



FROM CRAPPER TO SNAPPER: The Origin of the Turtle Hunter
by T.E.Kinnaird

One

He awakes from a hazy slumber in which shadows move across his field of vision. He can hear a faint beeping and the rustle of fabric nearby. He blinks his eyes and the shadows become more distinct, gaining definition and color. The sounds become sharper and he hears murmuring voices in the distance. He realizes he is lying down and tries to sit up. A searing flash of pain slashes across his abdomen and he cries out.

“Looks like our patient is awake,” says a young woman dressed in white. “Sit back. Be still. It's okay. I'll get the doctor.”

Her voice is calm and soothing. He lies back in the bed as she exits the room. He looks around, seeing the blinds on the windows to his right, the curtain drawn on his left, dividing the room. The walls are white and reflect the soft white light cast by the overhead fluorescents. He lifts his right hand, seeing the IV tube inserted into the vein on the back of his palm, and reaches out to touch the cold metal rail. He looks back over his right shoulder, toward the source of the beeping sound, and sees a display screen with several multi-colored lines running horizontally across its surface. He realizes he is in a hospital. He is confused. Why is he here? What happened? How did he get here? He looks toward the ceiling, trying to relax and let the memories come.

He focuses on the fluorescent lights and lets his mind clear. The room begins to fade out as he focuses on the lights. They begin to turn yellow and burn brighter. He squints against their intensity, creating two slanted shadows across their surface. They look like eyes -- two giant reptilian eyes -- and they are moving toward him. Coming for him. Suddenly he remembers, his eyes opening wide for one terror stricken moment just before he blacks out and his body goes limp on the white sheets.

Two

He opens his eyes and looks up into the canopy of maples, elms, and pines. He can see the grayish blue sky above the silhouettes of their branches and leaves. Rain will be falling before sunset, he is sure, but for now the conditions are perfect for an afternoon hike through the woods. He has been here on countless occasions and can navigate these wilds as easily as any street in his hometown. He prefers to spend his free time alone in the woods, walking the trails and exploring the untouched underbrush and stands of wild pine. He feels free, alive, and content. The sweet scent of pine needles, the loamy aroma of rich earth, and the rich odor of animals fill his nostrils and he relishes in each one, appreciating the intricate balance that makes up his world. He prefers to company of nature to the company of mankind, for here he finds beauty and meaning. Everything seems to serve a purpose and co-exist in a perfect harmony. Walking in the world of man just fills him with contempt and disgust. So many voices saying so little, so many great accomplishments blighting the landscape and filling the air with fumes and gasses. So many self-made dramas being played out, so many people caught up in the pointless cycle of besting their neighbors. That world is too claustrophobic for him. He cherishes the woods, and is here today to worship in this church of Nature's making.

He makes his way down the side of a hill, following the path of a small stream that feeds into a small pond in the narrow valley below. The sun, making its way toward the horizon, appears from behind the cloud cover just long enough to cast a few warming rays into the valley. They dance across the ponds smooth surface, creating vivid hues of magenta and violet before disappearing. The sun is back behind the hazy gray curtain of cloud, and he feels the weight of the coming storm as darkness begins to creep into the valley. He continues down the path, looking for animals in the stream as he goes, occasionally spotting a salamander or small frog.

As he neared the valley floor, he thought he saw something floating out in the middle of the pond, a small domed shape that disappeared as soon as he saw it. The surface of the pond was still as smooth as glass, not a single ripple disturbed its placid calm. A thick blanket of moss met the mud bank at the edge of the pond. Further away from the edge, the moss grew thicker; resembling luxuriant carpeting, and tall ferns grew from it, spreading their fronds in graceful arcs. This gave way to the shiny green leaves of underbrush and the saplings that would one day reach high into the canopy and offer shade for this serene setting. As he smiled to himself in appreciation of the circle of life, he heard something that sounded like a growl. He clamped a hand to his stomach as a spasm forced him to double over.

