

"'Go camping,' they said. 'It'll be fun,' they said," Brian grumbled to himself.

Now, they hunkered down behind a counter in a strange building, trying not to have their heads blown clear off their shoulders by a sharpshooter. Brian was having a ball.

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Two days prior to this dire situation, they had loaded up Mark's jeep, and the three of them, Brian, Mark, and Kevin, headed out to the wilds of Washington. Mark and Kevin were the outdoorsmen. Brian, however, preferred to keep his adventures restricted to a good book on the couch with a cup of hot something. After a few years of them prodding him to come on their annual guys' week camping trip, he had finally given in. He was the only bachelor of the group, and he anticipated spending most of his time in a hammock. More guys were supposed to meet them. However, for the first two nights, they would be the only three.

"I enjoy getting there before everyone else. It gives me time to relax before too many people arrive," Mark had said, and Kevin nodded along jovially.

The ride up into the mountains was long, but Kevin and Mark kept up a steady conversation. Brian would interject a comment when he felt he had something to contribute. Although, mostly, Brian kept his nose in his book. For a moment, he worried he might not have enough books for the trip, but remembered the three digital books he bought if he finished the four physical books in his backpack.

When they had reached the campsite, Mark and Kevin set to work putting up tents and hammocks.

"Brian, could you set that tent up?" Kevin pointed to a rectangular duffle bag sitting on the ground next to the jeep.

"Umm, I'm not sure how to do that," Brian admitted, glancing from the bag to his feet. "I've never actually set up a tent before."

"Never?" Mark's jaw dropped open. He snapped it shut only a moment later, but it was too late to spare Brian's feelings.

"Not when you were a kid?" Kevin asked.

"No, we never went camping," Brian mumbled.

"No matter, I'm almost done with this," Mark smiled. "Then I can show you how to set it up. They aren't too difficult."

Mark did as he said, and to Brian's surprise, it wasn't complex. They soon were sitting around a ring of rocks where a campfire should be. Mark was trying to coax a fire from the kindling using only flint and steel. Brian didn't understand why he didn't just use the lighters and lighter fluid they brought, but he didn't care enough to ask. Besides, he was in the middle of a particularly nail-biting part of his book.

Soon the fire was burning. There was something about sitting around a fire with friends. Maybe camping wasn't that bad. Lots of reading, no cell signal to distract him, good friends, and fresh air. No, not too bad at all.

"What's that?" Kevin was peering past Brian out into the woods.

"What's what?" Mark glanced in the direction Kevin had indicated.

"I saw a flash of green light."

"I don't see it." Mark frowned and shook his head.

Brian sighed and put his bookmark in his book. He wasn't a monster who dog-eared the pages. Turning around, he studied the woods but didn't spot any green lights. "Ha, ha, guys, you're hilarious." He turned back around. "You had me going there for a second."

"No, really!" Kevin's wide eyes almost had Brian believing him.

"Uh-huh, I know what you guys are doing." Brian reclined in his camping chair. "Take the new guy out into the woods and scare him with a ghost story."

"Well, there is a story about a green ghost light around these parts." Mark grinned.

And there it was. Brian was right. Kevin was going to scare him if only Mark had caught on before Brian.

"No, really guys, I saw a green light," Kevin insisted.

"Well, I'm going to bed." Brian shook his head at his friend's persistence. "You two can stay out here with the ghost light and let me know how it went in the morning."

Mark chuckled. "I'm out too. Kevin, have fun with your new friend."

"But guys, I really saw something."

Brian and Mark didn't pay heed to Kevin, and both went to bed. It wasn't long before Brian could hear Mark snoring. It took him longer to get comfortable, but soon, he was asleep as well.

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"Brian!" Mark's panicked voice shouted from outside the tent, startling him from his slumber.

He sat straight up and tried to throw the sleeping bag off himself, as he would have his covers. Unfortunately, it was zipped, and he only succeeded in tangling himself up. He wrestled with it for a bit before managing to extricate his hand and unzip the confounded thing.

"Brian, get out here!" Mark shouted again. "Now!"

Brian flopped out of the bag like a fish out of water and stumbled to the tent door. He unzipped it and ran into the bug net. Ugh, why did they have two identical zippers? He unzipped the bug net as well and poked his head out to investigate why Mark was shouting.

"What's wrong?"

"Kevin's missing,"

Was that it? Brian thought. "I'm sure he just headed out for a morning walk or is trying to scare us with the whole ghost light thing."

