

Tales of a Sunny Day

“Want to go spelunking?” Jon threw the question to me with as little energy as he possibly could. Drained from the high heat and humidity, his young lanky frame sprawled out over the couch.

“What?” I murmured the question back from the comforts of the forest green Lazy Boy recliner. The heat of the day constricted any quick movement.

“You know, spelunking,” Jon replied, his movement also constricted.

“I can’t say I know what that is. But doesn’t it have something to do with cave exploring?”

“You’re kidding.” Jon’s face contorted, giving me a puzzled look. His thick russet eyebrows shifted upwards as he tried to comprehend how I could not understand the concept of spelunking.

“No.”

“Well let me enlighten you, my son. Spelunking is when an arrow is shot from a crossbow into my pond, aimed at a frog.”

“What?”

“Yep. Spelunking, spelunking for frogs.”

“Hey, Jon, let me ask you something.”

“Sure. What do ya want to know?”

“Are you an idiot?”

“No. Well, at least I don’t think so.”

“Do you want to go or not?”

“What do you plan on doing with all those dead frogs?”

“Putting them in my sister’s room.”

“I am sure Susie would like that.”

“Me, too. After all, she was the one who told Marty about my grade card’s disappearance.”

“Are you sure that you are not an idiot?”

“Yes, I’m sure. Now grab your boots and let’s go.”

I rose and ambled to the back porch. Sliding open the screen door, I squinted as the sun scorched the back of my eyelids while I groped blindly for my boots. I scratched the athlete’s foot between my toes as I tugged on my boots. The day was hot and I hated leaving the comfort of the air-conditioned living room. I already longed for the comfort of that forest green recliner. I could always be found there on such a day, when the air was thick with humidity. My boots were warm with a slightly gray mud caked on them from a previous journey into Jon’s backyard. The effort of intertwining the grommets with the stiff laces left me drained. *What is taking him so long?* I thought to myself as I sprawled out over the cool grass. I looked up to the heavens, the clouds outlined in a light blue. *Do frogs have a soul? I hope not. I don’t want to meet one in my after life. I wonder if they are even out? It is too hot for anything, especially me. I hope Mom got me those fireworks I asked for. She better have. The fourth is not that far away and I obviously can’t buy them myself. I*

wonder if Jon has any. Maybe I should ask him. I thought I saw some in the garage next to his grandfather's rusty old toolbox.

"Hey, wake up." Jon poked me with the blunt end of one of the arrows he had found.

"Hey, stop it. I wasn't sleeping."

"You looked like it."

"Well, I wasn't. It's the heat— it makes your mind wander. Oh. Hey, by the way, do you have any fireworks?"

"Yes, but they're pretty old. Dad hasn't bought me any since that last incident."

"You mean when you shot the Cooper kid with that bottle rocket?"

"Yeah," he chuckled. "Oh well, I'm sure I'll get some pretty soon. Here."

He dangled the stock of my crossbow over me in a futile attempt to help me up off the grass. I reluctantly took hold of the stock and stood on my feet. The weight of the crossbow was only a few pounds, yet it felt as if it weighted me down. I stood awkwardly, keeping most of my weight on one leg.

"So, are you really going to put those dead frogs in Susie's room?"

"Nah, I'll just throw them in the Cooper's yard."

"Hey Jon, why don't we put a live one in their pool?"

"You sure it will live?"

"Does it matter?"

"Well then, let's get started."

"Hey, Steve?"

"Yeah?"

"You're terrible."

"I know."

I turned from him and looked off to the horizon. A few yards past the garden, which inhabited brightly colored strawberries and various fresh vegetables, lay the center of the tree line, and behind it rested a small murky pond. Cattails grew on the one side, and on the other the grass was neatly trimmed to the edge. A few bright yellow lawn chairs rested on the side, with fishing poles leaning on them from a day or two ago. Brightly colored bobbers dangled from the ends of the tangled lines as the sun bounced off of them. There was a calmness that floated in the air, a tranquility that could only be felt on a hot Sunday afternoon. All things remained so very still as the sun bleached our energy. The only movement was the wind blowing over my shoulders and wrinkling the small murky pond.

"Hey." Jon was again poking me with the blunt end of his arrow. "You were sleeping again." He grumbled this time, a little annoyed with my incoherence.

"Nah, I told you, it's the heat— it makes your mind wander."

"Why is this heat making your mind wander?"

"I don't know, maybe I'm concerned that we're becoming the bastard children of Satan," I joked, trying to lighten his mood. "Why does it matter if I'm a little incoherent?"

"Well, I think you're always a little incoherent," Jon said, grinning.

"Forget it. Let's just go spelunking like we planned."

We began to amble over to the pond with only one stop along the way to eat some wild raspberries. The raspberries were very fresh, lacquered in a heavy purple that stained our hands and clothes when they were picked. I was sure I would hear about that from my mother later. I could almost hear her now, nagging away.

She would stand very erect, face with a red hue trying to keep her calm, holding the stains in front of me. She would give lessons on the morals of cleanliness and how hard it was to be a single mother.

"Why can't you act a little more responsible?" she would half ask, half order. "How did you get these clothes so stained? You think money grows on trees? I am not buying you any more new clothes." Then she would end with the line she always used: "You don't have the common sense God gave a goose." Blah blah blah, on and on she would go about some stupid stains. I don't know why I put up with her. After all, they are just clothes.

