

The Hudson Jeff has never seen still exists.

This other Hudson is as real as unprinted money, the spirit of Christmas, that invisible place where lost cell phone chargers and lottery tickets reside. He is real like fake crab or pains in a ghost limb. He is as real as a favorite tautology, the little Calvinist lies we tell ourselves to make it through Friday afternoons at the office. He is real.

To Jeff, this other Hudson is a shadow with no noun to cast it. He has a brutal time imagining the unobserved Hudson and it's not for lack of trying. When he does manage to conjure up an image, when he can slow his mind down long enough to focus its invisible beam upon the blank screen of imagination, all he ever sees these days is a skinhead marionette. This marionette dangles from a nail in a dark garage, limp and lifeless. He's harmless, yet suffused with unlimited potential. The marionette is waiting for someone to pick him up, to dance a little life into his strings. He is waiting for an audience, witnesses to make bothering worth the bother. He is waiting for an observer to make him real. Without one, he is nothing. He is nobody.

Macpherson's tree fort had nothing to do with Hudson, the only Macpherson son. Before Hudson was even conceived, Ferguson "Old Mac" Macpherson had it built as a sort of show of solidarity to the locals of Indian Harbour, to demonstrate that he wasn't so very different from them; the classic pants-on-one-leg-at-a-time demo. The fact that the tree fort sat on the edge of the only "estate" on Vancouver Island's entire west coast was a point lost on Old Mac. So was the point that none of the Canadians—white or native—actually lived in trees. He clearly reckoned that, with a tree fort, he'd be viewed as some sort of local by proxy, a man in touch with his surroundings, a Rousseau in action instead of what he was: white-skinned conqueror; snake-oil salesman; racketeer; functioning alcoholic; liar; etc. The man seemed to actually believe that a really bang-up tree fort would make up for three suicides, a land grab reminiscent of sub-Saharan Africa in the nineteenth century, and the transformation of a low key blue collar town into an amusement

park for the world's dramaturges; the metamorphosis of its inhabitants from a proud, coastal people into a megalomaniac's slaves.

People already hated Old Mac. A tree fort wasn't going to fix anything.

Blueprints for the fort began in 1970 and were masterminded, not surprisingly, by Jeff's father, Basil DeLieu. Bas had done such a blistering job on *The Globe* that a little fort would be a cinch and they could use up some of the leftover lumber. The new structure started out humbly enough: a square room made of local wood and approximately the size of a large kitchen. It would tower twenty feet off the forest floor. It would have a thatched roof and black 2x2 piping. By the end of autumn though, the fort has blossomed into an affair with a crew of four, skylights, imported hardwoods from Venezuela and Brazil, and a tiny elevator built inside the trunk of the ancient cedar that served as its foundation. Old Mac just couldn't contain his enthusiasm. He lived by the rococo adage, *Why do something when you can overdo something?*

By the time it was drafted, the fort had decks all around, double-glazed windows, a hot tub and an upper deck with a built-in "galactic observatory." Once assembled and modified, the observatory's telescope was comparable to that at any university astronomy program in Canada. The ornate, hand-carved door to the fort measured eight feet wide by fourteen feet high and was reportedly stolen from a mosque in the Khyber Pass destroyed in 1850, acquired by Old Mac god-knows-how. But, in that centuries-old British tradition of calling Arabian quarter-horses "polo ponies" and hundred-room castles in Warwickshire "summer houses," Old Mac still insisted on calling the thing a tree fort.

Between the years of its completion in spring 1971 and its occupation by the impish twelve year-old Hudson in 1984, the tree fort was used for any number of purposes by Old Mac: He used it for storage of books and papers for a while and for leftover exotic timber; he hosted academic seminars with visiting Shakespeare scholars who oohed and awed at the craftsmanship and the elevator; he used it as a place to sleep it off when he'd been pounding Laphroaig down by the water, scanning the horizon for single-malt inspiration. There had been one or two unfortunate late night dalliances in the fort with women who were

neither his wife nor his wife's age. And later, after Hudson was born, the tree fort merely became a convenient place to escape the infant's demonic howling.

