicker with the flames from Hell."

Jim breaks into a giggle, "That's superstition. That's how the Valley got renamed. By superstitious idiots who were afraid, but lets not get ahead of the story. That old man never did anyone any harm he just stayed by himself in that house. Coming out now and then to stock up on supplies and get his mail. One day a new Preacher came to town. He was a fire and brimstone Preacher. Right off, he took a disliking to the old man. I think it was because the old man never paid him any attention. Even laugh at his fiery sermons on Sunday. Said, the Preacher looked like a stage actor, acting out some steamy hot play. So the stage was set for the showdown. As the days passed and winter turned to spring, and then to summer. The Preacher slowly got the towns folk all worked up into believing that the old man was the Devils servant. He told the people that the old man has an alter, on which he recites demonic sermons. It's during these sermons when the flames in the stain glass window are seen to dance and glow."

Jim paused, he slowly looked around the table, and they all were looking back in anticipation, and then he continued, "The old man could no longer walk uptown to get his supplies without being harassed. He even had problems buying food and supplies from the general store. So, one hot

summer Sunday, when the back doors to the chapel were open, he walked in, right in the middle of one of the Preacher's fire and brimstone sermons. When the Preacher saw him, he stopped and froze with his fist still in the air over his head. Everyone turned to see who it was, that interrupted the sermon. As the Preacher lowered his hand, the old man continued up to the podium. There he stopped, looking the Preacher in the eye. For a whole minute there was silence, as the old man and Preacher looked at each other eye to eye," Jim paused again looked at Glen and whispered, "You know what happened next?"

Glen shaking his head, and whispered back, "No-- what?"

Now this part of the story, Glen hadn't heard before.

Jim leaned over to Glen and whispered, "The preacher pointed at the old man and with a loud resounding voice..." Jim shouted and Glen jumped, "'HOW DARE YOU ENTER THE TEMPLE OF GOD AND DEFILE ITS SANCTITY WITH YOUR PRESENCE!' The old man quickly retorted in even a louder voice, 'HOW DARE YOU TELL LIES AND FALSE ACCUSATIONS, FOR IT'S YOU, WHO HAS DEFILED THE SANCTITY OF GOD'S TEMPLE, AND HE WILL STRIKE WITH A BOLT OF FIRE, AND WITH FIRE, HE WILL CLEANSE HIS TEMPLE!' Then the old man turned, and walked towards the open door. The Preacher, red faced and in a fit of rage, shouted passages from scripture at him. The old man, never paused or look back, he just kept walking, paying the Preacher no mind. The very next day the sky became so black that you needed a lantern to see. The storm blew in so quickly that no one had time to prepare. The wind blew, and lighting flashed across the sky. It rained so hard that you couldn't see across the street, and streets were torrents of water. It hailed so hard that the lawns turned white, it broke windows and killed two cows over at Osborn's farm. The apple trees at Applemans were stripped bare, not one apple was left hanging. Then as suddenly as it came, the storm began to let up. Then--just about the time everyone thought it was over, the unthinkable happened! A bolt of lighting that lit up the sky, from horizon to horizon, hit the church steeple and blew the cross clean off. It landed in the cemetery next to the old crypt. The steeple was blown wide open and the church was set ablaze. The stain glass windows flickered and glowed from the light of the fire inside.

All the towns folk came to put the fire out, but it was of no avail. The fire burnt so hot and furious that no one could get near. By that evening all that was left, was the stonewalls and smothering ashes.”

Jim pauses and takes a sip of coffee as they all watched, waiting for the next part of the story.

