

Smoky Mountains Survival

C. R. Fulton

THE CAMPGROUND KIDS

www.bakkenbooks.com

Smoky Mountain Survival by C. R. Fulton

Copyright © 2022 C.R. Fulton

Cover Credit: Anderson Design Group, Inc.

All rights reserved. This book is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America. This book may not be copied or reprinted for commercial gain or profit.

ISBN 978-1-955657-16-7

For Worldwide Distribution

Printed in the U.S.A.



PUBLISHED BY BAKKEN BOOKS

2022

*To every kid who longs for adventure:
keep your face to the sunshine,
and all the shadows will fall behind.*

THE CAMPGROUND KIDS

No. 1

Grand Teton Stampede

No. 2

Smoky Mountains Survival

No. 3

Zion Gold Rush

No. 4

Rocky Mountains Challenge

No. 5

Grand Canyon Rescue

For more books, check out:

www.bakkenbooks.com

- 1 -

“Dad, can I ride my bike until you’re ready to pack it?” I ask, locking up my brakes and sliding to a stop next to him.

“Sure, Isaiah. It should be about ten minutes before we are ready to leave.”

I look a lot like my dad with his blue eyes and brown hair that wants to be blond in the summer.

“Me too!” my younger sister Sadie says as she swings a leg over her purple bike. For a nine year old, she’s not so bad.

“Race you to the corner!” I say, standing up on the pedals and pumping hard.

My tires sing as I fly down the road far ahead of

Sadie. I scan the empty street, wishing Ethan was already here.

I veer past a huge plastic Easter egg decoration that's blown into the road. Sadie and I have been waiting for Easter break all school year, which signals our camping trip to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is finally here!

At the stop sign, I wait for Sadie. She's panting hard as she slides to a stop by me. "At least I can still outrun you, Isaiah!"

I shrug, eyes locked on a truck at the far intersection of our neighborhood. My shoulders slump when it turns the other way; *it's not Ethan.*

"Oh, no!" Sadie cries, flipping her long, brown hair over one shoulder.

"What?"

"I forgot to pack my firefly jar!" She zooms back toward the house, and I follow, driving in and out of the shallow rain gutter on the street side. A car is coming my way, but it doesn't move from the dead center of the road. I can see the driver of the

car is staring down at her lap—not watching the road. *I don't think she even knows I'm on the road.* I'm going fast, and even though I hit my brakes hard, there's no way I can stop in time. My rear brake locks up, and I swerve. It's either crash into two cars or take a hard right into the yard. I jerk the handlebars and hit the steep curb, trying to squeeze between the mailbox and Mr. Myers' black Lexus he had parked on the street in front of his house. The impact with the concrete curb is harder than I thought it would be, and I nearly lose my grip on the handlebars altogether.

With a desperate groan, I jerk away from the mailbox, and my brake handle smashes into Mr. Myers' car. My forward momentum creates an awful screeching sound as my handlebar scrapes for what seems like an eternity along the side of the car.

My foot slips off the pedal, and all that's holding me up is the pressure against the car. With a final jerk, I regain my balance, and my tires thump

down off the grass of his yard and onto the road. Arms stiff, riding over the smooth-as-glass pavement, I blink rapidly. A heavy sensation like a rock settles in the pit of my stomach.

“Isaiah!” I nearly fall at Dad’s voice.

“What?” I answer My voice comes out annoyed even though I’m genuinely nervous.

“Time to get your bike loaded up, buddy.”

I swallow hard. *Why did that have to happen? Why couldn’t the driver have stayed on her side of the road?* I get off my bike and roll it toward Dad. My palms are sweaty, and my voice squeaks as I say, “Dad?”

Before he can answer, Sadie bursts out the door. “Dad, Aunt Sylvia says she is lost! Can you give her directions?”

She holds out the phone, and Dad paces in the doorway, trying to figure out where she and Ethan are.

“Helloooo. Earth to Isaiah,” Sadie says, waving her hand in front of my face. “I just called the win-

dow seat for our entire trip, and you didn't even freak out."

I swallow hard, still reliving the awful sensation of my handlebar locking up with Mr. Myers' smooth black paint.

Dad walks back and hefts my bike onto the rack next to the other three. I hold my breath, waiting for him to ask what I had wanted. But he doesn't; he's forgotten that I'd started to ask him anything.

Sadie jumps high, her fist thrust in the air. "Yes! Window seat!" She finishes with a funny little dance. Usually, her antics would make me smile, but I just walk into the house. I had intended to tell Dad what happened, but maybe this interruption is proof that I shouldn't.

"Honey, take this bin to Dad, please." Mom places a plastic tub into my arms, plops a kiss on my head, and hurries off down the hall.