According to neighbors and by Old Mac's own admission after a couple of Laphroaigs, Hudson, between the ages of two months and three and a half years, could actually make your nose bleed with his screaming. The Macphersons tried every remedy under the sun. They rubbed his new teeth with oil of clove. They put "quite a bit" of brandy in his bottle at bedtime. They tried warm facecloths, cool facecloths, a fan, a dehumidifier, lavender baths, marjoram oil behind the ears, fleece coverlets, buckwheat pillows—the lot. Nothing short of a miracle or an exorcism was going to help. The couple tried playing a cassette tape of nature sounds—which didn't work—and things got so desperate that Old Mac smashed the tape against the nursery wall with the heel of his hand, screaming to his wife that the bloody Pacific ocean was pounding away less than a hundred yards down the cliff and wasn't that bloody natural-sounding enough for the wean?

Basil was over one day, working on some ceiling renovations to the great house when Hudson started his wailing. He'd heard them say he was bad but hardly ever did work inside the main quarters. It was truly shocking: a sound from beyond the grave.

"See what I was telling you, Bas? Like a bloody banshee," said Old Mac, pulling his tweed hat down over his ears a bit. His shoulders and back immediately clenched. In profile, the stout little man looked like a moray eel wearing a hat.

"He's a howler alright. He'll grow out of it, though. Not to worry."

"Not this one, mate. Bloody possessed, he is."

"Oh, our Jean-Francois used to be that loud. We tiptoed around the house when he was asleep. Couldn't even have ice in our G and T's as the clinking might wake him! Honest to god though... One day, he just shut up."

"This one hasn't shut up since he was two months old."

"Come on then, Ferguson. He just needs some patience. All about patience, children; otherwise, they think you're letting them win." Basil let his heavy tape measure retract with a snap, missing the finger-pinching metal end of the tape like a pro.

"Oh, he won ages ago, this one. We're on our ninth nanny—now why do you suppose that is, Basil? Our last one was paid twenty dollars an hour and she still quit." Old Mac's cheeks flushed red. "That's more than I pay you!"

"I was just going to say that..."

Hudson, Old Mac explained, had just turned three and a half and seemed to be getting worse with each passing week. Basil reckoned the poor bastard needed to get it out, to get it off his chest, so he didn't interrupt with advice. Not only was he loud enough to make your molars hurt, he was cruel, a horrible kid. This was common knowledge. While most children his age learn how to share or, eventually, to factor in other people's feelings, Hudson was showing all the signs of a toddling what's-it-called—sociopath—in training. He grabbed anything he wanted. He tried, successfully for a while, to trip his parents and nannies as they walked by. He grew fond of spitting in visitors' eyes when they leaned in to say hello to him—even his grandmother! He urinated in shoes and boots on a fortnightly basis.

Only a month ago, Old Mac explained, Hudson mummified their cat, Grimalkin, with gaffa tape and the only way to get it off was to shave her fluffy grey fur off, leaving her bald and sickly and on death's doorstep. A week later, Hudson pushed the same cat into the fire while watching cartoons and burned her hairless body so badly that she had to be put down. Little bugger didn't shed a tear. Mrs. Macpherson had had this cat since before they were married.

Hudson hid feces in his father's pillowcase. Twice. Source unknown.

Old Mac was staring at the ceiling, at the spot where the howling was coming from on the third floor. It was a wonder the kid didn't wear himself out. "Look, Bas. The wife wants to bring in Hank Snow. Do some Indian magic on him."

Basil was suppressing a laugh about the pillowcase surprise. Clever monkey. He laughed out loud, slightly, as things must really be bad for Old Mac to employ the natives for anything other than pageantry. Hank Snow in Mac's house—he'd like to see that one... Maybe the child is possessed, thought Basil. For Old Mac to actually ask for native help was unheard of. Hank Snow certainly knew this, too.

When the local carvers and other native artists started making two thousand dollars a month that first big summer off of tourists—Ferguson's tourists —Old Mac opened a native art gallery. When he saw the Indian fishermen selling their salmon straight off the boat, Old Mac opened a "Nootka" fish market run entirely by natives and owned by him. It kept things tidy and he kept a piece of the action that he brought to this town in the first place. Fair's fair.

Old Mac learned, quickly enough, to trot the natives out for the tourists with their mini parades and long houses and salmon barbeques. Sure, the "people from across the bridge" didn't figure into Old Mac's original plan for a Shakespearean hamlet on the wild west coast, but they were just so... marketable. And they didn't all up and leave as he had assumed they would. He actually grew fond—despite his constant complaints to the contrary—of this ethno-pandering for German tourists especially because they ate it up even harder than the Americans and Japanese. The hearty Germans bought "native" anything, be it sausage or house paint. He'd seen one massive Teutonic man buy a rusted old pick-up truck once just because it was "a genuine Indian" who was selling it. What was he going to do, ship it halfway round the world on a barge? Daft Germans...