He puts the cup down and continues, “The Preacher goes to the top step of the church, where the big wooden doors once hung. He bows his head and all follow in prayer. After he finishes, he looks up and is silent. Then suddenly, he points to the old man’s house and loudly declares, ‘It’s THE OLD MAN! HE’S IN LEAGUE WITH SATAN! HE DID THIS! YESTERDAY DID HE NOT SAY THAT THIS HOUSE OF GOD WOULD BE CLEANSED BY A BOLT OF FIRE? HE MUST BE DRIVEN FROM OUR TOWN AND HIS HOUSE OF EVIL MUST BE DESTROYED!’ The Preacher came down the steps and headed to the old man’s house with the towns people in tow. The Sun had just set when they reach the gate leading to the front door of the old man’s home. The Preacher went to the front door and rapped on the door with his fist. He shouted, ‘OLD MAN COME OUT AND FACE YOUR JUSTICE!’ But, no answer came from within. The Preacher rapped harder and shouted louder, ‘COME OUT YE EVIL ONE! WE KNOW YOU’RE IN THERE! YOU CAN’T ESCAPE THE JUDGMENT AND WRATH OF THE LORD!’ Still no answer. The Preacher now in fit of rage kicked the door and it swung open, it was dark and still inside. The Preacher walked inside followed by several of the towns people, they went from room to room, but the house was empty. A message was scribbled on a old cracked chalkboard in the kitchen. ‘I can’t live here anymore. I’ve gone to Cardinal Valley. Don’t follow me or enter there in, or misfortune will be your fate. Curse to those who set foot upon the valley floor.’ As the Preacher was leaving, the Sheriff and two of his deputies met the Preacher. The Sheriff arrested the Preacher and firmly reprimanded those with him, ‘what are you doing here? You have no legal right to be on this property. Breaking and entering is a felony’, and to the Preacher he said, ‘I’m placing you under arrest for unlawful entry’. He then handcuffs the Preacher and takes him off to jail.”

Jim pauses and again takes a sip of coffee, and then continues, “The next day the Preacher was out on bale. He met with several of the towns

people, who were with him the night before. Now the Preacher was very angry because, he felt the old man was responsible for his misfortunes. He was now even angrier because, the old man had given him the slip. So, the rest of that day, they plotted on how to get even with the old man. It was decided that very day, they would go to Cardinal Valley, and get the old man and bring him back to town. They would then set him before a tribunal, on charges of heresy and witchcraft. The Sun was sitting red on the horizon when the Preacher and four of the towns people got to the entrance of the valley.” Jim pause’s again, sipping on his coffee as he looks at Glen.

Now Glen knows the valley is about a mile wide at the widest and nearly five miles long; a small river, that feeds from a cold spring fed lake, meanders the length of the valley and disappears into a fissure at the east end.

There’s only one way in and out, an old road, just wide enough for a wagon, which descends into the valley from the south rim; it reaches the valley floor about a half mile from the fissure and follows the river to the lake for about a mile before it disappears.

The entire valley is isolated by steep shear cliffs, and covered with thick cedar and pine, with stands of aspen sprinkled here and there.

Jim puts the cup down, gets his pipe out and fills it with tobacco; using his finger, he packs the tobacco into the pipe.

Getting a wooden match from his pocket, he strikes it on the top of the table and lights the pipe, blowing the match out with a puff of smoke, he tosses the spent match into the metal ashtray near the middle of the table; after taking several puffs he leans back.

Looking again at Glen he continues, “Suddenly one of the men stopped and stammered, ‘Look--what’s that red light?’ As he pointed to a flashing red light coming from deep within valley. They all stood and watched the flashing, flickering light. No one saying anything, wondering if maybe they were a bit hasty in coming here. The light flickered red, then orange, and finally stopped and was gone. Now the Sun had gone down over the horizon and the evening breeze had a chill. The men were now a little apprehensive about continuing, because they remembered the warning that was scratched on the chalkboard in the old man’s house. The Preacher

