



(from Chapter 47)

(Rick narrates)

It's been a while since dinner. We had the steaks tonight. We figured since we paid to stay in an organized campground with barbecue pits, we might as well grill the steaks over a charcoal fire. Alex seasoned them with a clove of garlic and some salt and pepper, pretty basic stuff, and then Bob cooked them. They're actually getting to be quite the cooking team. While the steaks were nowhere close to what we got at the Roundup, they were pretty good. Bob cooked them just enough to get rid of all the blood red, but he left plenty of pink in the middle, so they were really juicy and tasty. We had some canned beans along with them. Pretty basic stuff, and cleanup was a breeze.

We hiked up to the top of the box canyon Telluride sits in today. There's a fantastic waterfall on the right side of the boxed end as you look at it from town. Off to the left, sort of on the middle of the boxed end, is a smaller series of cascades. The two streams join down in the canyon. The waterfall has the greater volume of water by far. We were able to drive to the bottom of the waterfall, but we had to walk from there. Not quite two-thirds of the way up, we ran into a pretty cool guy and his sister in a jeep. They were out for an extended four-wheel drive excursion. It's nice what we're doing, but particularly being here in Colorado, I want to come back some time and rent a four-wheeler, to really get into the back country. When we got to the top of the canyon, we walked along the smaller creek for a while, but when it just seemed like all we'd see were more mine ruins, we decided to turn around and head back down.

As it turns out, it's a good thing we left when we did. We just barely beat a thunderstorm back to the car. What was a good road on the way up got to be a little more sloppy and slick on the way down. It took nearly twice as long to get down as it took to get up, plus we had a couple of slides that were, well, exciting, to say the least. Harv was freaking out, because he thought his precious car, the Beamer, was going to go over the edge. You'd think he'd be more concerned for his life than his car's well-being.

By the time we got to Telluride's municipal campground, the rain had stopped. It was still overcast, and it had definitely cooled down. If I had to guess, I'd say the temperature had dropped to the mid-60s. After we selected a couple of sites, paid and got out our gear, Harv and I left Bob and Alex to set up the campsites. We went to get firewood at a place the jeep guy, Ray, told us about. We eventually found it, and basically filled the backseat floorboards with wood. It wasn't that much, but we figured since we would be cooking away from the campsite we wouldn't burn a fire anyway until after finishing up dinner. The wood was a real deal at three bucks. We also got some charcoal on the way back. That was a ripoff at three bucks.

It was practically dark by the time we finished cleaning up dinner and got back to the campsite. Bob and Harv have the nicer firepit of the two sites, so we built the fire in their pit. We pushed their picnic table over so that we could sit on the bench and watch the fire while leaning our backs against the table. It's the first time in a while we've had anything remotely resembling a backed chair to sit on while in front of a fire.

As darkness set in, Alex stayed true to her word from earlier today that she'd put her harem to work. As we were sitting there on the bench, she reached over and started massaging Harv's dick, right in front of Bob and me. When he started to get a woodie she helped him pull his shorts down, pull hers off and then she just sat on his lap, watching the fire, while he fucked her. As he started making noise she started playing with my dick. As soon as Harv shot his wad, she hopped off him and mounted me the same way. It took me about a minute to blow my load. Then she walked around Harv over to Bob and rode him. She came while she was on Bob. Then she did us all again, starting with Harv. It's just kind

of weird sort of being in line, waiting your turn to fuck. But in the end, all of us got to cum a couple of times. And she's the only one who probably avoided getting splinters in her ass. After she finished with Bob she came over and sat back on my lap, without putting her shorts back on. She's been seeping all over me ever since. Both Harv and Bob are letting their dicks air dry. We're facing away from the traffic loop, so we're probably OK if somebody walks by, but there's nobody right around our campsite.

Off in the distance we can hear thunder. We suspect we'll probably have another storm tonight, so we haven't built the fire up too much. That way we can put it out on pretty short notice. We've got all three of our buckets ready, and, of course, the thunderstorm will come finish off whatever our piss and water don't accomplish.

