



Trees Are Where You Find Them

Savage, Arthur Dekker

Published: 1953

Categorie(s): Fiction, Science Fiction, Short Stories

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YOU MIGHT say the trouble started at the Ivy, which is a moving picture house in Cave Junction built like a big quonset. It's the only show in these parts, and most of us old-timers up here in the timber country of southwest Oregon have got into the habit of going to see a picture on Saturday nights before we head for a tavern.

But I don't think old Doc Yoris, who was there with Lew and Rusty and me, had been to more than two or three shows in his life. Doc is kind of sensitive about his appearance on account of his small eyes and big nose and ears; and since gold mining gave way to logging and lumber mills, with Outsiders drifting into the country, Doc has taken to staying on his homestead away back up along Deer Creek, near the boundary of the Siskiyou National Forest. It's gotten so he'll come to Cave Junction only after dark, and even then he wears dark glasses so strangers won't notice him too much.

I couldn't see anything funny about the picture when Doc started laughing, but I figure it's a man's own business when he wants to laugh, so I didn't say anything. The show was one of these scientific things, and when Doc began to cackle it was showing some men getting out of a rocket ship on Mars and running over to look at some trees.

Rusty, who's top choker setter in our logging outfit, was trying to see Doc's point. He can snare logs with a hunk of steel cable faster than anyone I know, but he's never had much schooling. He turned to Doc. "I don't get it, Doc," he said. "What's the deal?"

Doc kept chuckling. "It's them trees," he said. "There's no trees like that on Mars."

"Oh," said Rusty.

I suppose it was just chance that Burt Holden was sitting behind us and heard the talk. Burt is one of the newcomers. He'd come down from Grants Pass and started a big lumber mill and logging outfit, and was trying to freeze out the little operators.

He growled something about keeping quiet. That got Rusty and Lew kind of mad, and Lew turned around and looked at Burt. Lew is even bigger than Burt, and things might have got interesting, but I wanted to see the rest of the picture. I nudged him and asked him if he had a chew. They won't let you smoke in the show, but it's okay to chew, and most of us were in the habit anyway, because there's too much danger of forest fire when you smoke on the job.

Doc laughed every time the screen showed trees, and I could hear Burt humping around in his seat like he was irritated.

AT THE END of the show we drifted over to the Owl Tavern and took a table against the north wall, behind the pool tables and across from the bar. Doc had put his dark glasses back on, and he sat facing the wall.

Not that many people apart from the Insiders knew Doc. He hadn't been very active since the young medical doctor had come to Cave Junction in 1948, although he never turned down anyone who came for help, and as far as I knew he'd never lost a patient unless he was already dead when Doc got there.

We were kidding Lew because he was still wearing his tin hat and caulked boots from work. "You figuring on starting early in the morning?" I asked him. Rusty and Doc laughed. It was a good joke because we rode out to the job in my jeep, and so we'd naturally get there at the same time.

Then Rusty sat up straighter and looked over at the bar. "Hey," he said, "Pop's talking to Burt Holden." Pop Johnson owns our outfit. He's one of the small operators that guys like Burt are trying to squeeze out.

"Hope he don't try to rook Pop into no deals," said Lew.

Doc tipped up his bottle of beer. In Oregon they don't sell anything but beer in the taverns. "Times change," he said. "Back in 1900 all they wanted was gold. Now they're trying to take all the trees."

"It's the big operators like Burt," I said. "Little guys like Pop can't cut 'em as fast as they grow. The companies don't have to reseed, either, except on National Forest land."

"That Burt Holden was up to my place couple weeks ago," said Doc. "Darn near caught me skinning out a deer."

"He better not yap to the game warden," said Rusty. "Them laws is for sports and Outsiders, not us guys who need the meat."

"He wanted to buy all my timber," said Doc. "Offered me ten dollars a thousand board feet, on the stump."

"Don't sell," I advised him. "If Burt offers that much, almost anyone else will pay twelve."

