



CONSERVATION CHARLEY

Mr. Elk Has His Say ...

Charley was bellying up to the bar in "Duncan's Dungeon." He'd stopped in for a beer to stabilize his nerves before tying on the feed bag.

It's quiet in the Dungeon. The lights are dim. The juke box has laryngitis. There isn't a single bar fly caging drinks. Charley's nerves are purring contentedly.

He raises his glass and sips the beer. His eyes sight down the length of the glass and zero in on another pair of eyes—big, brown, eyes. He sips and stares. Brown eyes stares back—the age old setting for romance.

Charley can't help smiling out loud. Any other fellow in this situation would be swapping glances with a radiant redhead—or a beautiful brunette. The best Charley can do is tangle eyeballs with a brown-eyed elk's head hanging on the wall.

Relic of Wilds

Brown Eyes seems sad. Charley can't help noticing the fly specks on the pupils. And the sparkle of the glass eyeballs is dulled by a film of grease and smoke which has accumulated through the years. The hair on the neck and head is dusty and unkempt. The rack, which grazes the ceiling, is a relic from a wild, free world far from the stale air of the Dungeon.

Charley feels sad, too. He tries to visualize this moth eaten wall fixture gliding regally through the pine scented air of some far away mountain fastness. Brown Eyes must have been a proud and graceful creature in those days.

Chuck is jarred out of his reverie by a rough, belligerent voice.

"Whatcha staring at?" it asks. Beer dribbles down Charley's chin as his mouth gapes open. Is that taxidermist's puppet talking to him?

"Yeah, I'm talking to you." This time there's no mistake about it. The head on the wall is speaking.

"I was just wondering how a feller like you can hang around a place like this," Charley stammers. "Must be pretty dead around here with no cows to chase."

"I can think of things I'd rather do than look at bleary-eyed beer kegs like you all day," the head admits. "But from where I hang it doesn't look like I've got much choice."

He pauses and curls his lip to chase a pestiferous fly away.

"Course, things were pretty tough out there at times, too," he continues. "Spring, summer and fall were great. We had plenty to eat, the sun was warm and the woods were full of friendly girls." He drools a little over the memory.

Never Had a Chance

"Winter was murder, though." He shudders at the thought. "The snow was deep, our winter range was small and the winds were cold. There wasn't enough food for all of us. We'd get weaker and weaker. We'd crowd together and die. When spring came the ground was littered with the dead. It was horrible to see all of the youngsters who never had a chance."

He chokes up for a minute and can't go on.

When he regains control of his voice he continues. "A hunter's bullet can sometimes be merciful. The one that felled me spared me the agonies of another bleak and hungry winter. Many of the deer and elk and antelope you see sprawled out on cars and pickups these days are pretty lucky, too."

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YOUR NEWS

ITEMS TO 2331

The Daily Tribune-Examiner will greatly appreciate your cooperation in giving us news items. If you are going somewhere, entertaining or have someone visiting you, it is interesting to your friends. Just phone 2331 or 2332 and tell us about it. Thanks!

They're not going to slowly and painfully starve to death."

"Our range is just like a cattle range. It can be overgrazed. Too many critters eat for too long on an area and the grub runs out. Old Mom Nature is a tough nut in some ways. She gets rid of surplus animals one way or another.

If the hunter doesn't get them she'll get rid of them with disease, predators or starvation."

He sneezes as he gets a snoot of second hand cigarette smoke.

Just Another Crop

"Our range has to be managed just like cattle and sheep range," he says. "Much as I hate to admit it, wildlife is just another crop from the land. We're harvested each year by one means or another. There's some satisfaction in ending up on someone's table rather than as coyote bait out in the forest."

"Yeah, this is kind of a lousy place to spend the rest of my days but it beats being a pile of bones out there." And he bobs his head toward the distant mountains.

Charley suddenly gulps his beer and heads for the door. When a stuffed elk head starts talking to a feller—and making good sense—it's time to vamoose. Next

thing you know it'll turn pink and come down to practice on the bar.

They must be packing a lot of dynamite in beer these days.

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