"OK," says Harv, "topic for this evening, so that we get to know each other better."

"Huh?" I say.

"An item for conversation. Alex has been kind enough to afford us some physical stimulation, so I'm offering a way to stimulate our minds, too."

Alex reaches over, wags Harv's limp dick around in between her thumb and index finger, and says in a sing-songy voice, almost as a mother to a baby, "It's so nice to know Hardy got all stimulated."

"Don't encourage him," I say.

"I didn' say I couldn' be stimulated further this evening," says Harv, "but for the time being, I'm talkin' about our minds."

"OK, I'm game," says Alex.

"Oh, you'll regret this," I say to her.

"C'mon now Rick," says Harv, "work with us, here. So here's the topic, an' Rick, pay attention, because you'll be goin' first."

"Jesus," I say.

"Possibly a good answer," replies Harv, "but please listen to the topic first. It's this: who's your favorite historical figure, and why? Now it doesn't necessarily have to be the greatest person in history, although greatness should be one of your standards. And we'll wanna know why you pick a particular person, so be prepared to give some reasons. Got it? OK, Rick, you're up."

"You've gotta be kiddin' me," I say, "this is stupid."

Alex squirms on my lap a little as she cranes her neck around to look at me, "Why do you say that, Rick? It sounds fun."

"Look, once you say somethin', the whole point of the exercise is for Harv to get his jollies pickin' you apart." I adjust my butt a little bit to accommodate the shift in her weight, as I continue, "He dudn' wanna learn anything about us, he just wants to show us how dumb an' shallow we are."

"Aw, hell Rick," says Harv, "if that's all I wanted to do I wouldn' go to the trouble of even comin' up with a topic. I'd just start talkin' to ya."

"See?" I say to Alex.

"I think you're makin' it out to be worse than it is, Rick. Go ahead. You must have somebody in mind. I do," she replies.

"Yeah, Rick," says Bob, "go ahead. Who's your favorite historical figure?"

Well now I feel kind of trapped. I'm clearly the odd man out. Alex thinks this will be fun. Harv came up with the idea. Bob wants to go along, too. Alex turns her head back to the fire and squirms her

butt around on me again, saying, "Come on, now, Rick. You lead off." Her pussy is still moist and seepy as she squirms on me, but my dick is spent for the time being, so even the little grind she's doing on me doesn't get a rise.

There's a low rumble of thunder in the distance. "Well," I say, "with an intro like that, how can I say no?" I pause and think for a moment. "OK, it's gotta be F D R. Best President America ever had. Saved the country during the Depression, an' then he leads America to save the world in World War Two."

"Hmm," Harv muses, "interesting choice." I knew it. Here comes the mockery. "Roosevelt was at the helm when some pretty heady stuff happened, I'll give you that. But did he actually lead the country in those accomplishments, or did events happen that woulduh made those results happen no matter what?"

"Well shit, Harv," I say, "nobody's a great historical figure if you just suppose events would have happened no matter what. That's too easy."

"Not necessarily true, Rick," he says. "Let me give you two examples from American history. First, George Washington. Now, he did lots of things. Helped to start the Revolution in the Continental Congress, served as commander-in-chief for the duration of the war, first President, presiding over the initial organization of the federal government. I mean, that's a helluva list. But with all of those things, you could say that maybe they would've happened without him. The thing that he did, though, the true genius of George Washington, was in what he didn't do. He never launched a coup against Congress during the war, when many in the army wanted him to because Congress didn't support the troops. The greatest thing he did, though, was to decline a third term. He set the precedent for the peaceful transfer of power that we've pretty much enjoyed ever since."

"With one pretty big exception," I say.