was firm in mind and heart and he told the men, that they had nothing to fear and to put their trust in the Lord, so on they went, down the pathway, descending into the valley. It was very dark when they the got lanterns from their packs to light the way. As they walked, the light from the lanterns cast eerie shadows which the men saw as demons, monsters, and other horrible images that came from their deepest inter-minds. They were now walking very slowly, as strange sounds were coming from all directions. A twig snapped! Then another! They stopped, and froze in fear! One of the men whispered to the other, 'Did you hear that? What do you think made it?' The other whispered back, 'Some very large animal! I'm getting out of here! I'm not going to be dinner for some big beast!' The other nodding, 'Me either. I'm with you.' The two men turned and started to leave, when the Preacher caught them. 'Where are you two going?' The Preacher asked, 'Don't you have any faith in God? He will protect you. That twig was probably the old man trying to scare us, and you two fell for it. Now let's go--he can't be far'. The two men rejoined the Preacher and they pushed on. Another twig snapped! This time it sounded very close! They stopped again and froze in fear. The Preacher shouted, 'OLD MAN YOU DON'T SCARE US. WE'LL FIND YOU, AND WHEN WE DO--WE'RE TAKING YOU BACK TO ANSWER FOR YOUR EVIL DEEDS'. They were about to continue, when they heard a rustle of leaves coming from a short distance in front of them. The Preacher shouted again, 'OLD MAN--WE KNOW THAT YOUR MAKING ALL THOSE SOUNDS TO SCARE US BUT, IT ISN'T WORKING! WE'RE COMING FOR YOU AND NOTHING YOU DO IS GOING TO STOP US'. Then--a low growl came from the left followed by another snapping twig. The men and the Preacher gave out a yell, turned, and started running back out of the valley. As they ran loud heavy footfalls could be heard following them! Another growl, and louder and faster foot falls. The men were now running as fast as they could. Panting and gasping for air, as they were running for their lives. Then, a loud hair raising screech followed by a scream! The Preacher looked back and one of the men was gone! Fear ran through him as he, and the remaining man continued to race for the entrance of the valley and safety beyond. They slowed for a moment, out of breath, and the footfalls were gone. They stopped to catch their wind, because both men were panting and gasping. The remaining man sat on a large rock to rest. The Preacher just

stood there, trying to catch his breath. Neither man could speak, because each was out of breath. Then without warning--something grabbed the man sitting on the rock. He screamed as he was pulled into the underbrush. The Preacher screamed and starting running. The footfalls could now be heard again! The Preacher ran as hard as he could. The heavy footfalls and growls were getting louder and closer! He prayed and cried as he ran. What ever this evil beast was, it was about to get him, as his strength was fast leaving him and he couldn't run much longer. The entrance was now only a little ways off. If only he could muster enough strength to reach it. He ran and ran, not knowing where his strength was coming from. There it was just ahead, the path out of the valley. He ran to it and started to ascend when his legs gave out. He stumbled and fell! A rock flew by! He got up and tried to run up the steep path, but this took more strength then he had. He fell to his knees and cried, for he now knew that all was lost and the beast had him for sure! He began to pray and then, he passed out. The next day the Sheriff and several men from town found him halfway up the old road from the valley. He was bruised and battered and could hardly speak. The Sheriff asked, 'Where are Gibson and Nelson weren't they with you?' The Preacher nodded saying, 'They're both gone! The Devil Beast has got em'. The Preacher then gets up and they leave for the safety of the town. The Preacher looks back and remarks, 'Old Man--you can stay in that valley. You and the Devil, together in his valley--Devils Valley.'

The next morning Glen wakes up with the story still fresh from previous evening, in his mind.

After chores and breakfast, he gets ready and catches the bus for school.

By the time, the final bell sounds the end of school that afternoon, he's forgotten the story; after all, it was Friday and the weekend was ahead.

On the way home, on the school bus, the sky has turned gray.

The radio on the bus announces the approach of a big snowstorm; by six that evening, it had already begun snowing.

After supper Glen and his Parents sat in front of the TV, watching reports of the big snowstorm.

An airplane fly's over and it sounded very low.

"He sounds awful low! I hope he isn't in any trouble," Glen's Father

remarks, “this isn’t the kind of weather to be out flying in.”

The sound faded and then vanished; Glen remarks, “He’s headed over Devils Valley! He better not try landing there!”

Glen went to bed that night thinking about the airplane; the next morning, the snow had stopped, leaving a fresh new foot of fluffy white snow on the ground.

After chores, Glen smiled as he walked back to the house for breakfast, and as he passed the machine shed, his new snowmobile was sitting there waiting for him; it beckon to him, to come aboard and play in those white fluffy, cold fields.

The news was on the radio as Glen and his Parents ate breakfast, it told of a missing airplane that took off from the local airport.

“I wonder if it wasn’t that plane we heard last night, it did sound awful low,” Glen remarked; and then, the sound of a couple of snowmobiles could be heard approaching.