"Hey, Jon, does Marty complain about your clothes being stained?"

"Who? Martin?"

"No ya dork, Marty. You know, your stepmother."

"Oh, Marty. She used to, but now I think she has gotten used to it. You ready to get started?"

"Sure. As long as you promise to get your ears checked," I replied. I gathered up my crossbow and arrows, ate the last of my raspberries, and followed Jon towards the pond. The edge of the pond was muddy and cattails prevented any real quick movement through the banks. The heavy sent of decaying fish filled our nostrils. However, it was the best place for frog killing in the whole county. Of course, this was also the only place in the county I could do this, but I was sure it was still the best place for spelunking, or whatever Jon calls this waste of valuable recliner time. I slowly sank into the mud as I carefully sneaked through the cattails, trying not to lose my boots. The soles of my shoes clung to the smelly oatmeal surface as I made my way toward Jon.

"See any?" I whispered.

"Not yet," he replied, "but I am sure we will see them soon enough. I heard them all last night. They were singing away, keeping me up all night."

"Frogs don't sing man, they ribit."

"Whatever. Just shoot them when you see them."

I cocked back my crossbow, set the safety and squished through a few yards. After finding a suitable place to stand I loaded an arrow and waited.

After a short while I lost interest and began to look up at the sky. *I wonder if Jon is really*

going to put those frogs in Susie's room? I bet the house is nice and cool, with the air conditioning blowing—that Lazy Boy is looking mighty comfortable. I just want to go inside. We're never going to find any stupid frogs. They are probably sleeping, if they even sleep. And I don't really care about Jon's revenge. I must be daydreaming, again. Wow, look at the size of that carp.

While my inattentive mind had been wandering, a white carp had swum up close to the bank. He was at least two and a half feet in length with a slightly pink belly. The whiskers next to his gills flickered as he lazily made his way closer to me. His white head broke the surface as he scanned the terrain for food and then went just below the surface once again. I was surprised; they normally do not come to the surface like this on such a hot day. He must be hungry, I thought. I felt like Captain Ahab must have felt the first time he spotted Moby Dick. His size was unparalleled by any other fish. He basked in his own magnificence, as he glared at me without fear. He knew I was a predator, yet he continued to search for food, as if I was no threat. *That's what I'll call you. Moby Dick*, I thought, as I marveled at the size of him. He swam closer to me, stopped, looked right at me, and with a flicker of his whiskers he was off in a flash, gone without leaving a ripple in the water.

The sun continued to bake us for a while, and I could feel my arms and the back of my neck starting to burn. I was just about ready to tell Jon that I was tired of this nonsense and that I was heading inside when I heard the sound of an arrow whistling briefly in the air, slicing an occasional cattail before the final splash in the water.

"Hey, I got him," Jon sounded off like a trumpet, breaking the silence of the day. I pulled myself from the smelly oatmeal and headed over to the drier shore. I uncocked the crossbow and pulled off my boots and socks and began to roll up my pant legs. Jon was still fishing for his trophy.

"Are we done yet?" I asked, tired from the heat and longing for that recliner.

"Sure," he excitedly replied. "But first I want to show you the spoils of the war."

"Afterwards, we can go inside, right?" I started heading over to where Jon was. His back was to me as he dragged something from the murky depths. I could not see what it was, but it looked big.

"What did you shoot?" I asked.

"This." He pulled a white carp from the shallows and held it in the air. "This thing must be two and a half feet long," he exclaimed. *It's Moby, not a thing*, I thought, as Jon hiked the dead carcass on to the bank. Then Jon climbed out of the pond.

"Why did you do that?" I asked, angry with him for shooting what I had been so impressed with earlier.

"Do what?" he replied, unsure of what I was talking about.

"You killed that carp." Surprised at my reaction, Jon gave me a puzzled look as though he was trying to understand why I would get upset over a fish. "It's a fish. No big deal," he retorted.

"I know," I replied. "But it looked so cool earlier. It swam right up to me."

"Hmm. I see it's your friend." Jon tried to lighten my mood. "I'll tell you what, hang out here

for a second and I'll be right back." Jon pulled his arrow from the dead carp's side and quickly trotted off into the garage. I walked over to the body and stood silently for a moment while I waited for Jon's return. He emerged from the garage carrying a shovel and a small pine board.

"Grab your friend," he said as he walked over to the trees. He put the board down on the grass and started digging. I picked up Moby by the tail and walked over to Jon. When he had finished, I placed the carp into the hole and Jon replaced the soil. Then, using the shovel as a hammer, he pounded the board into the ground at the head of the grave, then stepped back.

"Here." He pulled a black magic marker from his back pocket and handed it to me. I scribbled on the board and stood back. Jon looked at me and recited what I inscribed on the board.

"Here lies Moby Dick, biggest carp in the pond.' Man, you had a name for him and everything."

"Yeah, well, that's life," I stated.

"Come on, man, let's go inside. It's nice and cool in there, and we can watch some TV before dinner. What do you say?" Jon inquired, trying to make some penance with me.

"I guess," I replied. His gesture of air-conditioning and dinner was enough for me to forgive him. He was my best friend. I had no other close companions. Therefore, because he was the only person who could understand my desires and beliefs, I could never stay mad at him for very long. Together we turned and made our way towards the house.

"Hey Jon, do you think fish have a soul?" I asked.

"I hope not," he responded. "I wouldn't want to meet him in my after life."