"No, all of his things are here, and his sleeping bag looks like it wasn't disturbed." Mark pointed to Kevin's tent.

Brian glanced over. Mark was right. "He's playing a prank on us. I'm sure he'll jump out anytime now. Let's get breakfast."

"I don't think he would take it this far." Mark didn't take his eyes off Kevin's tent for a moment longer, but finally gave in and got the fire going.

They finished breakfast. Kevin hadn't returned and Brian was questioning his earlier hypothesis. He stood to search the camp. Mark stood to help as well, and they silently searched, neither saying a word.

Brian found footprints near the edge of camp a short while later. Why would Kevin leave camp before they woke up? He followed the tracks into the woods.

"Did you find something?" Brian heard Mark following him into the woods, but didn't look back.

He found more signs Kevin had passed this way, and he followed them. Suddenly, he lost the trail. As if Kevin had simply disappeared. Brian had stopped so suddenly Mark ran right into him. "Hey, watch it. Look around. He must have gone somewhere from here."

They searched and searched, but to no avail. Kevin was nowhere to be found. The trail had gone as cold as the winter in the mountains. They returned to camp as the sun was setting. Mark began tearing down camp.

"What are you doing?" Brian furrowed his brow. "We can't leave without Kevin."

"We need to go tell the park rangers we have a missing person," Mark replied. "I don't want to leave all our stuff out here."

Brian set his jaw. "You go. One of us should stay here anyway, in case Kevin comes back."

Mark nodded solemnly. "Good thinking. I'll be back as quick as I can." He pulled something out of his pack and handed it to Brian.

It was a heavy revolver.

"You know how to use one of these?" Mark didn't take his hand off the enormous gun.

"Y-yes," Brian stammered. "Point and pull the trigger."

"You also have to pull the hammer back for this one," Mark warned. He slapped down a heavy waterproof container into Brian's other hand. "There are 44 more bullets in there. It's a .357 Mag. Use both hands."

Brian nodded dumbly, and Mark was gone. The jeep was rolling away before he even realized Mark had gotten in it. He was now alone, in the middle of nowhere, with a gun.

The light was waning. He would need a fire soon. He hastily constructed something akin to what Mark had made the night before. However, he didn't waste his time on the flint and steel. Instead, he sprayed copious amounts of lighter fluid onto the logs and kindling and lit it with the lighter.

As it flared to life, he could swear he spotted a green flash coming from the forest in the direction they had tracked Kevin. He leaned around the fire.

Nothing.

He leaned the other way.

Still nothing.

He stood. Maybe his mind was playing tricks on him. A flash of green shone through the trees for a moment. As if the light was moving through the brush.

Brian gripped the revolver tightly and leveled it ahead of him before heading into the woods. He didn't pull back the hammer yet, but his thumb sat ready on top of it. Slowly, he headed toward where he had last spotted the green light. It flashed again off to his left. He turned to follow, still leading with the gun.

"Hello?" He called, hoping the origin of the light was something easily explainable. No response came, so he continued forward.

A flash of green surrounded him suddenly, picking him up off his feet and sending him flying backward... into a wall? No, it had to have been a tree. His head pounded, and his back hurt, but he had somehow held onto the revolver. He wasn't sitting on leaves or detritus, as he expected, but on a very filthy tile floor. His head spun, trying to take in his surroundings as quickly as he could. The building he was now inexplicably in appeared to have gone through a disaster, natural or otherwise. The windows were cracked, and glass, dirt, and debris littered the surrounding floor. He was sitting against a counter in what appeared to be an old hospital. How in the hell did he end up here?

"Brian!" Kevin's voice sounded from his right.

He snapped his head toward his friend's voice.

"Keep your head down. There's a sharpshooter!"

Brian spotted him lying next to a wall under a broken-out window. Kevin was holding his thigh as blood welled up under his hand.

"What's happening?"

"I have no idea, but somehow that green light pushed us to some war zone somewhere, and we apparently look like the enemy to them."

"The green light did this?" Brian asked.

"Yeah, remember an hour ago when I told you I saw that light? After you two turned in for the night, I went to investigate and ended up here."

"An hour ago? You've been missing for a day!"

"What? I'm not really sure how long it's been, but I know it hasn't been a full day."

Brian peeked cautiously over the counter. He spotted the sharpshooter on the roof of the building across an empty street. The man turned his gun, and as he did, a green laser sight emanating from the barrel blinded Brian.

The End (For Now)