Glen’s Father asks, “You planin’ on going snowmobiling?”

“Yeah, --by myself,” Glen responding, “now it looks like I’m going to be havin’ company, it must be all this new snow. Now everybody will be out--there goes the peaceful quite ride.”

Just as the two snowmobiles reach the road crossing, the Sheriff turns in and drives up their driveway; then the two snowmobiles cross from the ditch onto the driveway and head for Glen’s house.

The Sheriff pulls up, stops, gets out, and walks up to the front door and knocks. Glen’s Dad gets up and goes to answer the door.

“There’s been an airplane crash in Devils Valley,” The Sheriff solemnly announces, “we need Glen and his snowmobile to help bring out any survivors, because there is no way in except by snowmobile. We’ve cleared a spot for a Helicopter to land, in case there are injured survivors. The Helicopter can’t land in the valley, because of the thick cedar and brush. We need the snowmobiles to bring the survivors to the helicopter.”

Glen, standing at the door, told the Sheriff that he would help.

By this time the two snowmobiles have pulled up and stopped; the two riders get off and remove their helmets.

After placing their helmets on the seats, they walk up to where the Sheriff is standing and talking to Glen and his Father; they were Glen’s two

friends from school, Bob and Jerry.

“What’s up,” Bob asks?

“We need the three of you to help on a rescue mission,” The Sheriff replies.

“Yeah, a plane crashed in Devils Valley,” Glen breaking in, “they need us and our sleds to go and bring out the survivors,” both Bob and Jerry nod that they’ll help.

Glen goes and puts on his snowmobile suit, gets his helmet, and heads for the machine shed; he opens the big door and goes over to his new pride and joy, and as Glen’s two friends watch, he uncovers the new machine.

He pops the hood, checks the oil level, the engine, and transmission belt, and after being satisfied, he lowers the hood and secures the latches; next, he checks the fuel level and finally he is ready to start it up, and as he puts the key into the ignition Bob remarks, “Bet it won’t start.”

“Bet ya’ a pint of oil, it’ll take at least three pulls,” Jerry adds, Glen pauses and looks at Jerry and points at him saying, “You’re on. She’ll be running on the first tug.”

Glen turns the key and grabs the recoil handle and then he whispers to the machine, “Girl--there’s a nice pint of good oil for you, if you’ll start before the rope gets halfway out.”

He looks over at the two boys, smiles--pulls the rope; the sled fires to life, the recoil rope had only been pulled out about eighteen inches.

Glen works the throttle a bit and the sled settles into a smooth two stroke idle; heavy blue exhaust smoke soon fills the shed and bellows out the door.

Glen puts one knee on the seat and his other foot on the running board, grabs the handlebars, squeezes the throttle, and the sled moves out of the shed; He drives it over to the other two sleds and parks it next to Bob’s.

Bob and Jerry follow, walking, they arrive just as Glen shuts his machine down.

Glen holds his hand, palm up to Jerry, “You owe me a pint of oil.”

“I’m not betting with you again,” Jerry says nodding, “shoulda’ known better than to make bets on a new sled. Just look at the old things we have to ride.”

Glen looks at Jerry and retorts, “Old! You guys bought them both new last year! Why, --they’re hardly broke in! Now we all got new sleds to ride this winter.”

The Sheriff gets a couple of radios and a map from his car, and then motions to the three boys to come over to where, he spreads a map out on the hood of his car, and points to the location where the plane was spotted; it was at the far end of the valley, at the small spring fed lake.

Glen choked! He and his two friends will have to traverse the entire length of the valley to get there, get any survivors, and traverse it again to get out.

Glen looked at his watch and figured he had about six hours before it got dark to do it in, and swallowed hard at the thought of being in that valley after dark; the story from the evening before, ran through his mind.

The Sheriff handed two-way radios to the boys; Glen got one radio and Bob got the other.

The Sheriff instructed the boys on how to use them, to keep in contact, or for emergency instructions.

Finally it was time to go, the boys put on their helmets, started up their sleds, headed out of the yard, and up the driveway; they stopped at the road crossing, then across the road and into the ditch.

