

## Camping . . . So it Goes

by Jason\_Love

It was time for a real, live, actual two-day weekend. I had been working too hard and, as remarkably, grumbling in answer to questions.

“We need an adventure,” said my wife.

And what made more sense than overnight camping, just the two of us alone in the woods without a drip of experience between us. Yahaira had never touched a tent, and I had camped only as a teenager when I was condemned, like Christ, to carry my own bedding. So it goes.

We borrowed supplies from over-trusting neighbors and hit the road, two madcap married people floating on a whim. We arrived at the campground shortly before ten p.m.

“We got a little lost,” said Yahaira. Pam, the check-in lady, chuckled country-style, but I could see her thought bubble: What a coupla twits.

Pam pointed us to our campsite, conveniently located on the other side of the moon. We all stared into the darkness together, and Yahaira asked, “What about security?”

Security?! Why was my wife thinking security? Was this not the same woman who picked up a one-eyed hitchhiker?

Pam, who had been so chuckly, waffled like the president waiting on his ear piece.

“Well, you know, there’s a security gate for which you’ll receive a code. Patrol doesn’t actually go out that far, but you’ll be fine.”

Yahaira squeezed my hand. You could hear the theme sound from Friday the 13th: Tch-tch-tch-tch-ah-ah-ah-ah.

We drove to the security gate, a metal bar certain to keep away killers UNLESS THEY'RE ON FOOT. The pole was fastened by a padlock much like you'd find on a high school locker, only all the students knew the code.

As I fumbled with my flashlight, two Confederates wobbled up singing to their beers.

"You wannus ta lock that fer you?"

Oh, boy.

"Nah, that's okay," I said. "It's got some fancy code."

I should have brought a gun, but let's face it—I'm precisely the reason they conduct background checks.

Safe behind the padlock, Yahaira and I followed our headlights to stake number three—our new home. It could have been on the edge of a cliff for all the dark. We took to striking, or pitching, or whatevering, our camp. Yahaira searched for a tent manual, and I was in charge of cursing the fire pit.

"What is WRONG with this wood?!"

But those things didn't concern us. What concerned us were the crunching noises on the perimeter. Every few minutes, a branch would crack in a way that made your neck hair pay attention. Tch-tch-tch-tch-ah-ah-ah-ah. Yahaira and I stopped to listen. What kind of animal crunches like that besides a drunken backwoods rapist?

Yahaira suggested "okay, I suggested that we go home. But it had taken all night to get here and I had already set my shoe on fire." We agreed to sleep in the shell of the truck beside our trusty steak knives. With a nervous goodnight, we conked out and forgot the whole thing ever happened.

Until Yahaira woke up choking.

“What’s the matter?” I said.

She couldn’t breathe to answer. Yahaira’s nightmares get that way. It’s kind of cute when you’re not TRAPPED IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE.

“There’s a dead body outside the car,” she said. “Men are looking for us.”

Oh, boy.

I was waiting to hear the rest when I saw her need for assurance.

“Wow,” I said, gulping. “You’re such a visual person.”

And that was all it took. Yahaira turned to ice and said, “I want to go home.”

Now?

NOW.

You see, Yahaira thought I had called her psychic because in Spanish “visionario” means “never mind.” It was two a.m., the witching hour when rednecks are released from local taverns to wander the forest for murder victims.

In muddy socks I bundled up everything we had only just unpacked. As a show of support, Yahaira revved the engine. I tried to leave behind only items we owned, but the crunching sounds were so close and I can’t rightly say what happened.

We sped back through the security gate, which was now wide open. Tch-tch-tch-tch-ah-ah-ah-ah. It wasn’t till the highway that we eased our sphincters and reviewed the night’s events: Remember Pam’s eyes when we asked about security? What about the open gate? Do you suppose Velma and

Daphne are okay?

We sat down to Denny's smelling of cinder, Yahaira in teddy bear PJs. And there at our sticky table we laughed and gorged and decided that if our fire burned down the forest we would become clerics to cope with the guilt. It was that loopy high you get during sleepovers when you talk really fast before the sun comes up and ruins everything.

And there in our third coffee, I realized that we had gotten everything we had asked of the trip. We had spent some quality time fearing for our lives together and now, best friends with benefits, giggled like our server wasn't staring. I decided at that moment to create more time to almost go camping.

At six a.m. we collapsed in bed. Somewhere in the distance, the sun peeked through the pines to reveal a story of two freaked-out campers and the horrors they so narrowly left behind. Tch-tch-tch-tch-ah-ah-ah-ah.

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