

Fall 2020

## Expectations

Rachel Weaver

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

---

### Recommended Citation

Weaver, Rachel (2020) "Expectations," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 92 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss92/6>

This Prose is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

RACHEL WEAVER

---

## EXPECTATIONS

THE DAY I went to a murderer's house alone, he hadn't killed anyone yet.

But he would, on a fall day like this one. His victim a woman whose feet made the same sound mine did on the crushed gravel of his driveway on this edge of Alaska.

At the sound of the truck, Nick appeared around the side of the house.

"Come on in," he said. He pushed up his glasses offhandedly the same way he always did, the same way I imagine he did that morning, just before raising his rifle, the one big enough to kill a bear.

He'd offered to let me borrow his smoker to deal with all the salmon I'd been stocking my freezer with for the winter. I had come to pick up the smoker, had expected to load it into my truck and be off. But Alaska is quiet in the late fall. If you're not used to the way the weather zips up, you can begin to feel like you can't breathe. I figured Nick needed a little company to get the air back into the bottom half of his lungs. And if I was honest with myself, on that particular day, I did too.

So I followed him in the side door, down a narrow hallway, past a bed-

room and into a large kitchen. He worked with my boyfriend at the shipyard, and we'd all hung out at the bar, but I'd never been to his house before.

"Wow. It's nice in here." The plants were healthy and thriving in the big window, the countertop free of clutter and wiped clean. It was open and airy and somehow sunny despite the heavy cloud cover outside. I lived in a tight A-frame under a dense canopy, made tighter by the rough edges of no electricity, no running water, and a sandpaper relationship.

"Can I make you some chai?" Nick asked, bustling by the stove as I sat down on a stool at the island.

"Sure." I had forgotten such a thing existed, had grown accustomed to coffee thick and black.

Three months earlier, Nick had walked off the ferry carrying only his wallet. He had walked into the shipyard on the day another man quit. The owner, Smit, hired him on the spot without asking any questions. Best not to when someone shows up, hands loose and empty, in hard-to-reach parts of Alaska.

I took my winter hat off, curled my toes inside my heavy wool socks and imagined Nick making omelets or a quiche for breakfast in this kitchen. My mind flashed to my boyfriend, the way he ate a whole fried egg in one forkful and then chewed with his mouth open.

I liked that Nick didn't seem to know anything about fishing and boats and rain, topics 99 percent of the conversations in this small coastal town were centered around. He'd told me once he liked opera.

Nick moved around the kitchen in jeans and sock feet, his light brown

hair a little long but trim. “How much fish do you have to smoke? I don’t even know how that thing works.”

“About a hundred pounds. I appreciate you letting me borrow the smoker. I’m sure it’ll work better than a falling-down smoke shack and a five-gallon bucket, which is what I used last year.”

He laughed and stirred a spoonful of honey into my tea without asking. “All salmon?”

“I caught some trout south of the slough, I’ll throw that in there too. A winter of just salmon sucks.”

The look he gave me was so open that I felt sorry for him.

“Have you ever been anywhere like this for a whole winter?” I asked.

“No.”

“Are you staying all winter? I mean, is there somewhere you’re going back to?”

“No.” He carried the tea over, set it in front of me and sat down on a stool.

“Me neither,” I said, taking a sip. “I’ll bring you some smoked trout.”

“Great. Never had it.” He smiled and stirred his own tea.

He didn’t look like a hardened shipyard worker. He looked like he’d sat in an office from eight to five everyday before loading up on the ferry. Like he’d made his mom cherry pies and wrote cards to his employers at Christmas.

“Why’d you come up here in the first place?” I asked.

He stood up, his stool scratching against the floor. “Let me show you

that smoker.”

We all had bruises. I felt bad for accidentally pressing on what seemed to be one of his. I left my tea on the counter, still mostly full and steaming, and followed him back down the stairs, a few paces back to give him room.

We both stepped into our boots at the door and I followed him along the backside of the house to a shed. I waited just outside the door of the shed while he ducked inside. He pulled out the smoker, stepped out of the shed and set it at my feet, avoiding my eyes. The smoker was brand new and expensive. “Is it yours?” I asked.

He sighed and looked at me finally. His face was too tight, the rest of his body a little too taut. We were in a narrow-graveled walkway along the back of the house. The tight tangle of woods was right behind me. I took a step back toward my truck as he started talking. “I put in some extra hours painting a guy’s boat last month. He gave me some salmon to say thanks. I can’t stand to eat the stuff, but thought I might like it smoked, so I bought a smoker.” It seemed a tremendous waste of money and made me think back through times I’d been at the bar when Nick was, trying to remember if he always spent money freely like this. Most everyone I knew in town was broke. Subsistence fishing wasn’t a hobby, it was a necessity.

“But you haven’t used it yet?” I knew it was past time to go. I knew I was too close to him, too out of sight of anyone else. To be a man is to live with the ability to impose your will on any woman at any time. Most men choose not to, a fact I bank on most all the time. To be a woman is to live with the threat of any man at any time. I just needed a smoker. She just

needed a renter.

Nick smiled an easy smile, one that made me think I was overreacting. “You use it first and then come back and teach me the tricks to getting it just right.” Perhaps he was just a sad guy living alone in the rain.

I picked up the smoker and turned toward the truck, my arms wide to accommodate it, chest flat against the side of the round metal. The racks inside banged loudly with the first few steps I took.

“Here,” Nick said, tight and harsh. A ripple beneath the surface. He reached in, his arm rough against my chest as he took the smoker from me and marched off toward the truck. I was used to reading warning signs. I’d grown up with volatile parents, had dated volatile men, worked and lived in a volatile landscape. But I had missed it, somehow, until we were alone on the back side of a house.

He lifted the smoker over the side of the truck in one quick motion, shimmed it into a corner and used the loose line in the bed of the truck to secure it. “You should go.” His eyes flashed.

“Yeah,” I agreed. We stood on the gravel driveway three feet apart, as they would too.

It wasn’t then. It wasn’t me. He would choose another time. A different woman.

I got in my truck, shrugged off the sharp edges of him and drove away, which is not how it went for her.

WHEN THE NEWS comes in of her body and his, crumpled on that cold grav-

el driveway, I want to scream: It's not your fault, he was hard to read, the lighting was too low, the rain too insistent, so much was expected of you.