“Oh, geez,” he said aloud “I knew I shouldn't of eat them eggs.” He tensed up as another spasm rocked his insides and his stomach emitted another low rumble.

“Sure am glad I brought a good roll of TP.” He shrugged out of his backpack and sat down on the moss-covered ground. He began to fish for the toilet paper in his pack. He moved aside plastic bags containing carrots and apples then pushed his camera and extra rolls of film out of the way before seizing upon the prize. He pulled the little cylinder out and held it high above his head.

“Only three things you really need in the woods,” he said as he admired the roll “and that's water, a good knife, and clean butt wipes. I never leave without 'em. They're like my American Express.” He chuckled to himself as he imagined Karl Malden making the pitch on television. Another spasm from his insides cut the laugh short.

“Oh, mammy, she's gonna' blow. Take cover!”

Another reason he liked the woods was the fact that nobody was around to watch him act foolish. He could say whatever crossed his mind. He was alone in his own personal playground. Now, he was glad of that fact, for he certainly did not want anyone watching as he dropped his pants and squatted in the low brush to do his business. No, sir. As he leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, waiting for the first eruption, he detected a slight change in the air. The scent was different, and it seemed to be wafting off of the pond.

“Oh, well,” he said “won't have to worry about that much longer, 'cause I'm about to let loose with a whole stew of smells over here.” He continued to look in the direction of the pond as he balanced on the balls of his feet. Smell or no smell, something just did not seem right.

Three

Back in the hospital room, he opened his eyes to a white room and two figures standing over his bed. One was the nurse from earlier; the other was a distinguished looking man in his late forties. He was wearing a white coat and had a stethoscope slung around his neck.

“Hello there. I have been treating you since your arrival. How are you feeling?”

“How long?” He managed to reply. His voice cracked when he spoke and his mouth was dry. He was very aware of his tongue, and seemed to have forgotten how to use it.

“You came to us four days ago. You were unconscious and going into shock. You had a lost a great deal of blood and were unable to communicate. We were afraid you were going to drift into a coma. Thankfully, that did not happen.”

“When can I go home?”

“Your wounds were quite severe and we would like to keep you here for a few more days to monitor your recovery and make sure infection does not set in. We would also like to find out what happened to you.” The doctor's expression darkened and he replaced the chart he had been holding at the foot of the bed. “You are a bit of a mystery to us. We were hoping you could clear it up. Perhaps you will feel more like talking tomorrow after a good night's rest?”

“Maybe,” he replied, “if I can remember. It's a all a little fuzzy right now.”

“Okay. I am sure it will come to you. We often find that patients have a little trouble recalling a traumatic experience at first. Get some rest. We'll talk again tomorrow. Okay?”

“Yeah,” he mumbled, “tomorrow.” He was not sure he wanted to talk about it. He watched the doctor and the nurse leave the room, then turned back toward the ceiling. The lights were off, but he could still see those yellow eyes.



Four

He rocked forward as the first wave shot out of his bowels. He felt beads of perspiration standing on his brow. He wiped the back of his hand across them, feeling their coldness as his swam.

“This is gonna be a rough one, I just know it.”

He took a deep breath and blinked his eyes, hoping to clear his head before the next wave locked down on his gut. Just as he felt the pressure building, a small movement close to the pond caught his attention. The brush was moving, even though there was no wind. The air was still. The surface of the pond was not. Its glassy expanse had been disturbed by something quite large, for wide ripples were radiating out from the bank, just below the moving brush.

He felt the first twinges of unease begin to crawl across his skin. The brush had stopped moving, and the ripples on the pond were subsiding. The clearing was calm.

“What's the matter with me, anyway? Probably just a chipmunk in the weeds and something fell in the pond. A branch or nut or somethin'. That's all. Geez, you'd think I never took a crap in the woods before.” He realized he was talking to himself again and grinned, feeling more than a little foolish.

“Uh oh, here it comes, round two.”