Old Mac was no idiot; he knew the natives had something that the tourists wanted that had bugger all to do with the bard, so he just changed his plan accordingly, made a vague sort of "harmonic living" a part of the New Stratford business model. If a woven prayer shawl was going to make him more money than a leather-bound copy of *The Merchant of Venice*, so be it. You want an 18th century whaling hat instead of an Anne Hathaway dollhouse? Pleasure doing business with you, ma'am.

"Sorry," Basil said, still snickering slightly into the rolled-up blueprint in his left hand. "That pillow business must have been a nasty surprise." He swallowed the last laugh. "What's Snow going to do, then? Seems a bit odd, if you don't mind me saying so."

"Oh hell... I have no bloody idea. And quit laughing, mate. If it means a bleeding witch doctor to sort this out, a bleeding witch doctor it is. Listen to him—he's not right, Basil." Old Mac was still staring at the ceiling, gob-smacked as a medieval peasant watching a comet streak by. "No child can cry for three and a half years and still carry on. In the old days the church would've taken him off our hands and bloody castrated him, made him a monk."

"Maybe it's not such a barmy idea then. My wife reckons they know a lot more than we do about certain things, these natives. Marie's very friendly with the Indian women, always bringing home a nice salmon or basket and some new piece of native wisdom. She plays cards with them every Sunday after mass."

"All a bunch of backwards layabouts if you want to know the truth. But I don't give a tup'ney fuck—excuse me—if he can give me peace and quiet. I'll paint my own face if I have to. I'll build them all new teepees, cash on the barrel head."

"Don't think these ones do the paint so much..." Basil paused to imagine Old Mac in war paint and then quickly elbowed the ridiculous image from his mind. And where the hell did he get teepees from? He was so old-fashioned... "Just last week, Jean-Francois had a nasty sty inside the eyelid. Marie put an Indian salve on it and it disappeared like magic. From a toad to a prince. I'm telling you, I'm coming around—daft as it sounds."

"We're at the end of our wits, man. Hank bloody Snow..." Old Mac laughed to nobody in particular. He clearly couldn't believe it had come to this.

Basil looked around and up, doing mental arithmetic as to how much work the ceiling was going to need to keep out the impending torrents. He'd have to plan the work for when the child was asleep or he'd be driven bonkers too. Maybe get a radio with headphones next time he was near the Radio Shack in Port

Alberni. "I'll be back on Monday. This bit should be finished by Wednesday, Thursday at the latest. And relax, Ferguson. A little faith goes a long way around these parts. The old codger might surprise you."

"Right then. Hope you're right. Although I'm sure the only surprise will be his bill."

"Worth a bit of dosh to fix a noise like that..."

"Old Indian bastard will probably make him even worse."

The shaman, Hank Snow, showed up at the Macpherson estate at dawn, alone. He walked right into the house, silent as a downwind canoe. Hank carried a large, rough club made of whalebone in one hand and a big basket full of clinking glass bottles in the other. The basket also held a rattle made from baleen and full of perfectly round, dried salal berries. Hank's long silver hair was tied back with a cedar bark thong and one cheekbone showed two red lines smudging upwards. He didn't say a word, didn't smile or blink.

"Thanks for coming," Old Mac said. "I know there's been a bit of bad blood between our, uh, tribes and whatnot over the last couple of years. Very good of you.... Good man."

Hank continued to say nothing. He knew that these rich white people would never take his shaman bit seriously if he talked too much. He purposely skipped the coffee this morning for this very reason and was starting to get a headache. Caffeine withdrawal is a bitch.

"Hudson—that's the wean's name—has really turned into a terror. And we've tried everything," Old Mac said, laughing nervously. "Guess he needs stronger medicine than what this white man's got, eh?"

All this medicine man, white man stuff in Canada was ridiculous as far as he was concerned. Like the bloody movies or something. Me: Ferguson. You: Hank. What a bleeding joke. He couldn't wait for it to be over so he could tuck into those kippers in the freezer. Get Emma to brew up a nice pot of tea, wash down the bones.

Hank deliberately ignored the little British man, or Scottish man. Whatever he was. He stared over Old Mac's shoulder intently, eyes locked on the sleeping child nestled in the lap of a massive leather armchair. The child didn't look so terrible from over here. Nothing more peaceful than a sleeping child. Catching a peek at himself in the mirror over the hall table, Hank thought he looked very good. He'd never fool an Indian with this costume, though. The two lines on his cheek just past the edge of his prematurely silver beard? Made him look like half a white woman with an ugly face. Don't smile. Don't smile.

