

A Bear?

By Jeffery Greb

The last pork rinds were gone before 10:00, and Tom started suggesting going back in for lunch around 11:00. By 1:00, we were tying off the boat and climbing the short incline back to camp to cook the small stringer of trout we'd caught. We hadn't seen Vincent or Dan out on the water, and sure enough the pair were still in camp when the three of us walked in.

Dan stood by the bear box holding a pastry, its congealed frosting glistening translucent in a shaft of October sun. Vincent sat with his feet on the edge of the fire ring, staring pensively at the thin trickle of smoke from a smoldering log, and holding a red plastic cup to his lips. Jerry went to the pit and began stoking the fire back to life, while Tom and I laid out newspaper on the picnic table and began to clean the fish.

"That brown's pretty nice," said Dan, indicating one of Jerry's fish with a nod.

"Olive wooly bugger on a bubble," said Jerry as the log caught. He covered the flames with the grill and came to join us at the table.

"Did you guys troll?"

"We did early, but it was slow, so we switched," said Jerry.

"Why you guys still in camp?" Tom asked, running his thumb along a gutted fish's backbone.

"Oh, you know," said Dan, and he took a huge bite of his pastry and wandered over to the fire.

I looked at the make-shift bar on top of the bear box. The bottle of bourbon was empty, and a second plastic bottle of nasty Canadian blended whiskey was nearly so. "How late did you guys stay up?" I asked.

"Oh, you know." Dan plopped into a chair.

Vincent suddenly roused himself from his torpor. "I'm gonna make another Bloody Mary. Anyone else want one?" He moved to the bear box bar.

Jerry and Tom both said sure, and I declined.

From the table, we looked directly at Vincent's tent in the trees. A rope was now strung between two trees, and Vincent's sleeping bag, blanket, and other bedding were open and hanging from it.

"I came here to fish," I said. "Looks like you came to drink and do laundry."

Vincent did not look up from mixing the drinks.

"That's not fair, dude," said Dan. "A bear pissed on him in his tent last night."

The three of us laughed.

"Come on! How is that even possible?" asked Tom. "A bear?"

"A bear."

"Did you see it?" Tom asked Dan.

Vincent stopped digging in the ice and rested his elbows on the box. He looked at us with a defiant eye.

"No," answered Dan.

"Did you?" Tom asked Vincent.

"It was a bear."

"Did you see it?"

"It was a bear."

"Well, how to you know?"

“Dude, what else could it ’ve been?” asked Dan.

I looked at Vincent’s tent. It was a dome tent, and the door was on the side opposite me. I knew there was a window in the door, but there didn’t appear to be any on the other three sides. The top was mesh, but it was covered by the rainfly.

“How is that even physically possible?” I asked.

Vincent didn’t answer. Instead, he went back to the ice.

“What do you mean? He pissed through the window,” said Dan.

“On the door?”

“Sure. Had to ’ve.”

Now Jerry spoke up. “Yeah, but how? Did it stand on its hind legs like a guy? Did back in and kind of sit on the window? How could it do it?”

“Have you ever seen a bear piss?” asked Dan.

“Well, no, but . . .”

“Well neither have I. But it did it somehow.”

“A bear? This is crazy!” said Tom.

“There was a bear in camp last night?” Jerry asked. “Why didn’t eat these Fritos? I set them here on the table before I went to my tent.”

“Nah, we picked everything up before we packed it in,” said Vincent. Dan nodded emphatically.

“But it’s in exactly the same spot!”

“You know what I think?” I said. “I think you were so drunk, you got up in the middle of the night to piss and peed in your own tent.”

“That makes sense,” Jerry said.

“No, it was . . .”

“Yeah. A bear. We know.”

“Here’s you drink,” said Vincent.

“On second thought,” Tom said, “I think I’ll pass.”

“Me, too,” said Jerry.

“Suit yourselves.”

“I’ll take one of those,” said Dan.

Vincent passed him one of the red cups, left one on the box, and took his own back to the chair near the fire. He took a sip and sat silent again with the cup still poised at his lips.

We cooked and ate the fish without much additional conversation. Every now and then, one of us would snicker as if contemplating some private amusement. After we ate, the three of us went back to troll for the afternoon bite.