Doc looked at me. "I'd never sell my trees. Not at any price. I got a hundred and sixty acres of virgin stand, and that's the way it's gonna stay. I cut up the windfalls and snags for firewood, and that's all."

"Here comes Pop," said Lew.

Pop sat down with us and had a beer. He looked worried. We didn't ask him any questions, because we figure a man will talk if he wants to, and if he doesn't it's his own business.

He finally unlimbered. "Burt Holden wants to buy the mill," he said, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand.

"Buy *your* mill?" said Lew. "Hell, his mill is five times as big, and he's even got a burner to take care of slashings, so he don't have to shut down in the fire season."

"He just wants the land," said Pop, "because it's near the highway. He wants to tear down my setup and build a pulp mill."

"A *pulp* mill!" If we could have seen Doc's eyes through the glasses I imagine they'd have been popped open a full half inch. "Why, then they'll be cutting down everything but the brush!"

Pop nodded. "Yeah. Size of a log don't matter when you make paper—just so it's wood."

It seemed as though Doc was talking to himself. "They'll strip the land down bare," he mumbled. "And the hills will wash away, and the chemicals they use in the mill will kill the fish in the creeks and the Illinois River."

"That's why they won't let anyone start a pulp mill near Grants Pass," said Pop. "Most of the town's money comes from sports who come up to the Rogue River to fish."

Rusty set his jaw. "In the winter we *need* them fish," he said. He was right, too. The woods close down in the winter, on account of the snow, and if a man can't hunt and fish he's liable to get kind of hungry. That rocking chair money doesn't stretch very far.

"I ain't gonna sell," said Pop. "But that won't stop Burt Holden, and any place he builds the mill around here will drain into the Illinois."

Doc pushed back his chair and stood up to his full height of five foot four. "I'm gonna talk to Burt Holden," he said.

Rusty stood up to his six foot three. "I'll bring him over here, Doc," he said. "We're handy to the cue rack here, and Lew and Simmons can keep them guys he's with off my back."

I stood up and shoved Rusty back down. I'm no taller than he is, but I outweigh him about twenty pounds. I started working in the woods when we still felled trees with axes and misery whips—crosscut saws to the Outsiders. "I'll go get him," I said. "You're still mad about the show, and you wouldn't be able to get him this far without mussing him up."

"There won't be no trouble," said Doc. "I just want to make him an offer."

I WENT over and told Burt that Doc wanted to talk to him. The three guys with him followed us back to the table.

Burt figured he knew what it was all about, and he just stood over Doc and looked down on him. "If it's about your timber, Yoris," he said, "I'll take it, but I can't pay you more than nine dollars now. Lumber's coming down, and I'm taking a chance even at that." He rocked back and forth on his heels and looked at Pop as though daring him to say different.

"I still don't want to sell, Mr. Holden," said Doc. "But I've got better than three million feet on my place, and I'll *give* it to you if you won't put a pulp mill anywhere in the Illinois Valley."

We were all floored at that, but Burt recovered first. He gave a nasty laugh. "Not interested, Yoris. If you want to sell, look me up."

"Wait!" said Doc. "A pulp mill will take every tree in the Valley. In a few years—"

"It'll make money, too," said Burt flatly.

"Money ain't everything by a long shot. It won't buy trees and creeks and rain."

"It'll buy trees to make lumber." Burt was getting mad. "I don't want any opposition from you, Yoris. I've had enough trouble from people who try to hold back progress. If you don't like the way we run things here, you can—hell, you can go back to Mars!"

It seemed to me that it was just about time to start in. I could have taken Burt easiest, but I knew Rusty would probably swing on him first and get in my way, so I planned to work on the two guys on Burt's right, leaving the one on his left for Lew. I didn't want Pop to get tangled up in it.

I don't generally wait too long after I make up my mind, but then I noticed Rusty reaching out slowly for a cue stick, and I thought maybe I'd better take Burt first, while Rusty got set. I never did see a guy so one way about having something in his hands.