She must have filled this bin with bricks! However, I can't compare the physical weight to the weight that's settled deep inside of me. I bite my lip

as I shuffle through the doorway. *Nobody knows—nobody but me.*

“Here, Dad,” I say. Speaking two words feels like walking on fresh ice—like I might fall through at any second. But the more seconds that tick by without my ’fessing up builds like a high wall that keeps me from saying anything.

A truck pulls into our driveway, and Ethan jumps from the passenger side, dragging a heavy bag behind him.

“Ethan!” Sadie and I rush forward, hugging him and Aunt Sylvia.

“So,” Ethan says, his voice cracking, though I pretend not to notice. “What kind of trouble do you think will we get into in the Smokies?”

His casual words make my blood feel like ice crystals as my face goes pale with guilt. *Maybe Ethan knows.* I shake off the thought. *It’s as ridiculous a thought as can be.* They’d been lost when I’d scraped the car.

Aunt Sylvia rescues me. “Isaiah, Sadie, I have

something for each of you. It's to say thank you for rescuing Ethan from the river in Wyoming."

I take the wrapped box from Aunt Sylvia and watch as Sadie rips hers open, her mouth forming a giant O as she pulls out a camping lantern with three different types of lights.

"Thank you!" She hugs Aunt Sylvia and then turns to me, "Come on, Isaiah! Open yours!"

I rip off the wrapping paper and open the cardboard box. Inside is a tough-looking canvas fabric with buckles.

"What is it?" I ask as I pull it out.

"It's a tool roll. I figured it would free up some of your pocket space if you had all these tools in one spot!" Ethan says and then ruffles my hair the wrong way.

I swing at his upper arm, and he rubs the spot as if I had hurt him even though I know I didn't.

I unclip the tool belt and find 12 new tools tucked into the small pouches. Ideas and plans begin to rush through my mind. "I could build an

amazing survivor shelter with these! Thanks, Aunt Sylvia.”

“And thank you for keeping your cool when your cousin needed it most.” Aunt Sylvia hugs Ethan tight after they unload his bike. She pulls away, waving out the window.

Mr. Myers pulls up right in front of our house as Aunt Sylvia drives away. The bright white gash in the paint on his car is clearly displayed. My mouth feels like it’s full of cotton balls, and all the blood drains from my face. *Mr. Myers saw me scrape his car! Now he’s come to condemn me.*

-2-

The old man's white hair appears as he gets out of the car. Then he shuffles over to my dad, one bushy white eyebrow arched high. "Good morning, Greg."

"What happened to your car?" Dad asks, wiping sweat off his forehead.

"Well, that's what I can't figure. I pulled it out onto the road to wash the driveway, then I went in for a drink, and now I find this." He slaps his leg with one hand and shakes his head.

I'm frozen in place, staring at the black Lexus like it's a rattlesnake. Sadie leans close, studying the mark.

“Isaiah and I could investigate if you want. We’re good at that sort of thing,” she offers.

A strangled squeak passes my lips right as Mom shouts my name from inside the house. *Maybe her interrupting is another sign I’m not supposed to tell.* I flinch, and Dad turns to me. “Isaiah, run and see what your mom needs.”

The pressure inside threatens to rip me apart. I know I need to tell him that I did it, but I cannot get the words to come.

Dad puts his hands on his hips. “Isaiah.”

I know that voice, and it means I’d better get a move on.

I groan, “I’m going.” As soon as I say it, I know my tone was all wrong, even disrespectful. Dad scowls at me, but I spin on my heel and run for the house.

When I trudge out the door with the last of the gear, Mr. Myers is gone, but the crushing guilt is still heavy in my stomach.

Once Dad finishes loading Ethan’s gear, he calls,

“Troops! Let’s roll for the Smokies; it’s only a five-hour drive.”

I settle in the middle seat, trying to get my knees to fit in the too-small space. *Sadie should really be sitting here.*

“Isaiah, would you look at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park map and see what you’d be most interested in doing and seeing?” Mom hands me a map, but I can barely get myself to take it from her.

“No, thanks.” My voice is flat, and Mom turns to look at me.

“Are you feeling all right, son? All I’ve heard this winter is how you couldn’t wait for Easter break and more camping.”

I swallow hard, jamming my knees into the armrest and staring at nothing. “I’m fine.”

Mom and Dad exchange a concerned look, but Ethan swipes the map from my limp hands.

“Leave it to me, Aunt Ruth. I’ll make sure we have a great time and avoid all rivers and cliffs.”

“Perfect,” she says.

“Okay, so, we are staying in Cades Cove Campground. There’s a visitor’s center and the Cable Grist Mill that still works.”

“A what?” Sadie asks, lounging in the wide-open space of the window seat.

Dad turns the truck onto the thruway. “It’s how they used to grind grains like wheat and corn by using the power of water to turn big flat rocks.”

“Um. Food with rocks in it.” Sadie makes a disgusted face.

“You’ll see,” Dad says as he grins.