Old Mac's wife, Emma, stared at the sleeping child in the chair. The expression on her face was composed of equal parts affection, fear and awe. Her swept-back hair was illuminated by the fireplace on the back wall and the delicate shadows on her face accentuated her beauty, her sharp cheekbones and round, kind eyes. She was a good-looking woman, Hank had to admit. Marrying Old Mac didn't strike him as the smartest move in the world. At least the little bear-man was rich....

Emma's anxiety was for the new child growing inside her—a child Old Mac still knew nothing about—rather than the older child before her. She wouldn't begin showing for another three or four weeks and she wanted to see how this ritual played out before telling the father. Now was not the time. She'd definitely have to wait for this to blow over. Ferguson would throw one of his "wobblies."

"So then there Hank, what're you going to do to the little bugga?" Old Mac asked in a loud whisper. He rubbed his hands together theatrically, his bright blue eyes wide with anticipation.

"Can't tell you." Hank's west coast accent was thick and monotone. He put it on a bit for occasions like this. He was good at doing different accents and voices, always the life of the party once friends and family got him going with his characters. Everyone loved his impression of Old Mac cutting a ribbon while drunk. He also did a mean Pierre Trudeau involving a wine glass and a fancy scarf.

"Come on, man. Give us a hint then!"

"Just some Indian crap."

"I'm not paying five hundred dollars for 'some Indian crap,' now am I?"

"Not about money."

"Oh yes it is, Hank. Everything is and you know it. You wouldn't help me or my family for free. But, with all due respect, Mr. Sn--"

Hank held up his hand, cut the short, round man's speech off like the top of a dandelion. "Do not say my slave name when I have agreed to help you."

"Sorry. With all due respect, er, um, C'ix'shh, uhh, C'ix7' atch' nuu, uhh, I think I deserve to know what your ritual might involve. He's our only son."

"Enough talking." Hank really wanted a coffee. This white man was worse than the rest of them. Never shuts up and talks like a chicken. Thinks his money can buy anything. Anyone.

Hank wondered if the wife ever had Indian fantasies.

Emma stepped closer to the two men, sensing she might have to take charge soon. "Ferguson, he's not going to burn him," she hissed, afraid to wake the child up. "He'll do his cleansing ritual and we'll have some peace and quiet for once. Please, Ferguson, let's let him be."

"Don't burn kids anymore, Mrs. Mac. Missionaries talked us out of that one way back. Now, please leave—both of you."

"We can't even watch? Come on, man; we'll assist you. Hold him down or something."

"No."

Emma stood behind Old Mac who stood face to face with the shaman. Her deep brown eyes, as dark and bottomless as a seal's by the low light of the fire, were locked onto the shaman's in a look that seemed to say, I know he's a prick, please do what you must; this is my only child.

Old Mac inhaled sharply, signaling to anyone who knew him that he was about to turn purple and probably start hurling racist insults. He was about to throw a wobbly.

Emma gripped him behind the neck, massaged the mound of tight muscle there, her touch signaling that his usual way would not do. Not today. Not anymore.

He must have sensed it. He knew she was right. This old Indian bastard was their only hope. "I'll give you an extra fifty if you let me stay and watch."

"The child could die."

"A hundred."

"Come back at noon. No earlier. Your child could get stuck halfway between your world and the spirit world. If this happens, no one can bring him back. Not me. Not even auntie."

Emma pushed her husband toward the double doors and, to her surprise, he didn't resist much. The kitchen on the other side was already flooding with a candy-colored dawn; the jars and containers on the counter glowing pink and red like something from a Monet. She closed the doors behind them, didn't look at Hank Snow. Trust has to be absolute, she reckoned, and she had to get Ferguson out of there before something happened. She knew this was their last chance to have a normal child. Two.

Old Mac was so mad he couldn't even speak. He immediately peeled his wife's hand off his shoulder and headed for the front door. He grabbed the keys to the Willy off the hutch and slammed the door behind him. The Jeep's chunky tires tore a patch out of the long gravel driveway and he almost struck the gateposts as he skidded onto Macpherson Crescent's pavement.

Emma knew where he was going. She stood there looking out the window with her hands across her belly. It was better this way. Ferguson would never be able to sit still for six hours while Snow worked on Hudson in the next room. Not in a million years. It was going to be a very long six hours even without him. She decided to make some tea and climb back into bed with The Observer. Keep her mind off the baby and what the hell they'd do if this didn't work.