"True enough. Which brings me to my second example. Abraham Lincoln. Now there was a great man. Arguably the greatest political figure western European civilization has ever produced. Just look at what he did. Out of the ashes of the collapsed Whig party, he cobbles together a patchwork of interest groups to lead the Republicans to a stunning victory in the second national election they ever contest, vaulting past more established political figures like William Seward and Salmon Chase to secure the Republicans' nomination. In a time when white racial superiority was taken for granted, including by Lincoln, he wins the election against three other candidates, including the Democrats led by his home-state rival Stephen Douglas, despite being derided as a nigger-lovin' Black Republican.

"Then he maneuvers the South into firing the first shots of the Civil War, so that he has the high moral ground to lead the North into the war. And when support for the war wanes, he stays resolute through to the end, going so far as to tell his cabinet that if he loses in 1864, they'll hafta pull out all the stops to win the war before the Democrat, his former top general, George McClellan, gets inaugurated an' agrees to partition the nation. But that's not all. While the South is M I A in the national government, he puts through all the North's priorities that languished for a generation: fiscal reform, tax policy, homesteading, the trans-continental railroad. It's a complete triumph for the vision Alexander Hamilton started under George Washington, an' it sets the table for our modern economy . . ."

Where I find it a perfect time to interrupt, "Which eventually runs itself into the ground because it didn't pay attention to regular people. That's where F D R comes in. He wins a critical election in 1932, and by governing in the interest of the common man, not the union-busting robber barons, he pulls the country back from the brink of a communist revolution. He saves all those rich assholes from themselves, an' do they thank him? No."

"Temporarily, maybe. But look at how unsustainable all those government programs have become. When the baby boomers start to retire we won't be able to afford social security. It was a nice

thought when America was young an' your average retiree lived three years after retiring. But think how long people are gonna be livin' in 2013 when the leading edge of the boomers start retiring. Somethin's gotta give, an' it's a problem F D R left us with."

"Yeah. Still havin' a country called America is such a big problem. For Russia, maybe. Nah, I'm sorry Harv. F D R was a great man an' a towering historical figure. He showed Americans the government could work for the common man, too, not just as a protector of the rich man's private property. That's the subversive thing he did that caused all those rich bastards to call him a traitor to his class. He just understood better than any of 'em that nothin' works if you don' make sure you have a thriving middle class."

"Alright, Rick," Harv says, "for a favorite historical figure, he's a good one. I don' think he gets past Lincoln or Washington in our list of greatest presidents, but he's arguably in the second tier with Jefferson, Jackson, maybe Teddy."

"Oh, give me a break," I say, emphasizing each word, "Mount Rushmore idn' an accurate measure of our great Presidents. Teddy Roosevelt was certifiable, so he just goes away. Jefferson, I give you, was a great man, an ideas guy, but his presidency wudn' the greatest. Jackson was probly a psychopath, an' his treatment of Indians was a national disgrace."

"Yes, but we're talking about favorite historical figures, so Jefferson as an ideas guy could certainly fit the bill. Teddy an' Andy were a little out there, but they definitely had their impacts. F D R probly dudn' take on the upper crust without watchin' Teddy do it first, so I'd think you'd tip your hat to him at least a little. It probly took a little bit a crazy to go after J P Morgan back in the day. Just like with Andy an' the banks."

"I don' understand much a what you guys are talkin' about," says Alex, "but history sounds a whole lot more interesting out here arguin' about it than it does in class memorizin' it."

"So whadduh you guys think," Harv directs his question to Bob and Alex, "do you like Rick's favorite historical figure?"

"Yeah, I do," says Bob. "I think F D R did a lotta great things for the country. Some of 'em might need some tweakin' now, but mostly he was really good."

"We never made it much past the Civil War in history class," says Alex, "but from listenin' to you guys argue, I'd say I definitely like Rick's choice. F D R sounds like he was a pretty good President."



(Harv narrates)

I think it's probably time to move on from our discussion of Rick's favorite historical figure, Franklin Roosevelt, so I try to wrap it up, "So whadduh you guys think, do you like Rick's favorite historical figure?"