About a quarter of a mile later, they swing onto the local snowmobile trail and headed north.

Glen gunned his sled and the speedometer hit forty, the other two were right on his tail; these sleds were high performance sport machines.

It took them forty-five minutes to reach the entrance to the valley.

They paused--looked at each other; Glen raised his visor, leaned over to Bob and said, “Well--here goes. If we don’t make it out before dark--I hope these sleds can out run whatever is in there!”

Bob nodded, lowered his visor and was ready; Glen lowered his, turned and gave one last look back, then he squeezed the throttle and the sled headed down the old wagon road into the valley, Bob and Jerry, following Glen.

When they reached the small river, they followed it west towards the place of the downed plane.

The virgin snow was deep and soft and because no one has been here to make a trail, the sleds were bobbing up and down making a new trail.

At times they had to slowly inch their way between the thick stands of cedar and around large rocks and aspen trees.

The going was very slow and time was fast running out; the Sun was now passed the mid-point in the sky.

They were in this deep valley and thick forest, darkness would now come much quicker then if they were on the ridge, Glen had forgotten to take this into account when he figured the amount of time he had before darkness fell.

He began to get very nervous, because now, it appears he might be riding through the valley in the dark after all.

It was one thirty, when they pulled up to the lakeshore.

There in the distance they could see the crashed plane; it had tried to land on the frozen lake, but the slippery ice and short distance wasn't enough landing area for the plane to make a safe stop, and it had slid into a stand of large cedar trees and rocks.

There it stopped, the nose of the plane is lodged between two trees; the wings were bent back and the wheels are lying next to a large rock, which had removed them from the plane as it, slid past.

Two people, a man in his early twenties and a woman about the same age were sitting next to a fire, wrapped in blankets.

Several minutes later, the boys were at the wreck.

The woman's face showed the wear of the previous night crying with fear; the mans face showed only fear.

They were ecstatic when Glen and his two friends arrived and both seemed to be in fine physical health and wanted to leave immediately.

Glen radioed to the Sheriff that they had found the plane, and the survivors were Ok.

Glen told the man to ride with Bob and the woman to ride with Jerry, and he'll bring up the rear.

The man went straight to Bob and got on his sled.

Glen walked over to him and asked, "Is there anything you want from the plane?"

The man shook his head and said, "Let's just get going. I don't want to spend another night in this hell hole!"

The woman was now sitting on Jerry's sled and she nodded the same.

Glen perplexed asked, "Did something happen last night?"

Both people nodded, and then Glen nervously asked, "What?"

The man slowly replied, as fear now returned to his face, "It all started right after we ended up in the trees. The engine quit in the snow-storm--carb iced up. I looked for a place to land and saw the lake and headed for it, hoping it was big enough to set down--it wasn't. We figured it was better to weather the storm in the plane, as it offered shelter from the wind driven snow. Everything was fine. We were bundled up in blankets that were stored in the back, when suddenly there was a loud snarl and growl from outside. We held our breaths and remained very quiet hoping whatever it was would leave."

The man paused and his face got distorted with fear, then he continued, "Then we heard what sounded like foot stomps or maybe paw stomps coming. They got louder and louder. What ever it was, it was huge, as the snow was making a loud crunching sound with each step it took. We were so scared, and then Sue started to cry. I feared the beast would hear her, so I tried to quiet her. Then everything got quiet--we thought it was gone--then the plane gave a lunge! Then we heard the most terrible loud screech and roar that you've ever heard. It made your blood run cold and we froze in sheer terror. I was near crying myself. I never want to hear that sound again, so let's just get going before that thing, or whatever it was comes back," just hearing the story made Glen shiver with fear.

Bob and Jerry quickly mounted their sleds and motioned to leave.

Glen wanted to see the tracks that the beast made, and maybe get some idea as to what kind of animal it might have been; the way the man had talked, it sounded just like a Bear, --a Bear!

There never has been a Bear so far south before; the only Bear that Glen had ever heard anyone talk about was way up north, how could a Bear get into the valley without someone seeing it?

Besides, shouldn't a Bear be hibernating?

Anyway, it would've had to travel for several hundred miles through open farmland; no--it couldn't possibly be a Bear--unless--it was brought here and released.