He grabbed on to his knees, trying to maintain his balance as his bowels exploded once more. Again the cold sweat beaded on his forehead and he became light-headed. His eyes watered, blurring his vision, and sensed movement just in front of him. He blinked the tears welling in his eyes and looked again at the ground right in front of him. Something was there, camouflaged in the brush. He could see a large brown mass hidden by shadows and two glowing yellow dots of light with black vertical slashes across each one. They were about the size of quarters and set about six inches apart.

“What the hell?” He had never seen anything like it, and now his unease turned to fear as he realized his knife was hanging on the belt looped through his pants, which were now gathered in folds around his ankles.

Still not believing what he was seeing, he used his left hand to balance while reaching slowly with his right toward his pants. He heard a low, guttural sound from the dark shape just inches away from where he squatted. He continued to reach for the knife, never taking his eyes away from those yellow dots of light, those yellow eyes. He sensed intelligence there, something more complex than a common animal. He moved his hand around the folds of his pants, feeling the comforting shape of the knife underneath. He reached under the folds and began to work it loose from the sheath, which held it. Slowly, carefully, not making any sudden moves he pulled the knife free.

Suddenly, he was gripped by pain as another spasm erupted deep in his bowels. His body tensed and the dark shape in the grass let out an unearthly sound as it sprang from its hiding place. He just had time to raise the knife before the beast was upon him, its razor sharp beak tearing into the soft fleshy tissue of his private parts. He screamed as the turtle, for that is what he saw as it flew at him, neatly amputated his testicles in one bite and then retreated into the brush.

The pain was overwhelming, but a rush of adrenaline kept him from losing consciousness as he backpedaled up the slope, desperate to put distance between himself and the accursed beast. He could see the creature watching him. Blood stained its beak and its yellow eyes seemed to be dancing with amusement and satisfaction. John continued scuttling up the slope, watching the creature all the while, knowing that he had just been castrated. By a turtle.

“Turtle hell, it's too big!” He screamed out in pain and rage, “that's no turtle, that's a beast. Spawn of hell!”

Another sound emanated from the valley below. He could see the beast, see its taunting

eyes, and hear what he was sure was laughter. He knew it was like no laughter he had ever heard, but he knew the turtle was laughing at him. He stared in disbelief as the turtle turned and slid back into the pond. His vision blurred. His body had taken all it could. "It was laughing at me," he sputtered, just before he passed out.

Five

Lying in bed, staring at the shadows cast on the hospital wall from the window blinds, he was still thinking about the eminent conversation with doctor he would have to face today. He was not sure if should tell him the truth. It just sounded too crazy.

Yeah, I can see it now. I tell the doc I got my balls bit off by demonic damn turtle, he'll likely move me to a room with padded walls and restraints on the beds. Then I'll never get out of here.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of footsteps from the doorway. The doctor strode into the room accompanied by a tall woman with shoulder length auburn hair. He did not remember seeing her before. Her overly calm demeanor made him a little nervous.

"Good morning. I hope you are feeling more rested today."

"Yeah, I am." He directed his answer to the doctor, but never took his eyes from the woman. She gazed into his eyes, as if she were looking for something there.

"That's a good sign. You seem to be healing well. Maybe we can send you home in a few more days." He was still looking at the woman. The doctor motioned to her. "This is my colleague. She is here to observe and evaluate your state of mind."

"Head doctor, eh? I didn't hurt my head." He allowed himself a grin.

"Often in cases where the patient has suffered extreme physical trauma, we find that there tends to be some degree of emotional trauma, also. She is here to help if she senses you are in need."

"There is no need to feel threatened. This is standard procedure. We just want to make sure you are given the best of care." She offered a smile, but there was no encouragement in her eyes. Only a cold, intellectual stare. He knew the truth would only keep him here. His instincts had been correct, as they usually were.

"So," the doctor began, "feel like talking about what happened to you?"