The young Macpherson boy was asleep in the other room. Hank Snow had taken off the cedar bark thong holding his hair in place and was in the process of gently throwing another log on the fire. He was going to be here for a while. No sense freezing to death and, anyways, their woodpile was bigger than uncle's house.

He did a quick perimeter check of the room and made sure the double doors to the kitchen were shut fast. A quick peek out the window determined that, yes, the vehicle he had heard skidding out was the man's black Jeep. He was famous for his short fuse, Old Mac. With him out of the way, things would be easier.

It sounded like the woman was making coffee or tea in the kitchen. Should he trouble her for a cup? No. Have to stay focused. No tea. No coffee. No talking to them until noon. No cheating. She was good-looking. He'd end up staring at her breasts and forgetting about the kid. He'd never been with a white woman in the morning before.

So now what the hell am I going to do, he thought, surveying the contents of the room. The rattle and club lay on the floor next to the bottle basket like discarded toys. No television here, so catching some cartoons quietly or a fishing show was out of the question. The kid was bound to wake up and wonder what this painted man was doing in his house. He'd start the screaming then for sure. He should have planned this part out better... He hated screaming kids, always handed them to the first woman he saw.

Plan B, plan b, plan b... Take the glass bottles out of the basket and see what we've got. Arrange them like the science guy on that kids' show. Not that these people would know the difference between oolichan oil and two stroke oil, but props are important. Got to have props just in case the door flies open. Look like you're doing some magic. Maybe something with slug slime or lots of fern smoke? He'd seen shamans use both of those when he was younger.

In his hand, Hank holds a tiny vial of something or other, maybe the old trick of his uncle's to make kids sleep. What do you do with it again? Stripe under the nose, stripe on the back of the neck? You don't eat the ones this color, he knew that much. What was it? Maybe he should just knock the kid out with some strong smelling medicine and they'll think he fixed "the little bugger." He wondered what a bugger looked like. What came to mind was a chigger. He'd be away with the five hundred dollars before they knew any different. Five hundred dollars would fix his boat and his personal life.... He was going to start calling chiggers buggers now, just for fun. Chigger-buggers. He thought of tying a fly that looked like Old Mac but knew it wouldn't catch a fish.

"Who are you?"

Hank snapped to attention, hid the vial behind his back and gently dropped it in with the other bottles with a plink. The child was looking right at him.

"Hank Snow." Shit. He didn't bargain on the little ghost talking. "Shhhh." They said all he did was cry. Are three year olds supposed to talk? "You must not speak, little one." Maybe they said four. He'd heard that white people's kids were counted as a year old as soon as they were born. Maybe that was Chinese kids. "This is your time, young one."

The child stared like a warrior: no blinking, no fear. Staunch heart and a man's nose on a child's face. Funny-looking kid. Maybe he was taken by an ancient spirit. He never knew white people had those but they probably did. How else could a child so small have so much tupkuk in him?

"Where's my dad?"

"He said he had to go buy you a special gift."

"You a liar?" The child paused, gave the shaman a closer look. "Where's my mom?"

"No, really, little one. He said that his son, a great strong child, was having a special day today and that he needed a special, uh, gift for him. All of the elders are coming."

"Birthday?"

"No. Better than a birthday. Much more powerful than Christmas. But now you must be silent for the special ceremony.... It can not work if you talk."

The child shut up and stared at Hank. He looked right into his eyes, then panned the room to take in the gear, the basket and bottles, the club and baleen rattle on the carpet. Hank half-expected the kid to point out that medicine men don't carry whalebone war clubs, but he didn't. These were the kind of children who grew up to kill chiefs and have their own poles. Or to become like Old Mac. Hank's uncle would never believe it when he told him about this "Little Mac." Of course he could never tell his uncle about today. He'd be sent away. Selling the old carvings and whaling hats was one thing; this would really get him in shit. "Do you know why I'm here?"

"You said to shhhh."

"That is true. You are, uh, lucky today because.... Today is the day. Wait. Uh, why do you cry so much, Little Mac?"

"My name's Hudson."

"Today, you are Little Mac. And today we stop you from carrying your sadness."

"You talk funny."

"Shhhh." Hank closed his eyes, tried to emanate calm in the room by outstretching his hands like a sleepwalker. "Close your eyes. No looking." Oh, this was turning into a bad idea. This kid wasn't a baby at all. He was wiser than the father; that much was obvious. Shit. He followed orders, though: eyes shut tight. Think, man. Think.