Bob is first to offer his opinion on our mini-debate, "Yeah, I do. I think F D R did a lotta great things for the country. Some of 'em might need some tweakin' now, but mostly he was really good." Mostly he was really good . . . well, if that isn't damning praise for a favorite historical figure I don't know what is. But I'll keep that to myself in the interest of moving things along, so Rick doesn't get his nose too out of joint. He can have such thin skin sometimes.

“We never made it much past the Civil War in history class,” says Alex, “but from listenin’ to you guys argue, I’d say I definitely like Rick’s choice. F D R sounds like he was a pretty good President.” Sounds like he was a pretty good President? God, do you people hear yourselves? You’re trying to pick one person out of all recorded history, and you go for a pretty good President? I can’t dwell here, though. It will turn ugly if Rick gets too defensive.

“OK, then,” I say, “it sounds like we’re giving Rick a thumbs-up on F D R as a favorite historical figure. Nice selection, Rick.” Jesus, not even one of our two best Presidents, and he’s a favorite, out of all of history? Rick can be such a dimwit sometimes. “So I’ll go next. So for my favorite historical figure, I’ll take one of the greatest, no, the greatest, leader of all time. He’s such a great figure that his name has great in it. Alexander. He starts with a piss-ant little principality in Macedon, an’ by the time he dies at thirty-three he’s the ruler of the known world. That’s what I call takin’ a grub stake an’ creating a juggernaut.”

Nobody says anything for about 15 to 30 seconds, and I use the break to slip my shorts up under my butt and shift my weight around. I’ve been letting my boy air-dry since fucking Alex a couple of times earlier tonight, well, since we all fucked her a couple of times earlier tonight. I’ve got half a mind to go over to the bathroom and wash my boy off, because he probably has some of Bob and Rick’s cum on him. I’m just not so sure how it would look if somebody walked into the bathroom while I’ve got my boy whipped out in the sink. So I guess we’ll have to go with letting him air-dry. Finally it’s Alex who speaks up, “I’m not sure I remember exactly, but didn’ his empire start fallin’ apart almost immediately when he died?”

“Well, yes, it was divvied up between a few of his top generals, but that’s not the point. The point is what amazing things he accomplished in just fourteen or fifteen years.”

“But it sounds like it was fourteen or fifteen years of constant war, an’ then probly more a the same between his guys after he was gone.”

“But the point is that he unified the known world under a common system for the one time in human history. Admittedly, he didn’t do a great job transitioning power, but he lived in a time when that wudn’ a priority. Anytime a king dies, you’re likely to have a power struggle. It comes with the territory.”

“Hmm,” says Alex. “I guess he did create a lotta cities an’ stuff. It’s not like what he did didn’ have some permanence, some lasting effect. An’ I guess all the military stuff is kinduh impressive.”

“Kinduh impressive?” I’m almost stammering. “The guy’s marched his fuckin’ army from Greece to Pakistan, kickin’ ass an’ takin’ names all along the way. Shit, he wudn’ just takin’ names, he was handin’ ’em out. He was constantly outnumbered, but he outmaneuvered everybody he came up against. He was a freakin’ genius.”

“I don’t think she’s disputing that,” says Bob, “I just think she’s questioning how much is accomplished by constant warfare. There hastuh be a time of consolidation. A time when you systematize your gains an’ put institutions in place to ensure their long-term survival. It’s a fair point. Not to take anything away from what Alexander accomplished, because, as you say, it’s impressive, but a life cut short probly resulted in his inability to consolidate his gains.”

I’m just stunned. Here we are talking about Alexander the Great. Alexander the fucking Great. I mean, if the name doesn’t say it all, what does? He conquers the world, and these guys are nitpicking that he didn’t have a succession plan? “Well, I’m just sayin’, for all the reasons I’ve already stated, Alexander the Great, my favorite historical figure.”

“I’ll buy it,” says Rick. “He’s impressive, but like all historical figures, he’s got his warts, too.”