Glen walked over to the plane and looked all around it.

He looked and looked, but couldn't see any signs or tracks, maybe the snowstorm covered them up, maybe it was only the sound of the wind through the quaking aspen and cedar, that made the screeching and growling.

With the trauma of the crash, their minds were probably playing tricks, as Glen can surly testify too; his mind has played tricks on him many times in the night, as for the plane shaking--well--the wind could have done that, as it was very windy during the storm and the plane wasn't that well secured.

Glen headed back to his sled wondering about all of this, and the more he thought about it, the story from last evening came back and his mind began to play tricks, a shiver went down his back, and it wasn't because he was cold, and now he didn't want to wait around any longer.

Glen radioed to the Sheriff, that they were on their way back.

After the machines were started, Glen motioned to Bob to head out.

In single file, they retraced their trail back from where they came; the going was a little quicker this time because, they didn't have to break trail.

As they rode, Glen began to recall the story again, the similarities were startling, could there really be a Devil Beast in here after all!

An hour had passed as they rode and the sky had cleared off to a deep blue, not one cloud remained.

The wind was from the North and very calm, and when it gets dark it will be very cold under the stars.

"When the Sun sets it'll be getting dam cold," Glen thought as he rode, "another reason to be back before dark."

Suddenly, he saw brake lights and pulled hard on the break; he stopped in the nick of time, just missing Jerry's taillight by a fraction of an inch! He was daydreaming!

Glen looked up and saw Bob and Jerry pointing to something across the small river, and looked over to where they were pointing and froze!

There, off in the distance was a bright flashing, flickering light!

Sometimes it flashed or flickered red and sometimes it was so bright that he couldn't look at it.

The story from the evening before, once again came to him; now he had mixed feelings of fear and curiosity, but now mostly of curiosity.

What or who is making that flashing light?

Against better judgment, he dismounted and walked over to Bob; when he got to where Bob was stopped, they both raised the shields on their helmets, so they could talk.

“I’m going over to see what it is that’s making that flashing light,” Glen told Bob, “you and Jerry take these people to the Helicopter. Its going to get mighty cold after the Sun set’s and these people aren’t dressed for it!”

“You’re crazy,” Bob shot back, “it’ll be dark in another hour,” they looked to the west and the Sun had already started to sink pass the valley rim.

“I’ve just got to find out about that light,” Glen told him, “it can’t be more then a quarter mile over and a quarter mile back. If I hurry, I can still make it out by dark.”

“Ok--it’s your funeral,” Bob replied and lowered his face shield; Glen smiled and nodded.

Bob and Jerry started their snowmobiles and Glen stepped back as they then took off down the trail, leaving Glen.

Glen watched as they disappeared around a curve, he then walked back to his machine, got on and started it.

After looking once more to where the Sun was starting to fade he said to himself, “Glen--why are you doing this? This is stupid!”

He made a sharp turn off the trail and headed towards the fading flickering orange and red light.

As he got closer the light got more pronounced; fifteen minutes later he was almost there.

There--just up head he could see it; he pulled up and stopped, next to an old dead oak.

He looked up and saw an old deer stand with a platform about twenty feet up, wooden slats was nailed to the tree as to make a crude ladder up to it.

He could see that it wasn’t used for many years, as some of the slats were missing and twisted.

Whatever was making that light was up on the platform, so he carefully started to climb the rickety old ladder.

Finally reaching the platform, he pulled himself up and carefully got

up to a standing position and looked around, and from here, he could see the entire valley.

He could almost see past the rim of the valley, and the Sun was still above the horizon.

There was Bob and Jerry, they were just about ready leaving the valley and were starting to make the climb out.

He looked around to find the source of the flashing light; there--an old cracked mirror hanging on a dead branch by a small piece of wire.

It was the Sun shining in the mirror, as it was just setting, which made the colored light; and as wind moved the mirror, it caused the flickering and flashing.

Glen smiled with relief, because there weren't any demons or monsters making the flashing light.

There isn't anything to be afraid of in this valley after all, so he takes the mirror and says, as he puts it into his pocket, "No more scary flashing lights. Now I'll show everyone how stupid they, are. Devils--Demons--there are no such things!"

