

Be Ware of Bears!

by Marilyn Reeves

“Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!” laughed Kevin as they passed the ‘Be Ware of Bears’ sign posted at the campground. Elaine didn’t think it was so funny.

“Gosh, Kevin, what if ... ?”

“Oh don’t worry about it. I brought my gun along just in case.”

“You mean your little bedside pistol? I don’t think you can kill a bear with that little thing.”

“Well, maybe not, but I can sure as heck scare him away. Besides, bears are more afraid of humans than we are of them. Don’t worry, Honey, we’ll be fine.”

They sat blissfully watching the sun’s radiant farewell as it retired behind the mountain, and stirred the embers of the fire that had provided them with such a memorable meal – juicy rib steaks grilled to rare perfection over the open flame, foil-wrapped corn on the cob roasted in the coals.

The scraps had been scraped into the fire pit and the dishes rinsed in the creek. The picnic basket was safely stored away in the back of the SUV.

Kevin tossed his empty beer can into the trash and then announced that he would take care of putting out the fire if she would get the sleeping bag ready for an early turn-in.

They snuggled together inside the warm down-filled bag listening to the night birds chirp and the little creatures scurrying about the forest floor.

“My gosh, it’s dark, isn’t it? Did you bring the flashlight?”

“Got it right here by my side. If a bear comes along I’ll blast him in the eyes and then hit him over the head with it – that’ll teach him!”

“Oh Kevin. I can’t help it, I’m nervous.”

“Hush up and go to sleep now. We’ll be fine.”

Clank! Scuffle. Tinkle. Bonk!

Both of them sat up, wide-eyed. “What was that?”

“Hush. Be quiet. Don’t make a sound.”

Rattle rattle rattle. Thump thump. Tinkle.

“Oh my God, Kevin! It’s a bear!”

“Shhhhhhhh! Be quiet!”

Elaine reached across her husband and grabbed the flashlight and blinded them both when she hit the switch.

“Turn that off, for heaven’s sake! Didn’t you see ‘Jurassic Park’? That’ll just attract the darn bear. Turn it off! Turn it OFF!!!”

There was a moment of absolute quiet. Then something brushed against the side of the tent. Elaine couldn't control it, her piercing scream could have been heard three counties over. Kevin grabbed his gun and started firing through the wall of the tent. ***Bang! Bang! Bang!***

Another scuffling sound, and then the sound of something running off into the bushes.

"Oh Kevin! Do you think you hit it?"

"I doubt it, but at least we scared him away. Let's make a run for the car!" She grabbed a blanket, he grabbed the sleeping bag and they sprinted, barefoot, across the twelve-foot span to the car. He fumbled for the keys in the dark, but finally got the door open and they scrambled in, then sat trembling and shivering and clinging to each other, the sleeping bag wrapped loosely around them.

When daylight finally lit the forest, Kevin ventured out to see what he could see. The cooler had been knocked off the table and the latch was undone, leaving pop and beer cans strewn over the ground. The steak bones were missing from the ashes of the campfire and in their place were animal prints. One set "of little pointed prints left by a marauding raccoon, but not a bear track to be found.

Be ware of bears? Where's the 'Be Ware of the Raccoons' sign?" Kevin laughed to himself. Then he ran to the tent to put on some clothes.