



Crosscut Macaws

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The blood of one hundred crushed macaws would cover the forest floor on the day Brian Big's machines rolled into town.

The big enchilada of the crosscut saws, 'Brian Big' was spray painted in red on every machine, car, and crate that rolled through the town.

Women stuck their heads out open windows while their husbands lingered in front doorways, warily watching the display of blade and banner roll by before being swallowed by green on the edge of the main road, leaving muddy etchings of weighty tyres and the pungent smell of exhaust.

By 6.00 a.m. on that first Friday, most had those three syllables committed to memory. Those who weren't awake at dawn to see the Brian Big brigade first-hand, heard of it before breakfast by word of mouth, when they wondered, with annoyance, why the macaws were crying bloody murder.

The trees began to shake shortly after. At first, the people thought the canopy had come to life to defend its feathered friends, branches rising to their feet above the sea of leafy green. But the tree trunks soon plummeted with a thud, thud, thud, snapping their barks to the tune of that terrible manmade buzz.

At sunset, the cars emerged. From their houses, the people watched workers pitch tents on the outskirts of town, a tarpaulin obstruction between the tree line and the backmost buildings.

Pun in title to capture the attention of the reader.

Gruesome **foreshadowing** in opening sentence; the forest and town **settings** are established and the reader is taken immediately into the story's action.

The **metaphor** of 'enchilada', suggesting power, introduces Brian Big, one of the main **characters**.

The townspeople are introduced as observers. The writer uses a **cumulative sentence**, building the **description** of the machines rolling into town. Note the use of the **senses** – sight, texture and smell.

The environmental **themes** and the main **complication** of the attack on the macaws and the forest are introduced here. Note the lack of empathy of the townspeople who 'wondered with annoyance'.

The author uses **figurative language** to vividly describe the destruction of the forest: **onomatopoeia** in thud, buzz, plummeted; alliteration in tree trunks, barks, bones, feathered friends; **personification** of trees in branches rising to their feet, barks.

The story is told in **third person** with an **omniscient narrator** who is able to express the **points of view** of all of the characters. Here the narration is through the eyes of the townspeople, who 'watch' and are witnesses to events.

Brian Big himself could be seen sitting on a crate as he ate some microwaved mush. He didn't wave when he looked up and noticed the faces watching from the windows. Something strange happened as the people watched in wonder; one lone survivor, bloody-beaked with broken feathers, flew out from the trees behind Brian Big. Though small, the parrot cried out a call so mighty that the windows rattled and the treetops shook.

Whoosh and *crack* and *snap* and *thud*. A sudden, circular, spiralling of the wind, a split second, and Brian Big was flattened; a hand-shaped branch came hurtling down from the heavens, middle finger mangling him from the tip of his skull like a hydraulic press and a can of coke. The workers screamed at the sight of their big man turned bug, and then yelled down the phone, and then screamed some more.

When the bird fell from the sky in a blur of blue and red, the people closed their curtains and went to bed.

Saturday morning was sunny and bright. The women sipped their steaming coffee, observing Brian Big's makeshift memorial from the windows. Soon, the army of hard hats disappeared between the trees single-file, and by midday the buzzing and crunching began again. By lunch, the locals deliberated lodging a noise complaint.

When they were certain nobody would surface to chide them, a few bored teens slipped over to the tents to spit on Brian's grave and poke at the soil with sticks. When one girl's twig struck something solid and pale, she let out a giggling screech and flung herself into the arms of a friend.

The earth began to rumble and shift. The boys gathered around the thing she'd hit, looking at each other and then back down at the fleshy pink hand, which they were certain had not been there a moment ago. When those sausage fingers flexed and curled, picking at the dirt caked under their own thick fingernails, the kids all ran screaming.

Brian Big unfurled from the soil leaf by leaf; first his left hand, and then his right, and then the remarkably smooth and uncrushed top of his skull. By the time he'd blinked the dirt from his eyes, a ring had gathered around him. The townspeople gawked in shock and awe, extending no helping hands out towards him; while bonier than before, to be sure, this was certainly the same Brian Big they'd seen last night be crushed by a twig. He gathered fistfuls of dirt and clawed his own way out of the earth, inch by inch.

Using **passive voice** in 'could be seen' also suggests the townspeople watching. Note the use of **descriptive language** in 'microwaved mush' and the power of hyphenated words such as 'bloody-beaked'.

The next major **complication** is the attack on Brian Big, described powerfully using **adjectives** (sudden, circular, spiralling) and **figurative language: onomatopoeia** (whoosh, crack, snap, thud), alliteration (split second), **personification** (hand-shaped branch, middle finger), **simile** (like a hydraulic press and a can of coke) and **metaphor** (big man turned bug). The **imagery** taps into the **senses** of sight and hearing.

The lack of empathy of the townspeople is emphasised here through a single sentence **paragraph**.

Time signals such as 'Saturday morning' are used to progress the **narrative structure** and maintain the momentum of the story. The townspeople are still 'observing' but selfishly consider 'lodging a noise complaint'. The loggers are described using the **metaphor** of an 'army of hard hats – it's a war!'

The **perspective** of another group of townspeople – some curious teenagers is presented.

Through **magic realism**, the author is able to bring Brian Big back to life. It provides the third major **complication** in the **narrative structure**. Through magic realism the author is able to depict something fantastical in a realistic way.

Note the **sentence variety** (simple, compound and complex sentences) in the description of Brian Big coming back to life and the reactions of the townspeople. The writer also uses many **strong verbs** throughout the text to 'show rather than just tell'. Examples in this paragraph include unfurled, blinked, gawked, crushed, clawed etc.

“He’s been un-deathed!” one woman declared, and at her call, they all came to life with cries of terror, ran to their houses and locked their doors tight.