But Doc didn't drop out. "There ain't nothing but a few scrub trees on Mars," he said to Burt, looking him square in the eye. "And no creeks and no rain."

Burt curled his lip sarcastically. "The hell you say! Is that why you didn't like it there?" You could see he was just trying to egg Doc into saying he'd come from Mars, so he could give him the horse laugh. The guys he was with were getting set for a fracas, but they were waiting for Burt to lead off.

Doc didn't get caught. "But there's gold," he said, like he hadn't heard Burt at all. "Tons of it—laying all over the ground."

I guess Burt decided to ride along. "Okay, Yoris," he said. "Tell you what I'll do. For only one ton of Martian gold I'll agree to drop all plans

for a pulp mill, here or anywhere else. In fact, I'll get out of business altogether."

Doc moved in like a log falling out of the loading tongs. "That's a deal," he said. "You ready to go?"

Burt started to look disgusted, then he smiled. "Sure. Mars must be quite a place if you came from there."

"Okay," said Doc. "You just stand up against the wall, Mr. Holden." Burt's smile faded. He figured Doc was trying to maneuver him into a likely position for us. But Doc cleared that up quick. "You boys get up and stand aside," he ordered. "Get back a ways and give Mr. Holden plenty of room." We didn't like it, but we cleared out from around the table. A bunch from the bar and pool tables, sensing something was up, came drifting over to watch. I could feel tension building up. "Now," said Doc, pointing, "you just stand right over there, Mr. Holden, and fold your arms."

Burt didn't like the audience, and I guess he figured his plans were backfiring when Doc didn't bluff. "You hill-happy old coot," he snarled. "You'd better go home and sleep it off!" I grabbed hold of Lew's arm and shook my head at Rusty. I wasn't going to interfere with Doc now.

"You're not scared, are you, Mr. Holden?" said Doc quietly. "Just you stand against the wall and take it easy. It won't hurt a bit."

BURT HOLDEN was plenty tough for an Outsider, and a hard-headed businessman to boot, but he'd never run into a customer like Doc before. You could see him trying to make up his mind on how to handle this thing. He glanced around quick at the crowd, and I could tell he decided to play it out to where Doc would have to draw in his horns. He actually grinned, for the effect it would have on everybody watching. "All right, Yoris," he said. He backed against the wall and folded his arms. "But hadn't you better stand up here with me?"

"I ain't going," said Doc. "I don't like Mars. But you won't have no trouble getting your gold. There's nuggets the size of your fist laying all over the dry river beds."

"I hate to be nosey," said Burt, playing to the crowd, "but how are you going to get me there?"

"With his head, o'course!" blurted Rusty before I could stop him. "Just like he cures you when you're sick!" Doc had pulled Rusty through two or three bad kid sicknesses—and a lot of the rest of us, too.

"Yep," said Doc. "A man don't need one of them rocket things to get between here and Mars. Fact is, I never seen one."

Burt looked at the ceiling like he was a martyr, then back at Doc. "Well, Yoris," he said in a tone that meant he was just about through humoring him, "I'm waiting. Can you send me there or can't you?" The start of a nasty smile was beginning to show at the corners of his mouth.

"Sure," said Doc. He slumped down in his chair and cupped his hands lightly around his dark glasses. I noticed his fingers trembling a little against his forehead.

The lights dimmed, flickered and went out, and we waited for the bartender to put in a new fuse. The power around here doesn't go haywire except in the winter, when trees fall across the lines. A small fight started over in a corner.

When the lights came back on, Doc and Pop started for the door, and Lew and Rusty and I followed. Burt's buddies were looking kind of puzzled, and a few old-timers were moving over to watch the fight. The rest were heading back to the bar.

Rusty piled into the jeep with Doc and me. "When you going to bring him back, Doc?" he asked when we started moving.

"Dunno," said Doc. He took off his glasses to watch me shift gears. He's been after me for a long time to teach him how to drive. "It only works on a man once."

THE END

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