The Bear (April Fool's Day Challenge)

by Kevin Myrick

"Hey, is that a bear?" Daniel asked Will as they looked into the thicket off to the side of the trail.

"What?"

"Look, over there by that big oak. See it?"

Will stared deeply into the forest and as he peered Daniel pushed his freshly sucked finger right into his left ear. Out of shock, Will slapped his arm down and probed his ear with his finger.

"What the hell?"

"Ha! Gotcha!"

Daniel gave him a playful slap on the back as he double timed it up the trail; he'd gotten three others over the past days with that trick on the hike. Will, red faced and shamed at having fallen for it would get him back good.

Jake caught up with him and patted him on the shoulder. "He got me with it too. Don't worry, we'll get him good."

"You got a plan?"

"I've thought about it some. I was thinking that the old soap in his eggs trick might make for some fun."

"That's good," Will said.

They heard the scoutmaster shout up from ahead. "Come on boys, we've got 5 miles before we make it to the next campsite."

Jake shoved a handful of trail mix in his mouth and they continued on their Spring Break hike of the Appalachian Trail.

Daniel was up to his usual tricks when they set up camp later that night. This time it was Jamie, who asked for help in nailing in tent pegs. Jamie would take a good hard swing, and Daniel pulled it away at just the last second. "You nearly crushed my hand," he said the

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first time. "Now try it again. Remember, you've got to tap it in Jamie."

It took a few tries before Jamie figured out what Daniel was doing. "Just move out of the way," Jamie said with a hard shove.

"Oh come on Jamie, I was just kidding. It's April Fool's. Have some fun, why don't you?"

Jamie went back to work and got the tent up on his own. He stood there for a moment and looked down on Jamie.

"Come on man, don't be like that."

"Shut up."

Daniel chuckled to himself as he walked down to the bank of a shallow, rocky creek and watched the sunset sink over the Chimney Tops. The other boys watched him as he sat alone and thought how easy it would be to push him in, but didn't. They would play their tricks later on tonight.

Daniel had done some nasty things in his day. One time on a canoe paddle down the Nuwyeh River, he threw cherry bombs under a new scout's canoe and sent it flying backward into the water. The boy - no one ever remembered his name - never came back to scout meetings after the incident. His friends always said he'd get what was coming to him, but it was rare they ever got him back.

As night fell and the scouts finished their meals, it was Daniel's turn to do the dishes. The boys carried their plates down to the creek and watched as he took a rag and scrubbed away the stuck-on noodles and tomato sauce from the spaghetti they cooked over a fire with the canned sauce that Jake's father brought along. Everyone sat around the fire as they listened to Daniel whistle a Naked Rowdies song called "Washing Machine." The night was crisp and the fire warm as the fathers smoked pipes and told stories as the scouts sat around and talked about girls and cars and the upcoming football season. The whistling stopped. "Guys! Help!" Daniel shouted from the creek bank.

"Uh oh, is someone having trouble getting the sauce off the pan? Hey Daniel! Put some elbow grease in it!"

Then they heard the splash of water and Daniel as he banged together tin plates. They all looked, but no one got up. The banging went on for a few more seconds. "Help!"

Jake's father looked over to his son and said "what now?"

"I don't know, he's been up to his crap all day."

"Jake why don't you go see what he's up to?"

"Do I have to?"

"I don't like him calling wolf anymore than you do. But go see."

Jake got up and dusted himself off and about five steps down the trail to the creek, he looked and saw Daniel as he ran at full speed in his direction. A big angry black bear wasn't far behind.

"Oh Jesus Christ! BEAR!" Jake yelled and the camp scattered. The bear was hot on Daniel's trail and hardly noticed the others as chaos reigned in the campsite for 20 seconds as they ran through. The group, all except Daniel, came back a few seconds later and settled down. "Shouldn't we go looking for Daniel?" Jamie asked.

"He'll be back soon enough," Jake's dad said. "Besides, wouldn't y'all call this a character building exercise?" The other men on the trip nodded. The scouts laughed.

Daniel lumbered in from his hour-long trek back to camp and the others laughed as they saw him, mud covered and wet after he doubled back to the creek and floated a mile or two away from the bear.

"Didn't you guys hear me crying for help?" he asked the group as they kept up a good chuckle at his expense.