Now there wasn't any reason to hurry.

It was so quite and peaceful, he just stood there and watched the Sun set, and as he was about to leave, he spotted what appeared to be an old double barrel shotgun sticking out of the tree; it had been leaning against what was once the crotch of the tree.

As the tree had long ago grown over it and had since died, and now with only the double triggers and what was left of the stock protruding out.

Glen looked at the other side of the tree, to see if any more of the gun was still visible; only several inches of the two barrels remained, the rest of the gun had been devoured by the tree.

As Glen carefully climbed back down, it was now getting dark and as he rode his sled back to the trail, Glen wondered why, anyone would leave their shotgun, up in the deer stand?

He figured whomever it was, left in a mighty big hurry a very long time ago.

He finally reached the trail, turned and headed for the valley exit.

By the time he was in sight of the exit, it was now very dark, as there wasn't any moon.

He pulls over and shuts the machine off, turns around, and lies on the seat with his head resting on the handlebars.

The air was now cold and clear; looking up, the sky was black and full of stars that shined brightly, hardly blinking.

Glen tried to identify the different constellations and star groups.

The night was so still and quite, he could hear himself, breathe, then his thoughts returned to the deer stand, “Why would anyone leave in such a hurry as to leave their gun?”

A chill runs down his back as he again asked himself, “What would cause someone to leave in such a hurry as to leave their gun? Their means of self defense!”

Another chill--Glen abruptly gets up as fear now starts to grab hold; he swings around and as he grabs the recoil, a twig snaps followed by a growl.

He pulls the recoil cord, nothing happens!

He remembers the key and fumbles for it; finding the key, he turns it on.

He hears footfalls, and whatever is making them, is huge!

Again he pulls the recoil--still nothing!

As the sound of footfalls get closer and closer, the fear within him swells; he’s now confused and sweating, frantically asking, “Why doesn’t this stupid machine start?” It has never failed him before.

He glances back, and for an instant, he thinks, he sees something through the trees, it looks like it was coming down the trail towards him, something very big and grayish!

“Come on--START,” Glen cries, as he now feels anger along with the fear.

He tries again to get the machine to start, but still it refuses to come alive; not even a pop!

It’s as if the machine is also scared.

Again and again he pulls on the recoil, and each time there’s nothing; the footfalls are getting louder and louder, and then, there is a hair-raising screech!

Glen in sheer fear leaves the sled and makes a mad dash for the valley exit; the exit is no more than a eighth of a mile, for a teenager this is nothing, after all, Glen is on the track and field team at school.

He races for the exit running up the hard packed snowmobile trail.
The footfalls are now coming faster as well; what ever it is that's pursuing him, is intent on catching him!

Glen remembers the mirror.

"Maybe that's, what it's after," Glen says to himself in panic, and gets the mirror from his pocket and drops it on the trail behind him.

He runs and runs; he's panting now, as he's running out of breath.
There's the exit he's made it.

Now up the old wagon road and out of the valley.

Half way up he stumbles and falls; he closes his eyes, waiting for what ever it is, to grab him.

He's exhausted, and lies there quietly, waiting for the inevitable end; no longer afraid, he falls into unconsciousness.

Glen awakes in the hospital and looks up in confusion, his Mother and Father are standing at his bedside, looking down at him smiling; Bob and Jerry are standing at the foot of his bed, also looking down at him smiling.

"Where am I," Glen asking?

"You're in the Hospital," his mother responds, "after you didn't show up for hours. Bob and Jerry went looking for you. They found you laying on the trail, halfway out of Devils Valley."

"Yeah man--we thought you were a goner," Jerry said, breaking in and then asking, "what happen to your sled?"

"Hospital? Sled?" Glen still groggy softly repeating.

Bob nods and asks, "Did you find out what the flashing light was?"

"Flashing light?" Glen still a bit groggy again repeats, both Bob and Jerry nods.

"Yeah--the flashing light," Jerry responds, "remember?"

