no way out

Mike Thompson

Western Michigan University
The warm wind lapped my face and toyed with my long red hair. My cheap shoes were caked with mud, making it a hard climb.

We were running, Matt and I. We always ran together. His striped shirt stood out against the drab cut grass on the hill. It gave the impression of a t.v. screen after someone has played with the vertical hold--red and green stripes in an endless, mind-aching, sixties fashion.

Two small boys on a small boy's adventure. Though we lived in shabby houses and wore grubby clothes, we knew we were kings, and brothers. We would always be together to live and even die for each other if need be.

We reached the top of the hill, lords, standing straight and tall, surveying all we had accomplished on that fine summer day. Our quest had taken us through the fields of the vampire roses, beyond the grounds of the Satan worshippers, on past the mounds of the speaking dead, to the very big road at the foot of the great hill on which we now stood. It had been a long and terror-filled journey.

It was our duty to find out what was beyond the great hill. No one before us had been so brave as to pass beyond this largest of barriers.

We turned our minute backs on the familiar world and beheld our destiny. The top of the miniature mountain that marked the end of our realm was crowned with a split mohawk of leafy trees. The effect of this was a gloomy trail which did not seem to be touched by the midday sun. Matt wiped a drip of snot from his nose making a new stripe on
his shirt sleeve.

"Ready?" I asked.

"Your face is bleeding," he said.

"I know." Those who walked through the vampire roses could not expect to pass unscathed. I was lucky to bear only two cuts on my face.

"I guess so....yeah, I'm ready," he sighed, turning manure-brown eyes upon our chosen path.

The way through the trees was not too perilous. Only my companion suffered the wrath of the birds, but, with much swearing and spitting, he was able to clear most of the yellow ooze out of his eyes and mouth. I laughed so hard I nearly coughed up my spleen.

I rounded the mounded corner first, laughing and holding my aching stomach, but my laughter was soon stifled by a gape of awe.

"Matt!" I squeaked as my intestines formed an ever-tightening knot around my lungs.

"Kachchchchch kchchchchch pthut what?!" he yelled, at last maneuvering the corner. Then his jaw dropped, and the brown crusty he had been gagging on fell out of his wide mouth.

We beheld a crater in the earth fifteen stories deep and two-by-two miles in any direction. It was huge, like some giant's footprint in the ground, and it was totally undiscovered, except by the hundreds of lovers who used it as the setting for their back seat fumblings.

Ignorant of the previously mentioned, my partner asked, "What do we do with this?"

I had no answer for him then. I only stared at the gravel interior of the pit's barren dryness and played with the cuts on my left cheek.

Nine years passed me by. I was no longer an innocent eight-year-old. I had been taken from my father, then I had lost both my dad and my grandmother. Nine years, like daggers in the gut, left me hollow and cold. The blue eyes of youth had been replaced with stones. The eyes are the windows to the soul.

A snow flake landed on my nose and melted away. Mathew's eyes, now amber, showed different sorrows. They spoke of the abuse of a drunken father still living 'Nam, and the fear of a cancer-ridden
brother.

We had run up the snow-white hill, Matt and I. We still ran together.

As lords, we stood at the top of the mount. Kings who have seen too much and forgotten how to live. Once more we faced the trail. I shouldered my sled and asked, "You ready?"

"Do you know that your scars are turning whiter?"

"I know."

"Yeah, I guess so....I'm ready."

We knew what to do with it now.

Looking over the pit's barely snow-covered rim, I informed my friend of our impending doom.

"We are going to die."

"Yup," he said nonchalantly.

"Well, I feel real good about this! Let's do it!"

For a few seconds the two of us, in our respective sleds, did a balancing act on the edge of the cliff.

The spot for the slide had been carefully selected. It was a place where the floor of the canyon was covered with many sloping mounds. The hope here was that we would hit one of the mounds and fly into the air. The alternative was to slide full force into a flat area which would have the same effect as shooting one's self out of a cannon into a steel-reinforced brick wall. The thought of having our legs jammed up our rectum was none too pleasing to us.

I went over, eyes closed.

The sharp winter air rushed at me, pulling my hair back and making tears flow. I was laughing hysterically, a mad man's laugh.

In fear, I opened my eyes and immediately wished to be blind again. Not ten feet in front of me the snow which I had been traveling on came to an abrupt end. Gravel took over from there.

My liver rammed itself into my throat making screams impossible.

CRACK!!!

At the gravel barrier, my sled and I went our separate ways. It spun off to the left, slammed into Matt, and in a domino effect beaned
him in the head and knocked him off his sled. Meanwhile, I flew off to the right, pinwheeling through the air like a tittleywink.

While in the air, I formulated a plan. My strategy was this:

Step one: I would hit the ground, digging a fifty-foot trench with my back, which, at the end of the trench, would separate from the rest of my body, giving it much better ventilation.

Step two: I would do a flip, hit my head on a very large slab of granite, become unconscious, and slide the rest of the way down on my face.

I followed my plan to the letter.

I could hear my eyes creak as they pulled themselves open. I waited for the sky to stop spinning. Whether it was gravel or teeth I spit out, I'm not very sure. A moaning, simpering sound came from my right. With much strain, I flopped my head in that general direction. There, lying on a mound of rubble and bones from some humanoid creatures, was a hideously gelatinous pile of human flesh also known as Mathew Watrous.

The moans grew louder, and seeing that my long-time friend obviously needed help, I quickly jumped up, popped my spine back into place and proceeded to laugh at him.

"What are you laughing at?" he grunted.
"You look like unbaked meatloaf!" I heehawed.
"Well, you're not so pretty yourself, Mr. Cross-section! Now help me find my hand!"

It is the way with teenagers to laugh at each other's pain. It gives you a warm fuzzy feeling just knowing that no matter where you are, what time it is, or how much you need medical attention, there is always someone there to laugh in your face.

We found Matt's hand lying not forty paces from my left big toe. It was truly a lucky day. Lucky not only in that we both had reattained all our limbs, but also because we found something we thought was gone forever. Sometimes it takes a brush with death to make us remember just how much we have to live for.

On those bare rocky slopes we found hope.

I sat next to my friend and pondered the grandness of life. Matt
had found a Playboy and was attentively pondering the grandness of something entirely different. I peered at the sheer walls of the hole we were in and was suddenly struck with a realization.

"Hey, Matt?"
"Uh-huh."
"Have you ever noticed that there's no way out of here?"