“Yeah,” says Bob, “idn’ that part a what caused him to die?” He guffaws with Rick for a few seconds, while Alex looks at the two of them kind of mystified, missing the reference conflating herpes

with syphilis, which some still bogusly claim was the cause of his death. After they have their laugh, Bob continues, "In all seriousness, I like it, Harv. He's a good choice."

"I buy it, too, Harv," says Alex, "this is a neat game. I'll go next. Cleopatra."

We're all silent for about 30 seconds as we let it sink in. Then finally I ask, "Reasons?"

"Well, she had to fight her way to power in a dysfunctional family. An' she won. She ruled one of the richest empires on Earth at the time, an' she wudn' even Egyptian. But they worshiped her as a goddess. I mean, just think about tryin' to get Muslims to worship a Greek woman today . . ."

"But," I break in, getting ready to point out to her that Islam wasn't even founded as a religion until the seventh century AD, almost 700 years after Cleopatra was born. But then I think to myself, what's the point? "Nevermind. Go on."

"In addition, she was constantly outsmarting the Romans. She married both Julius Caesar and Marc Anthony, not at the same time, of course, but it helped her keep Egypt free an' independent."

I can't stand it anymore. "OK, first of all, she didn' marry those guys. She did travel to Rome with Caesar an' have a son by him, yes, but the Senate was scandalized that he brought his Egyptian whore to Rome an' treated her like royalty. It probly contributed to him gettin' assassinated."

"But that wudn' her problem, Harv. Right? I mean, with Rome in chaos, she has a better chance to keep Egypt free an' independent."

This is just too exasperating, "No, not really. She backed the wrong horse in the Roman civil war. Marc Antony ended up losing, and Augustus woulduh done Cleopatra in if she hadn' taken her own life, because he was wigged out about the possibility that Caesar and Cleopatra's son coulduh been set up as a rival emperor to him."

"Still, she ruled Egypt independently for a long time, and at a time when women almost never got a chance to really rule anything."

"I know one thing she was supposedly pretty good at rulin'," says Rick.

"Oooh!" Alex exclaims, as Bob and I look over and see her jump a bit up off of Rick's lap, before settling back down on it. Then I hear the loud crack of an open palm slapping skin.

"Ow!" shouts Rick. "Hey, whaddidya do that for? I told you ya gotta stop hittin' me all the time."

"You gotta stop deservin' it," she fires right back. Then she seamlessly continues with all of us, "An' so what if she did use sex as one of the tools to maintain her empire? Men did, too. Whadduhyou think the whole heir thing was based on? Babies springin' fully formed outta men's butts? An' let's face it, back then when an army sacked a city, there was gonna be murdering, raping and looting galore. Talk about a motivator, for both the fighters an' the defenders."

"Don't you have the same problem," I ask, "with Cleopatra as I had with Alexander? The lack of a succession plan? I mean, if memory serves me, Egypt ended up getting absorbed into the Roman Empire."

"She's my favorite historical figure precisely because she fought off the inevitable as long as she lived. If she had lived longer, Egypt would have stayed free longer. That's what makes her so great. Look at what happened once she was gone. Everything fell apart."

"But . . . but," I'm stammering because I don't know where to start. "That exact same thing could be said about Alexander."

Very coolly and very calmly, she replies to me, "Except you didn't say it."

“You smell that smoke, Bob?” asks Rick, as he sniffs at the air.

Bob sniffs a couple of times and says back, “I believe I do, Rick. Smells a little like scorched Weinberg.” They both snicker at my expense. Alex doesn’t. She just keeps her eyes drilled in on me.

“Very funny,” I say as I break eye contact with Alex. “Maybe you can move on to second grade for your next witticisms. My point is that, instead of just hanging onto a kingdom and having it fall apart when she died, Alexander built his empire, and even though it got split up, it still expanded Greek influence all over the world. In fact, Cleopatra was descended from Ptolemy, one of Alexander’s successors. So anything she did, in a way, she kinduh owed to Alexander.”

