Campsite Sadistic

By T. A. Fenner

“So troop,” Baxter said, drawing the attention of the boys seated around the fire pit. “What should we do before settling in for the night?”

Ideas flared up around the circle -- catch fireflies, duck-duck-goose, name the merit badge, and so on. But nothing caught fire with the group.

Baxtor checked his phone for ideas, but the darkening hills offered no signal, which, under normal conditions, he considered part of their charm. Not so much with seven bored scouts staring back at him.

The new kid strolled in from the shadows and plunked down next to the fire, opposite Baxter. With the slow drawl of southern accent, he asked, “Mister Baxter, can we tell spooky stories?”

Several scouts cheered on the idea, then stuffed their faces with roasted marshmallows.

“Looks like we have a winner. I’ll start us out,” Baxter said, resting the phone on the ground next to him as he tossed the half-eaten remnants of his poorly cooked marshmallow into the fire*.*

*One more*, he thought, stabbing his third marshmallow onto his stick. After perching it atop the flames, he cleared his throat and said, “It was a dark and stormy night…”

Groans erupted around the fire.

Baxter threw up his free hand in simulated shock, but failed to contain his toothy grin. “What?”

“Mister Baxter,” the new kid said, “you can’t start off spooky stories like that. It’s been done like a ka-jillion times.”

“Really?” Baxter faked a big sigh. “Guess I got a long ways to go to earn a story telling badge, huh?”

The scouts giggled.

Baxter smiled and drew in the crisp mountain air, allowing the summer-baked smell of pine to tickle his senses and smooth away the wrinkles of city life. *God I love this.*

“Can I tell a story?” the new kid asked.

“Absolutely,” Baxtor said. “Your name is…Terrence, right?”

The kid nodded.

“Well then, Terrence, give us your best shot.”

Terrence stood and hunched over the fire, allowing an eerie light to cast over his face and body. “This here’s a story about a boy. Not just any boy, mind you. But a boy so dark on the inside his heart pumped the blackest of inks.”

The scouts leaned in, grins and marshmallows smeared across their faces.

*The kid’s got skills*, Baxter thought, twisting his roasting stick.

“And the boy was smart too, smarter than most adults even,” Terrence said, jabbing a thumb towards Baxter which drew several snickers. “So smart, in fact, that he learned to hide the darkness, to keep it on the inside and only show folks what they wanted to see. And on one particular evening, the boy decided it best to look normal, to look like an everyday… Boy Scout.”

Several “oohs” rose from the troop.

“Now hush up, all,” Baxter said after a gooey nibble of his latest marshmallow victim. “You’re breaking the mood.”

Once the commotion died away, Terrence took turns glaring into everyone’s eyes as he continued, “But as time passed on, the darkness kept growing inside the boy. He tried all sorts of things to keep it contained, like torturing and killing small animals and such. But nothing ever satisfied him. And just when he neared his bursting point, he received the opportunity he’d been waiting for his entire life -- an invitation to go camping with his new troop.”

More “oohs”, even a few “ahhs”.

Baxter shook his head.

“But like I said, the kid was smart. Real smart. He knew he needed a plan, one good enough to satisfy his murderous urges, yet protect him from being caught.” Terrence picked up the nearest marshmallow bag. “He decided food was the key. Something delicious, something everyone would take part in. Once he found the right food, all he’d have to do was poison it.”

The scouts’ eyes flicked down to their sticky fingers, and Baxter’s to his own half-eaten marshmallow.

“Quick question,” Terrence said. “What deadly poison can be extracted from apricot seeds? Beep! The answer, of course, is cyanide. With the right dose -- say a marshmallow or two -- death can happen in less than fifteen minutes.”

The scouts glanced to one another, then to Baxter, fear squeezing their faces into wrinkled knots.

“That will do now, Terrance,” Baxter said, a nervous laugh rattling his voice.

But Terrence didn’t stop. “Fun fact. It doesn’t take much to extract the poison neither. Just need a simple chemistry set and the Internet. God bless technology!”

“Terrence, would you please-”

“Momma planted a few dozen apricot trees in the orchard this spring. They don’t produce the best fruit. But boy howdy, are made enough for collecting seeds.”

“Terrence, that is quite enough,” Baxter said, his words echoing down the valley. “I think you’ve sufficiently made everyone more than a little uncomf-” His words cut short when a shooting pain twisted through his midsection.

Terrence wagged a finger at Baxtor. “Now didn’t you just tell everyone to hush up earlier, to not break the mood?”

One by one, the scouts wrapped their hands around their stomachs. A few even rolled into moaning balls.

All except Terrance, who stood proud above the fire.

Baxter shot to his feet, but the world tilted and he tumbled back to the ground. He clutched at the fabric around his stomach as a gut-twisting gurgle swirled within him. Every muscle tensed and spasmed, crushing the breath out of him.

“Now where was I?” Terrance said. “Oh yes. The boy worried the poison might burn off in the fire, so he injected it inside the marshmallows using one of his daddy’s diabetes syringes. Stuck every single one right through the bag. Funny how nobody noticed all the pinpricks in the plastic when the bags were passed around.”

Gritting his teeth, Baxter swept his hand across the dirt in a herky-jerk motion, until his fingers finally located his cell phone. With the flick of his thumb, he flipped open the cover and lifted it to dial, but succeeded only in covering the phone’s screen in a spray of bitter spittle after a round of explosive coughs.

Terrence chuckled. “Now, Mister Baxtor. You know there ain’t no signal up in these hills.”

Baxter lay on his back, unable to move, a fog diffusing the world around him into a muddled, swirling haze.

As he blinked into darkness, the last heard was Terrence’s giggling voice, “So… How’s that for a scary story?”