

"It doesn't matter," I said. "He beat me anyway."

"You could have knocked him out."

"That was just a lucky punch," I said.

"You could have," he said. "You didn't go in on him when you had him." I exhaled slowly into my cupped hands.

"Whatever that takes, Charlie," I said, "I just don't think I've got it."

"Well you better learn, or you're going to keep on getting hurt." He unlocked the car door, and I turned for a last look at the old brick building. Flashes of sunlight gave it a warmer color than yesterday, but it was no place I ever wanted to spend any time.

"They still should have given you the fight," Charlie said as I got in.

"He'd still be the better fighter."

"You got a funny way of looking at it."

"I guess I do," I said. We passed some of the Anaconda boxers getting into a station wagon with Fletcher. The man with the red shirt grinned and waved and I waved back.

"Well, we start working out for the Gloves on Monday," Charlie said. "You gonna make it?" Main Street in Deer Lodge was empty and closed up tight, without a person or a spot that looked warm; no place to be on a Sunday afternoon in an early Montana spring.

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe I'll just wait a couple of weeks and try to kick this cold." I realized that I hadn't coughed in hours and I took a deep breath. There was only a slight raspiness in my throat.

"You could probably take the state easy," he said. "Only guy you'd have to beat is that Simmons from Great Falls, and he's just big and slow like that ape yesterday."

"I think maybe I'll just sit the rest of the season out, Charlie," I said. "See how I feel next fall."

"The regionals are in Vegas this year," he said. "That'd be a good trip."

"I'll think about it."

Charlie was quiet for a minute, then he said, "You know, two years ago I went up to Edmonton to fight some spade from Tacoma, and about ten seconds into the first round that little bastard sucker-punched me and knocked me right on my ass. After driving six hundred miles. I laid there and listened to the ref count and I could of got up again, but I was so disgusted I didn't even try. I thought that was it, my last fight." We passed the "End Speed Zone" sign at the edge of town and Charlie accelerated to seventy-five.

"You'll be back," he said. "It gets in your blood." He started whistling softly between his teeth, a tune I had never heard.

I put the seat back and closed my eyes. "What time is it?"

"About three."

"Run me by Shelley's, will you?" Charlie rolled the window partway down and spat out his gum.

"If you hadn't been so busy with your old lady last night, you'd have had enough in you to finish Gus off," he said.

"That must have been it," I said.

When we turned the corner at Garrison, the clouds broke and we saw the peaks of the Flint range, high craggy masses of snow that usually stayed hidden from October to May. I had never been up there, but I'd heard about the fishing. The snow would still be deep even in mid-June, and it would be a good day's climb into the Trask Lakes. I knew I'd find pan-sized cutthroat where the streams emptied in. □

## DIRECTION by W. S. Merwin

All I remember of the long lecture  
which is all I remember of one summer  
are the veins on the old      old bald head  
and the loose white sleeve      and bony finger pointing  
beyond the listeners  
over their heads

there was the dazzling      wall and the empty sunlight  
and reaching out of his age he told them  
for the last time  
what to do when they got to the world  
giving them his every breath      to take with them like water  
as they vanished

nobody was coming back that way

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