“Jeez, Harv,” says Rick, “it’s not a competition. I mean, you even said it’s your favorite historical figure. It’s personal, subjective. There’s not a right or wrong answer.”

I think about explaining to them how theirs are inadequately supported answers, though. Then I just decide to pass. They wouldn’t understand. Shit, FDR and Cleopatra. All of history to rummage through, and they pick FDR and Cleopatra. God only knows what Bob will come up with. “I buy it,” says Bob. “Cleopatra’s a good pick. She’s got some a those warts, too, maybe passed ’em on to Marc Antony, who knows, but she’s definitely an interesting historical figure an’ worthy of favorite status.”

“Aside from the fact her example has apparently given her the impression it’s OK to smack me whenever she wants, I buy it, too. Good choice, Alex. C’mon Harv, give it up,” says Rick.

There’s a peal of thunder. It’s not too close yet, but it’s definitely louder than half an hour ago. It’s time to move on, “I buy it,” I say.



(Bob narrates)

“Alright, Bob, it’s your turn,” Alex says to me from the other side of Harv, where she’s perched on Rick’s lap. We’re all watching the fire, sitting backwards on the picnic bench, reclined against the table. We’ve been playing kind of a game slash discussion generator Harv came up with. He does this kind of thing occasionally. And like Rick warned Alex earlier, he can tend to get a little preachy and exasperated when he thinks everybody else isn’t up to his intellectual standards, which is pretty much all the time. So far he’s criticized Rick’s selection of FDR as his favorite historical figure and Alex’s selection of Cleopatra. He’s also gotten a little defensive that we didn’t all tell him what a genius he is for choosing Alexander the Great. I mean, if I had to pick among the three of them, I’d probably pick Alexander, but I get to pick from all of history. So now I’m really going to mess with Harv.

“OK,” I say. “James H, Jim, Johnson.”

“He’s not a historical figure,” Harv says.

“Let him talk,” Rick says, “I wanna hear this.”

“Is he that guy who had all those people drink poison Kool-Aid in the jungle?” asks Alex.

“Oh, right,” Harv sneers sarcastically, “Bob’s favorite historical figure is a mass murderer.”

“It’s his dad,” Rick says to Alex, matter-of-factly.

“And the jungle guy was Jones, not Johnson,” adds Harv.

“So tell us about your dad, Bob. Why do you pick him?” asks Alex.

There's a loud crack of thunder, but we haven't seen any lightning yet. "It's getting closer," I say. The secondary rumbling after the crack goes on for five or ten seconds. I start talking again as it quiets, "You know how Harv was sayin' F D R was really just presiding over a course of events that would've happened anyway? Well, my dad, and lots of other guys like him, are the people who actually made those events happen. He was an engineer in World War Two. He landed on the beaches of Normandy. He helped take the bridge over the Rhine at Remagen. He came home after the war and got an engineering degree on the G I Bill. He had a workmanlike career as an engineer at an aerospace defense contractor, and along the way he stayed true to my mom and raised seven kids, five of whom have now graduated college. Kinduh like Rick's people, he came outta southside Virginia, but the war changed everything for him. It let him move from being the son of a man who was basically a white sharecropper to being solidly in the upper middle class. Soon he'll retire, putter around his shop and play with his grandkids. Basically he's what makes America great. Can you have a better favorite historical figure?"

There's silence for about 10 or 15 seconds, and then I hear Alex snuffle and see her wipe her nose with her forearm. "Wow," she says, "that was beautiful, Bob." As I look at her with the firelight dancing off her face, I can see glints of fire reflected in a tear gently rolling out of the corner of her left eye. She captures that tear with the back of her hand and rubs down the balance of her face with it. She sniffles in again. "You must really love him."

I'm struck by the raw emotion she's displaying. I wasn't trying to be all sappy and make anybody cry. Actually I was just trying to tweak Harv. Seeing her reaction, though, it all of a sudden makes me feel emotional, almost connected to Alex on a different level. We've shared a moment that I hadn't anticipated, and just as my story touched her, her reaction touches me, because it validates those feelings of love and pride I've had for my dad ever since I can remember. As I utter these next words, I can feel a tear forming in my right eye, "I do." I look away toward the fire. "I owe everything to him," I say.

