



PROJECT MUSE®

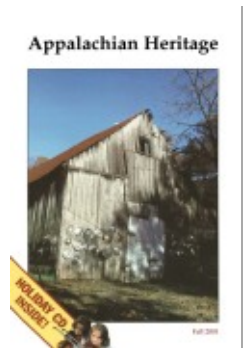
Arrowheads

Claude L. Crum

Appalachian Heritage, Volume 29, Number 4, Fall 2001, pp. 72-73 (Article)

Published by The University of North Carolina Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/aph.2001.0015>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/435937/summary>

FICTION

Arrowheads

Claude L. Crum

THE SUN IS JUST STARTING TO TURN THE CLOUDS PINK in the eastern sky as I crest the ridge and sit on a sweetgum stump to rest from the climb. I prop my 12 guage against a beech beside me and grasp for breath. I've climbed the steep point to this ridge many times, but the climb is more difficult than it used to be.

The fog is lifting out of the hollows now, and I look out over the valley below, hear a distant car humming along the highway, think about how different the land must have been before it was settled, logged and mined. I think about Indians, my ancestors, sitting in this very spot and resting from the climb, ready to hunt. My grandfather was a full-blooded Shawnee. I remember him telling me old stories, stories about the Shawnee people, stories his grandfather had told him, stories I wish I could tell Tommy.

I've caught my breath, so I stand, take the shotgun, feel the cold steel on the palm of my hand, smell gun bluing. My father gave me the gun when I was thirteen. It was my birthday and he woke me up early, gave me the gun and brought me to this ridge. I killed my first game that morning, became a man.

The woods now aren't much different than they were on the morning I first came here with my father. Only the gun is different. It's battered and old, with deep scratches on the stock and a few rusty spots on the barrel, but it shoots good. My grandfather gave it to my father, and my father gave it to me. I should be giving it to Tommy now.

I walk along the ridge, pass the rock cliff where I used to search for arrowheads. In all my life I only found two. One I wear around my neck and one I gave to Tommy. I touch the face of the cliff with my hand, look at the holes I dug, kick an old piece of screen I used to sift the dirt with. I raise my hand to my neck and hold the cold and lifeless arrowhead in my palm, think of one of my ancestors sitting at the base of this cliff and knapping a piece of flint with a deer antler, shaping formless rock into something I would spend my life searching for. I cradle the shotgun in the crook of my arm and ease along the ridge carefully and quietly. The leaves are damp with morning dew, and my boots sink deeply, quietly. At the edge of a stand of hickories, I stop, listen to the sound of teeth

scraping a nutshell and to shavings filtering down through the leaves and branches, pelting the ground softly. I move slowly, scanning the treetops for movement. My eye catches a flash of gray tail slithering along a limb. The branch bows and thrashes with the weight. I shoulder the gun, cock the hammer and press my cheek against the stock. The trigger gives under the pull of my finger and the gun fires. Leaves and twigs shower down, and a hollow thud on the ground a few seconds later means the squirrel is dead. I stand quietly, watching the woods around me, listening to the sudden quiet the gun has caused. Gun smoke burns my nostrils and hangs around my face in the calm morning air. My shoulder aches. The old gun kicks hard.

At the bottom of the tree the squirrel lies on its back, its white underside dabbed with patches of blood. I nudge it with the gun barrel to make sure it's dead before picking it up. I smell its musk, like wet fur, and I see that its eyes are already glassed over. I think of Tommy, cold and stiff, floating face down in Jacob Hall's pond. I see myself pulling at him, rolling him over. I can still see how water trickles from his nostrils, and his eyes are glassed over like the squirrel's.

I wipe a tear from my cheek, shove the limp squirrel into my jacket pocket and start back down the ridge to my house in the hollow below. As I walk, I break the shotgun down, ejecting the spent shell onto the ground with a click. I stop and lean against a persimmon tree, look into the sky. I wonder how many of my ancestors may have stood in the same spot, looking into the same sky. I think about how time changes things, about how my ancestors and I are different. Their sons lived to pass on their seed, but mine didn't. I turn, see the spent shotgun shell lying in the leaves. I wonder if anyone will come looking for it the way I searched for the arrowheads.