"Yeah, I'm ready. I remember some of it."

Six

When he awoke, the sky was darker. It was not the deep black of true night, but the blue-black of twilight. The sun must have sunk below the ridge just minutes ago, so he could not have been out for long, twenty minutes at the most. He was lying on his back near the crest of the ridge, a few feet from the walking trail. He was lying at angle so that his head was below his feet. He tried to stand, but the pain was too severe and black dots clouded his vision. He sank back to the ground, fearing that he might pass out again. He leaned forward, putting his head between his knees, and waited for the episode to pass. He could see the pond below in the shallow valley. The surface was still. Nothing moved down there.

After a minute or so, he felt a little stronger and crawled toward the trail. He dared not stand up. The simple act of crawling took all the strength he had, but he forced himself to keep moving. He knew that were a few houses on the other side of the ridge.

This whole section of woods and part of the valley had once belonged to his grandfather. He had spent many summers exploring here. Of course, that had been years ago, when he was still a teenager. Before the accident. Before the trouble. Before he had learned life's hardest lesson. That was then. With an effort he struck the past from his thoughts and focused present. He had to get to those houses.

From the top of the ridge, he could see lights burning in the windows of two of them. They were so close, only a few hundred yards, but that distance seemed like miles as John crawled onto the trail and began dragging himself inch by agonizing inch toward those lights. He was not sure if would make it, but he would not stop moving. He knew he had to survive. He had a score to settle, now. This had been no accident. That turtle was taunting him and he knew it. He could not let this stand. His anger fueled him as he crawled and slid down the trail, the houses looming closer each second. He began to feel hope.

Seven

“We know that you were brought in by ambulance,” the doctor began. “A gentleman who lives on a large expanse of property in Winder's Woods found you in his driveway. You were weak from blood loss and appeared to be delirious. He said you kept repeating 'I'm gonna' take yours' and 'I'll be laughing soon' when he asked you what had happened. He took you inside and called an ambulance. He was able to stop the bleeding while waiting for the ambulance to arrive. He most probably saved your life. You were very lucky.”

He listened as the doctor went on, describing how they established his identity through the driver's license in his wallet once he got to the Emergency Room. The medical team had to infuse him with several units of blood before he was stable enough for surgery. Luckily, the wound was fairly clean, so the repairs went forward without complication. The arteries and veins were reconnected and the wound sutured tightly closed. There had

been some nerve damage, meaning that there would be limited sensation in the penis, but the chambers had survived so that it still functioned. He could still have sexual relations on the occasions when the limited nerve sensations allowed proper stimulation. Still, he would never experience things the same way again. Unfortunately, the testicles were gone, and could not be replaced. That part of him was gone forever. He would never father children. He would most likely never have a fully realized relationship. He was cut off from the world, alone and without any real future as far as family was concerned. He had always been a loner, but now he would learn the true meaning of that word.

“Are still with me?” The doctor's voice broke through his reverie, bringing him back to the present.

“Yeah. It's just a lot to take in all at once. That's all.”

“What happened out there?” Both doctors stood over his bed with expectant looks on their faces. They wanted an answer they could believe. He could see it in their eyes. Neither of them really wanted to drag this on any longer than necessary. They just wanted to treat him, sign his chart, and send him on his way. He found that agreeable and prepared to give them what they wanted.

“Well, I was out on one of my hikes. I like to walk in the woods. Always have. I had been out for a couple of hours, I guess. I was on top of one of the ridgelines, admiring the sunset. It's sure something to see from up there.” He paused, remembering how peaceful those sunsets really were.

“Yes. Go on.” Both doctors were leaning forward ever so slightly on their toes, waiting for whatever came next. He still was not sure, as he was sort of making it up as he went. He hoped they would buy it.