Glen starts to recall the deer stand and the mirror and says, "It was an old cracked mirror, hanging in a deer stand, in an old dead oak. It was the Sun shining on it at Sunset, that we saw. When the wind moved the mirror it made the light flash. I took the mirror, so it wouldn't scare anyone any more. It's in the pocket, in my snowmobile suit."

"No honey--your pockets were empty," His Mother tells him.

Glen looks at his Mother and says, "But--I put it in my pocket," then, he remembers leaving it on the trail for what ever it was, chasing him.

“I dropped it on the road when I was running.”

“What happened,” His Father asks, “why were you running on foot? Where’s your new snowmobile?”

Glen starts to cry.

“It was after me. I couldn’t get the sled to start, so I left it and started to run on foot. It was huge--maybe eight to ten feet tall! I only got a glimpse, but it looked kind of grayish,” Glen tells them, and then he turns his head sobbing, “My sled is gone! The Devil Beast has it now.”

“As soon as you get back, we’re going to get your snowmobile,” his Father tells him, “We’re not leaving a brand new machine to rot out in the woods. We’ll get it back home--one way or another.”

His Father pats him on the shoulder and says, “We’ve got to be going. We’ll see you as soon as the doctor lets you go.”

His Mother leans over and kisses him on the cheek, “See you real soon honey.”

“See ya’--real soon, bye now--get well,” Bob says to him.

“Yeah--real soon--bye,” Glen says to him as he and Bob leave.

Glen watches, as they all walk out of his room.

Several days later, Glen, his Father, Jim, Carl, Bob, and Jerry were headed back to Devils Valley to retrieve Glen’s snowmobile.

Glen was riding two up with Jim on his old Arctic Cat; this old machine was built for two people.

His Father, Jim, and Carl were carrying their hunting rifles, because no one knew what lurked in that valley.

Bob also brought a rope to be used to pull Glen’s sled back home.

There it was, just where he left it; they pulled up and stopped.

Bob went to the back of his machine, in the storage compartment behind the seat, to get the rope.

Glen and Jerry walked over to the stalled machine.

Glen got on and Jerry said, as he pointed to the handlebar, “The kill switch is pushed. You forgot to pull it back on before trying to start the sled.”

Glen responded, as he pulled the switch to the on position, “I always pull the kill switch back on after the sled stops. It’s a habit I got,” as he remembers that he pulled the switch on, just before laying on the sled to look at the stars, and then, a thought occurred to him, “I must’ve pushed it off

with my helmet when I laid my head on the handlebars,”

“Try starting it, I’ll bet it’ll start now,” Jerry declares.

Glen grabs the recoil and gives it a pull, and the machine pops and come to life; Glen is red with embarrassment!

Jerry hollers to Bob, “We don’t need the rope. Glen forgot to pull the kill switch.”

Glen feels elated, there’s nothing wrong with his machine; it was all his fault, so stupid!

“Why didn’t I check the kill switch? I’ll never forget next time,” Glen tells himself, feeling stupid.

As the machine settles into a nice smooth idle, Glen gets off, picks up the back of the sled and drops it a couple of times.

This dislodges any frozen chunks of ice or hard snow from the under carriage, because the heat exchanger in the Tunnel, drips water onto the track suspension, which refreezes; this also breaks loose the track, so it’s free to turn.

Meanwhile, Jim and Carl, with their guns, explored; they looked for tracks and signs of the creature, that Glen said was after him, but they couldn’t find anything, not even a bent twig!

Jim hollered to Glen, “Just were did you say you saw the beast?”

Glen gets off his machine and walks over to Jim and points to the curve just beyond, telling him, “There--just behind those cedar trees. I just got a glimpse of it coming around that corner.”

They went there and look for signs, but there wasn’t anything only the tracks of the three snowmobiles, which passed by; they looked at each other.

Glen felt nervous because, he knew what he’d heard and what he saw wasn’t his imagination; it was real and very frightening!

The Sun was again getting low as they headed out of the valley.

Once on the flats outside of the valley and on the groomed snowmobile trail, they could increase speed and as they made haste for home, something made Glen want to look back, so he slowed, turned, and looked back at the valley; again that chill ran down his back, as there was that flashing light again, but how?

He took the mirror from the deer stand, but whom or what put it back?