Shit. Greedy, stupid plan. What plan? He was supposed to sit here reading the new Louis L'Amour book in his pocket, Galloway. That's all he thought he'd have to do once he got rid of the parents. Maybe mumbling some swear words, old fashioned ones in case the parents were listening at the door.... Why did he always have to push his luck? Who made me like this, he wondered.

His own parents died before he was this child's age and he didn't remember them at all. Whenever he imagined them, he pictured his mother as a raven and his father as a chubby sea otter floating on his back, wearing a cowboy hat and smoking a cigarette. Hunger for mischief must be hereditary like big lips or a strong chin. The only photo he had of his folks was so badly focused and from so far away that it was almost worse than no photo at all. All the picture told him was that his parents were Indians and that his dad smoked and wore a cowboy hat. His mom looked like a young version of auntie if she were skinnier. She was very pretty, like a movie star, even though the fuzziness of the coarse photo paper. He just couldn't help himself sometimes with the mischief. And look where it got him. Another stupid mess.

"Can I open my eyes yet?"

"No. No talking. No looking out your eyes." Oh brother. This was going to take concentration. Losing all that money would be bad. Getting outsmarted by a boy not even old enough to fish from the beach would be worse. "I have to put a, uh, special, um, Indian smell under your nose and hair; Little Mac."

The boy nodded his head, brave and trusting with closed eyes.

"No white man has ever, really, uh smelled this smell before. You are the first. Because it is your special day. Special Indian smell day for you...."

Hank rattled through the bottles on the floor. Shit. What's the knockout one? Special Indian smell day. Jesus. Maybe he should just fart on the kid and sneak out the door. Leave a bill for his services. Who says crap like that? The kid probably thinks he's some sort of Indian birthday clown now. Shut your mouth, Hank. Be quiet and mysterious. It's not his birthday and you are a shaman. A shaman—not Bozo the Medicine Man. Ooga-booga!

The knockout one is orange or yellow. Or red. Not p'u7up, not lhix7apt, not any of that regular stuff. Maybe it's this red one. Hank uncorked the small bottle full of red-orange paste that looked like fancy paint for artists. It was the color of a salamander's fire-marks in fall. What did it smell like? Phew! Yep, that could knock out a kid. What the hell was it, anyway? He felt a little dizzy from the oily, camphorous smell. He smuggled all these bottles from the back room at auntie's so it could be Indian toilet cleaner for all he knew. No, smelled like strong medicine. No time to be picky. Most of this shit was just plant juice and couldn't hurt you unless you ate a bunch of it. If he kept it away from the mouth and eyes nothing could go wrong. Those are called mucous membranes. Stay away from those.

Hank Snow's hands were shaking a bit, mostly from fear of being caught and partly from caffeine withdrawal. Two and a half hours without so much as smelling coffee. He placed his hand on the boy's little forehead and it was warm and healthy. He stroked the boy's hair back off his forehead and dabbed a tiny bit of the orangey stuff in his hairline. Then, a larger stripe of the substance at his hairline around the back of his neck. He mumbled a children's song in his own language that told of a boy who tried to use Eagle's suit to fly into the water and catch salmon. You can imagine how that one ends....

The last stripe of orange went under the child's nose, making a bright little square moustache about an inch wide. He really looked funny now. Little Mac was behaving very well: no crying, no talking, no peeking. Hank leaned in to listen to his breathing and, yep, the little bugger was falling asleep. Easy as pie. Too bad he didn't have a camera.

He put his hand on the little boy's heart and could feel it thumping under there, nice and slow. It was the right stuff. Strong heartbeat, everything's fine. "After today," he mumbled, trying to sound authentic. "You will be a leader of men. You will shed your sadness and rise to the height of a hundred men. Little Mac, son Of Old Mac and Big Mac before him, you will someday grow into a man who can see out over the treetops and into the hearts and minds of lesser men."

Little Mac wasn't dead and Hank still had four hours to go. He was proud of that last bit. Sounded kind of biblical, big and scary. Well, except for the Big Mac part. No Big Macs in King James. He wished the boy's father had heard it. Stuff like that is good for a little extra money. Indian horoscope. Ooga Booga.

The orange stuff made the whole room stink now, greasy with medicine. Hank pulled out his creased Louis L'Amour book and started reading, one eye on the child, thinking about how great his boat was going to look once fixed. He'd have to think up a good lie for auntie about where the money came from. He could burn that bridge when he got to it. That new Seagull motor would mean more fish for all of them and halibut season was only four days away.