There's another loud crack of thunder, and a breeze comes up. Our fire flattens out and sparks fly as the wind breathes new life into it. The breeze eases a bit as the after-rumbblings play out. "As nice a story as your dad's life makes, Bob, it dudn' make him a historical figure. Nobody's gonna write a book about him," says Harv.

"I don't know, Harv," it's Rick now, "I think Bob might be onto somethin'. You may be right that Jim Johnson won't be the star of a biography, but the generation he's part of, they went through a lot. They grew up in the Depression. They went to war as young men, an' when they were done the US was one of two superpowers in the world. They came home an' built the greatest economy ever known in world history. That's some pretty serious shit."

There's another round of thunder and wind. Harv's not done yet, "I'm not sayin' Bob's dad didn't do some extraordinary things in his life. Lotsa people in his generation did. Like them, he was just doin' what everybody thought was the right thing to do at the time. But he wudn' a leader like Alexander, or Cleopatra, or even F D R."

"But which is it, Harv?" Rick asks. "You can't have it both ways. On the one hand you wanna criticize F D R because it was inevitable the war would pull the country outta the Depression. On the other, you wanna say guys were just doin' what everybody thought was the right thing to do. Who's responsible for that? F D R? Jim Johnson? All the Jim Johnsons of the world? Somebody did somethin' great, because World War Two was one a the most complete military victories ever achieved. An' it hasn't been fumbled away yet, so it has staying power. An' the succession plan seems to be working so far, although voters can sometimes be idiots. So we've gotta have some great historical figure outta all that."

“Look,” I say, “it’s like Rick was sayin’ earlier, it’s subjective. You could pick F D R outta that. You could pick Eisenhower, or Marshall, they’re the leaders. But all I’m sayin’ is the guys who went an’ did the fightin’, the dyin’, the comin’ home, they’re historical figures, too. So maybe nobody ever writes a biography about ’em. So what? Their stories live on in the families they raised an’ the nation they built. I’m stickin’ with my choice.”

“Bob,” says Harv, “nobody’s sayin’ your old man didn’ do great things. I’m just sayin’ a lotta guys did, an’ . . .”

“God dammit, Harv!” Alex breaks in. “Sometimes you can be such a pig-headed horse’s ass. As far as I’m concerned Bob wins. Hands down he picked the best historical figure of the night, an’ he explained why better than any a the rest of us. I’ve had enough.” And with that, she hops up off of Rick’s lap, grabs up her shorts and walks over to her and Rick’s campsite, bare ass illuminated by the fire.

Harv starts to try to say something, but a loud clap of thunder drowns him out. The wind picks up again and blows the fire horizontal across the campsite about six feet, well outside the firepit. The wind subsides and the fire straightens back up. Rick is the one who actually takes the floor, “Look guys, I think we probly oughtta put the fire out, call it a night. We keep gettin’ wind like that, one a these times the fire’s gonna jump outside the pit an’ catch the grass on fire. Let’s put it out now before we have a real problem on our hands.”

“I agree,” says Bob. “If the grass catches fire, we don’ have enough water to put it out.”

“Yeah,” says Harv, “I suppose so. Hey, Bob, nothin’ personal about your choice, man. I just kinduh had different thoughts about what we were doin’.”

We all get up and pull on our shorts, so that we can douse the fire. We all pee on it after we’ve drowned it with the buckets of water. “Night, guys,” Rick says as he walks over to his tent.

“Night, Rick,” I say. “See you tomorrow, Harv.”

“Yeah, have a good night, Bob.” There’s a bright flash of light, illuminating the ring of trees around our site and the little tufts of grass in our clearing. The clap of thunder comes three seconds later. The storm is upon us. We both walk to our respective tents.