The workers returned from their break to find Brian Big standing over his own disrupted grave.

When they asked how this could be, he simply said, “I’ve been re-birthed,” and gave them a glare, as if they were the most insufferable simpletons he’d ever seen.

They nodded their helmeted heads, and said, “Ah, of course!” because Brian Big had a very big brain, and he’d never been off-beam before. If anyone could emerge like the messiah, it would be he.

What did strike the axemen as odd, however, was that later that day when they returned to the trees, the area they’d been hacking away at for one-and-a-half days seemed to have regrown in record time. New leafy growths sprouted from the trunks they’d decapitated that morning, and Friday’s damage was entirely undone. Stranger still, the macaws were back by the masses and warbling even brighter than they had been before.

“Damn birds think they own the trees. Kill them all!” spat Brian Big. The workers, though confused, counted their blessings and began their logging again; after all, they’d be fools to turn down the miraculous gift of bottomless branches. By sunset, the macaws were crying bloody murder once more.

On Saturday evening, the townspeople gathered again in the windows. They waited until Brian resurfaced with his men, and watched with grim curiosity to see if vengeance would be dished out again. To rob the forest of not one but *two* lives? Brian Big was tempting the devil indeed.

Whoosh. Five half-dead macaws flew from the forest with a burbling screech. *Crack*. The trees again quivered under the weight of the wind. *Snap*. The workers scrambled away at the sound as an entire tree began to teeter on its roots. Alas, Brian was too enthralled by his microwaved meal to bother looking up. *Thud*. Impact, and entrails splattered the edge of the forest floor once more. The workmen hung their heads and grabbed the shovels – dead again.

The townspeople laughed, but this time knew better than to go straight to bed.

Dialogue is introduced here to progress the events of the narrative.

This is an important paragraph to show Brian Big’s **character**. He is arrogant and clearly not surprised by his ability to be ‘rebirthed’.

The workers are characterised here as unquestioning. Note the **simile** of describing Brian Big’s power by likening Brian Big to the messiah, rising from the dead.

More **magic realism** with the rapid regrowth of the forest and the return of the macaws in greater numbers. Also there is more **personification** of the trees that had been ‘decapitated’ and **onomatopoeia** in hacking, sprouted and warbling.

Characterisation is developed here with more evidence of hard-hearted Brian Big’s character. The workmen, though driven by greed, are feeling confusion. The **theme** of profit versus the environment is also presented.

Another **time signal** to indicate **plot** progression. The writer uses a **rhetorical question** here to engage the reader with a thought-provoking question.

Effective use of **onomatopoeia** (whoosh, crack, snap, thud, splattered) to describe the attack on Brian Big and his ensuing gory death. This second time the workmen show their reactions by ‘hanging their heads’ and preparing his grave.

In contrast to the workmen, the townspeople here are unfeeling and at times, callous, in their reactions.

When Brian Big emerged in the middle of the night to begin his third life, he had half the meat hanging from his bones and no fat to be found. With his muscle mass gone missing, his men had to haul him up through the dirt. They dug down from the spot where his fingertips poked out, then grabbed him unceremoniously by the armpits and pulled.

Still awake, the townspeople crept cautiously from their homes to observe the anomaly. When Brian's feet were on solid ground, their eyes drunk in his hollowed ribs and sunken cheeks. His lips were chapped, his skin seemed green, and on still half-broken legs, he seemed to sway.

The townspeople were ushered away with harsh words and much aggressive arm waving. They murmured to each other with amusement on the corners of their lips, before slipping back into their houses for the night.

When the workers re-entered the forest before dawn on Sunday morning, they were less surprised this time to find that extra-luscious growth had sprung from yesterday's stumps. Nor were they as fazed by the calls of the macaws. In fact, they could have sworn that there were even more of them that morning, both trees and birds, than there had been on either day before. Excited by the imminent prospect of three times the usual profit, there was a mad scramble to get the metal teeth gnashing.

The axemen might have heard Brian Big begging for them to lay down their tools and forget this godforsaken forest if there were teeth still in his gums. But his vocal chords were weakened, and the buzzing was too loud. Brian's eyes widened as he looked above to the branches.

An army of macaws gathered around above the crosscut saws. They eyed Brian greedily, flap, flap, flapping their wings with enough force to send the entire canopy crumbling down.

Whoosh and crack and snap and thud. A thousand leafy fists of judgement fell with finality.

If their houses still stood, the townspeople would have been awoken by the dying cries of three hundred crushed macaws. Brian Big arose no more.

Another **time signal** – in the middle of the night. Also, more **magical realism**: in this state Brian Big could not still be alive. Note the **descriptive detail**, reminiscent of the horror **genre**.

Though cautious, people love a spectacle and they are almost compelled to observe Brian Big – note use of 'drunk in' to capture writing through the **senses**. The author also describes Brian Big vividly, albeit horrifically.

Despite the horror, the townspeople are amused.

A final **time signal** – before dawn on Sunday morning. The trees have new growth and the number of birds has increased but this does not faze the workers. The **magic realism** is included here. The **theme** of profit versus the environment is also presented strongly in this paragraph.

A change in the **character** of Brian Big is introduced here but it is too late. The image of Brian's eyes widening direct the reader to the final destruction of the forest.

A **resolution** is provided in the final three paragraphs.

Repetition of onomatopoeic words and the **alliteration** in 'fell with finality' emphasise the destruction of the forest. 'Judgement' suggests a deliberate act of retaliation.

This is an element of surprise in the **conclusion** with the destruction of the town. Or perhaps the author prepared the reader for this with some negative **descriptions** of the townspeople. An **evaluation** (like a moral) is also presented, linking to the narrative's environmental **themes**: no one wins in environmental destruction.