

## CHAPTER 1

### Attack in the Night

Shook-a. Shook-a. Shook-a. Shook-a.

It was three in the morning. I was fast asleep.

Shook-a. Shook-a. Shook-a. Shook-a.

I started to wake up. Something was dripping on me.

Shook-a. Shook-a. Shook-a. Shook-a.

I sat up. Something was wrong. Bobby was gone; so was his sleeping bag.

Shook-a. Shook-a. Shook-a. Shook-a.

The noise grew louder. Then something struck my right shoulder. I raised my hands to protect myself, but it was too late. The attacker hit me in the face.

\* \* \*

Bobby and I had started the day at work in Pascagoula, Mississippi. After lunch, we drove west along the gulf to Bobby's house and then to New Orleans, where we caught a flight to Salt Lake City. From there we flew to Reno, where we landed at 10:30 p.m. Our plan was to rent a car, drive south to Carson City, and find a motel room. The next morning, we would drive the rest of the way to Yosemite. Because of good weather and a misleading sign, however, we changed our plans.

The weather in Nevada was perfect—fifty degrees, no humidity, not a cloud in the sky. We headed south in our Hertz Thunderbird, the moon roof open, singing along with Bob Seger

to “Roll Me Away.” Then we saw the sign—Washoe Lake State Park. Underneath the words was an image of a tent. We had a tent—we were going to camp the next two nights in Yosemite—and it was an ideal night to sleep outside. I glanced over at Bobby; he shrugged. I took the off-ramp, and we headed for Washoe Lake.

It was midnight when we turned into the park entrance. A mule deer in the parking lot stared at us. We searched for a sign pointing the way to the campground but couldn't find one. Roads went to the left and right. We took the road to the left, along the shoreline of the lake. At the end, we came to a beautiful grassy meadow. Bobby and I studied the meadow. It was no doubt for picnics and Frisbees, not tents and campfires. We returned to the entrance and took the road to the right but found only rocky strips for RVs.

So we had two options—we could leave the park, continue to Carson City, and find a motel, or we could pitch our tent in the meadow along the lake. It was now after midnight. Wherever we stayed, our plan was to rise before dawn to get to Yosemite as early as possible. Bobby and I chose the meadow beside Washoe Lake. We would leave no trace, and we would not get caught.

The roof of my tent was mesh, with a detachable rain fly. The fly was needed only if there was a chance of rain or heavy dew or the night was cold. We pitched the tent without the fly and crawled into our sleeping bags. As we stared up through the mesh at the stars, Bobby and I talked of our plans for the weekend. Soon I was asleep.

I was still asleep—sound asleep in fact—when the strange sound began, when something started dripping on me, when Bobby disappeared without a trace. And I was just waking up when I was struck on the shoulder, then in the face.

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The attacker, as you may have guessed, was the Washoe Lake State Park sprinkler system. After all, without sprinklers, there are no grassy meadows in western Nevada. Bobby, who is a light sleeper, woke at the first sound. He realized our predicament immediately, grabbed his sleeping bag and air mattress, and fled.

Next to my wife Carrie, Bobby is my best friend. If I really need him, I know I can count on him. Faced with a crisis, and with time to think, Bobby would never let me down. But at Washoe Lake, with no time to think, Bobby saved only himself. He escaped from the tent and left me lying there. And Bobby not only abandoned me, he also left the front flap of the tent wide open, with nothing between me and the nearest sprinkler head. When it made its next revolution, I was defenseless.

The blast of water brought me to my senses. I climbed out of my wet sleeping bag, grabbed it and my air mattress, and hauled them to dry land. I then returned for the tent, which was getting wetter by the second. Fortunately we had not staked down the corners. I was able to lift the tent and carry it to safety.

The emergency over, I turned my attention to Bobby. From the instant the sprinklers had started until now, he had not said a word. He had not helped, or even offered to help. I spotted him, standing near the lake, holding his barely damp sleeping bag and air mattress. He was taking it all in, absorbed by the drama. He was grinning.

I demanded an explanation: “Why did you leave me? Why didn’t you wake me up?” Bobby mumbled something, but it was drowned out by the sound of the sprinklers.

We assessed our options. On the inside, my sleeping bag was dry enough to make it through the night, and our air mattresses would keep us off the wet floor of the tent. We returned to the tent, which was now on what Nevada without sprinklers looks

like: rocky, dusty, and dry. Just before I fell back to sleep, the sprinklers stopped.

The next morning, my anger had passed. With less irritation, I repeated the questions I had asked the night before. But Bobby still couldn’t say why he left me, why he didn’t wake me up. He couldn’t explain why he chose to stand by the lake, peering at the tent, wondering when I would emerge. All he could say was that he didn’t understand why I’d stayed in the tent. I was asleep, I reminded him. He pointed out that it’s not like he left a wounded comrade behind to be taken by the enemy or eaten by wolves. He asked why he and his sleeping bag should have gotten soaked while trying to wake me up and said there was no sense both of us getting wet. I responded that he didn’t have to get soaked, that he could have kicked me and said something on his way out the door. Bobby knew I was right, but he claimed I would have been pissed if he’d kicked me.

We speculated about the cause of the attack in the night. The sprinkler was undoubtedly on an automatic timer, but we chose a better story. We imagined we were victims of a sadistic park ranger, a vigilant protector of the sanctity of the park, a Western Barney Fife. The imaginary ranger, a stickler for the rules, had spotted our tent pitched illegally on his meadow. He had flipped the sprinkler switch and watched with delight as we—first Bobby, then I—scrambled to safety. As we drove south toward Yosemite, I closed my eyes, trying to get a fix on the imaginary ranger with his evil grin. But all I could see was Bobby’s grin from the night before.

Thus began the first of my travels with Bobby.

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