

Northern Lights aka Melvin the Moose

Written by Richard E. McCallum all rights reserved email me at remccallum2001@yahoo.com to receive the full story on a (.pdf)

“Let me tell you about Melvin, the moose,” I say as I join the three twenty-to-thirty-something ladies out for a night of entertainment at the hotel bar. I sit on the lounge sofa chair facing them sitting on a couch in front of the fireplace over which hangs a mounted bull moose head with antlers. “It was the summer of 1974.” I gauged their reaction to this date as it revealed I was an adult when they were being born.

The older one does not seem bothered by the age gap, but I notice the two others watch younger men passing. She points to herself, “Ruth Anne.” And then points to her friends: “Margo and Catlin.”

“Richard.” I introduce myself, and we all toast as I begin my story, “I was in college in Bozeman, Montana.”

“A college man!”

“Cowboys.”

“Romantic snow-covered log cabins with a big fireplace?”

I signal for a round of drinks.

“One night, on the campus of Montana State, during a rare display of the Aurora Borealis, I met a colleague, Mimi. We gazed up as glowing splendors unfolded like a theatrical stage curtain. Radiant blazes presented rainbow hues.”

“Oh, what a beautiful description.” Ruth Anne makes eye contact, “Are you a writer?”

“I’ve been known to spin a few tales.”

“T-a-l-e-s or t-a-i-l-s?”

“You’re fast.”

“You’re faster.”

We all sip our wine, and I resume, “Mimi said, ‘I am returning home to Alaska for the summer vacation.’”

“‘I would love to chase the lights with you.’ I told Mimi.” The ladies roll their eyes, and Margo says, “What a flirt.”

“Mimi agreed that my brother and I could travel with her.”

“Some protection,” Catlin remarks.

“The spring semester just ended, and my brother, who was at the time living in South Carolina with my parents, decided to come out for the summer. My father had just given him a ’62 red Corvette, which should have been put in a museum, both as a classic and because it was falling apart. However, he hopped in this rocket, spewing gas fumes into the driver’s cockpit, needing a new everything, including tires, and drove it out to Boulder, Colorado.”

“My father has a new Corvette convertible,” Margo said. I smiled to let her know I like rich young women. But then, continued, thinking I would just as well have her shut up.

“I met him in Boulder, and we drove it up to Bozeman. We stopped overnight in Billings, where we met up with a sometimes on, sometimes off, girlfriend of mine in her dorm room. We sold her friends a bag of pot as we needed gas money. I put her back “on” for the night.”

The ladies giggle.

“The next day’s darkness found us descending the Bozeman pass, it was rainy and slippery, and the ‘vet steered like a tractor but slid like an ice skater.’ We made it to my house and slept until late the next day. Upon inspection of the vehicle, we found a large bubble on the driver’s side front tire, ready to burst.”

I order another round.

“The night before leaving for Alaska, my brother and I went to a bar in Big Sky, the ski resort, started by Chet Huntly of NBC news. How we got there, I haven’t a clue, but we ended up driving home with a girl in a VW bug. She was not the prettiest girl I ever knew, but she offered us a ride, which seemed advantageous. I remember I swing danced with her a bit too hard, and she fell on her ass. I drove her car back to my place, which had a long driveway alongside another house, and was hidden from the street view. Well, she got out of the front passenger seat and walked away. My brother and I could not figure out where she went, but she left the passenger side door open. We were drunk and tired and went to bed.

The next morning, I heard a commotion, and the girl and a tall dude with a cast on his leg were surveying her car in the driveway with the door still open. I heard him say, ‘we should confront the asshole and hear what he has to say.’ I figured I was the asshole. So, I opened the front door. He was concerned that I had dumped his girlfriend and let her wander about town lost at midnight. I told him I didn’t know why or where she went. But as we were all drunk, I went to sleep. Guess I was lucky his leg was in a cast as I think he wanted to kick my ass but couldn’t. They left, and we prepared to go to Alaska.”

The girls laugh.

“We jumped in Mimi’s van and headed way up North to Alaska. Traversing through Glacier National park and on through Banff, Lake Louise, and the beautiful Canadian Rockies, we made it to Prince Rupert Sound to catch the ferry to Juneau.”

Ruth Anne interrupts me by saying, “Oh, I went to Lake Louise.”

“Luminous water.” I think Ruth Anne and I connect? A little spark? Well, what do I know?

I acknowledge her input and continue, “While waiting in line to purchase tickets, we met a girl with blonde hair braided into a ponytail. Strapped on her backpack was an iron frying pan, and other kitchenware. She introduced herself as ‘Diana’ and told us her dog’s name, ‘Molly.’ She paid for a one-way ticket to Alaska.”

“Go, girl,” Margo says as they gulp their drinks.

“We drifted up the intercoastal waterways visiting the fishing towns along the coast. The mountains towered over the water. We spent a night or two at Mimi’s house, in Juneau, and toured the island. I was surprised it was a rainforest; everything green and wet. Moss grew on the trees. We walked on the Mendenhall Glacier and spotted red salmon in the streams. They were decaying and waiting for death as they had completed their migratory cycle. After a few days, we caught the ferry to Skagway, Alaska, the infamous town of the gold rush era.”

“I saw a movie about the Alaskan Goldrush.” Catlin inputs.

“We chose to hike the legendary Klondike trail, the Chilkoot Pass. David, Diana, and the dog lagged me, and Mimi walked faster than I, so I enjoyed the trek alone. The spirit of Jack London’s Call of the Wild howled.”

“Spooky,” Margo expresses.

“When I came to the Golden stairway, I met up with Mimi, and we scaled the steep incline to the top. I left a chocolate bar for my brother midway.”

“Sweet.”

“We waited for David and Diana at the summit, and we entered Canada’s northwest sector. We negotiated the trail through the tundra and camped. I slept with Mimi, and David slept with Diana and her dog.”

“Ahmm?”

“I don’t think anyone had any romance. We discovered too late that the permafrost melted from our body heat and soaked us.”

“Bummer.”