“Yeah, okay. You see, I got that silvery feeling, you know, like nature's calling and I gotta' answer. So I move over into a clump of trees to let the dog out, if you follow me.” Both doctors were suppressing grins of amusement at his phrasing, trying not to laugh at his simple manner. *Good, he thought, the simpler they think I am, the more likely they are to believe my story. Let 'em grin.*

“Well, if you ever been up in the trails, then you know that there's all kind of trash up there. There's pieces of cars and washing machines, bits of clothing and shoes, and lots of broken glass. Strangest of all are big sheets of corrugated metal, like you'd use to build a makeshift shed or something. They're all over up there, all rusted and twisted. Anyway, like I said, I let the dog out to do my business there. I had left my backpack layin' on the ground by the trail. About the time I started watering the trees, I heard a rustling noise and turned my head back that way. There was a squirrel rootin' around in my pack. I yelled at him, but he just grabbed my food and scampered away. Then he stopped to look back and made that chitterin' sound. Sounded like he was laughing. I was so mad I started to run after him, but I tripped and fell. I don't remember much after that, just a sharp pain down there and the sound of metal clangin' around me. Then crawlin' down the trail with

something wet and warm all over my pants. I guess I must have caught myself on some of those sheets of metal. It's all sort of a blur after that.”

The doctors stood in silence, eyes wide and expectant, like two people waiting for the punch line of a joke, not sure if the story was over.

“I guess that's it then,” he prompted.

“So, when you were ranting when you were found, I suppose you were talking about the squirrel?” The doctor looked at him, waiting.

“I don't know. I guess so. I mean I really don't remember any of that. Sounds a little foolish, I know, but that's what happened.” Now it was his turn to stare and wait. The doctors looked at each other for several long seconds, before seeming to come to an unspoken understanding.

“Very well. You seem to be handling this all quite well. You must have a strong constitution.” He took the chart from the end of the bed and made a few notes. “You should be able to go home in a couple of days.”

He handed the chart to the other doctor. She scribbled something on it and replaced it at the foot of the bed. “If feel you need to talk,” she said while reaching into her coat pocket, “feel free to give me a call.” She took her hand from her pocket and extended it toward him. She was holding a business card between her finger and thumb. He reached out and took it, looking her in the eyes.

“Thank you. Thank you both for everything, but getting on with my life is the best medicine for me right now.” He smiled warmly as they turned to leave.

Eight

He continued smiling long after the room was empty, smiling in anticipation of the havoc he would wreak on that accursed turtle that had maimed him. Soon he would be strong enough to return to that pond and balance the scales. He would wipe that turtle out, and all those from whence it came. He would track down all the offspring and wipe them out, too. No shred would be left, no evidence that the evil lineage ever existed at all. He would wipe them from the face of the earth. He would never forget those yellow eyes or that laughing beak. Had a lot of work to do. So much to learn. So little time. Well, time was all he had left, now, and he would spend every waking minute finding a way to exact his vengeance.

There was no time to grieve for the life he had lost. As far as he was concerned he never had a life. Better to forget the carnal pleasures he'd known before than to spend the rest of this life missing them. Better that the damn turtle had done its damage when he was just a boy, leaving him no memory of virile power and a woman's touch. For sanity's sake, this

is how he decided to remember it. This is how he would tell the tale.

Maybe it had, after all.

Yeah, that's it. Everythin' started going sour way back then. The turtle knew somehow. That's why it was laughin' at me, because it knew. It took away my spirit then. It was just now getting 'round to finishing the job. That bastard's been watching me for years, just waitin' for the right moment to strike. Damn him!

He was not going to let this final insult go unchecked. He had lacked direction before, but no longer. Now he had a goal. One all-encompassing purpose to fulfill in this world. One reason for living. The price had been his manhood. The time had come to make some soup, as his grandfather used to say.

“He took mine, I'll take his. I'll take them all.”

From that day forward, he would be The Turtle Hunter, and his rallying cry would ring through every valley and across every ridge. As long as breath was left in his body he would proclaim to the heavens...

“HE TOOK MY BALLS!”

End