“And there is an 11-mile, one-way wildlife viewing loop. That would be cool to do on our bikes!” Ethan pursues the map, and I fight with the words I should say. *Just ’fess up, get it over with, take the punishment, and work for the next two years to pay for the repairs.* But I can’t make myself. It’s embarrassing to admit that I didn’t tell the truth straight up.

I groan. Mom twists in her seat to place her

SMOKY MOUNTAIN SURVIVAL

hand on my forehead, frowning when she finds it cool. I stare blankly at the windshield.

Why did this accident have to happen now?

- 3 -

We pull over at the modern-looking, rectangular park sign with a stone base. We gather in front of it for a picture, and I scan the woods for a wolf. *Nothing*. There are no wolves in the Smoky Mountains. The knowledge makes me feel empty. Mom counts down as we pose for the picture: “3...2...”

Something stings my leg, then again and again. *I'm standing in an ant's nest!* I jump to the side, smacking my leg to get off all the angry black creatures. I scan the woods again as I scratch my itchy leg. Wait.

“What is that?”

Something is moving deep in the trees ahead.

“Hikers!” Ethan makes a terrified face and runs behind the sign. His horseplay makes me laugh when he peeks out from the other side.

“All right. Point taken. They’re just hikers.”

The memory of Kota, the lone wolf at Grand Teton National Park, hits me so strong that I ask Mom for her phone as we get back into the truck. I scan through her pictures from our Grand Teton camping trip and find the one of us all at its welcome sign.

My mouth hangs open in shock, and my finger is pointing straight at the camera where Kota had been hiding far behind it. Everyone else is smiling, and I must admit I look pretty goofy in the picture. I swipe to the end of the Tetons trip, and there I am holding up my arrowhead and Junior Ranger badge. Mom had captured that exact second when I’d figured out the mystery of the missing horses. The shock shows clearly on my face. I jump back to the most recent picture, and once again everyone is

smiling except me. I'm grimacing and in pain as the ants bite my leg. *Just my luck.*

I sigh. *Kota would never have kept a secret like I am.* But soon were pulling up to Site C-15. I've done a ton of learning about setting up camp this winter, and I study the layout of our site as we clamber out of the truck.

The breeze is coming from the south and judging from the way the trees have grown, I would say that's its normal direction. That means the new tent for Ethan and me should have the part with the most cross bracing pointed toward the south.

"Oh, look! There's a lantern hook and a picnic table." Mom's voice is excited as we pull our gear out of the truck.

"What on earth is this?" Sadie asks, pulling out a silver canister with a handle on top.

"It's a portable shower." I point to the hose and explain, "You add water, pump the handle for pressure, and voilà! You now get to shower."

One side of her nose wrinkles up. "Um. So, are

you supposed to shower with your clothes on?”

“No, silly! We’ll make a little room out of tarps, probably over there.” I point to a trio of tall pine trees in the corner of our site.

“Thanks, but I think I’ll use the campground showers.”

“Can’t,” I say, happy to know something she doesn’t.

“Why not?”

“The Great Smoky Mountains National Park doesn’t offer any showers, electricity or other comforts like that at their campgrounds. Their only modern conveniences are restrooms with flush toilets.”

Sadie looks down at the shower with disgust.

There are many other sites up the road from ours, and we are at the end. Across from the road is a perfect view of the hazy blue smoke of fog that floats up from the forested hill. That smoky fog is what gives the Smokies their name. Now that I’m here, I see why. Thick blue smoke seems to be everywhere, giving the mountains a fairytale look.

Ethan and I wrestle our tent into submission in record time, and I grab the air pump while Ethan unfolds our new air mattresses.

“This is going to be like staying in a hotel,” Ethan says with a grin.

“Right, except without electricity, running water or air conditioning,” I retort flatly. We stare at each other for a few seconds and then erupt with laughter at the same time.

“Perfect!”

I pump the handle until my arms feel like they’re going to fall off. I poke my mattress and decide it’s full enough. I hear Sadie’s high-pitched voice—the one she uses to get animals to do pretty much whatever she wants.

I step out and see a chocolate lab leaning on Sadie’s legs and grinning up at her. He rushes over to me, his leash dragging.

“Oooph,” I grunt as he slams into my legs. He’s strong and wags his tail hard while planting a heavy paw on my foot.

“This is Cocoa,” Sadie says as the dog’s owner rushes over to grab the leash.

“Cocoa, you can’t keep getting loose! You must be on a leash in the park. Don’t you know that by now?” the young man says.

“Well, technically,” I say, “he’s still on leash.”

“True.” The man extends his free hand and says, “I’m Marvin Dexter. I think we’re neighbors for now.”

I introduce myself and Ethan, and then a little girl steps out of the tent at Marvin’s site.

“This is Maddie, my niece, and that’s her mom—my younger sister Becky.”

Sadie smiles wide at Maddie, and the two are instant friends.

Ethan and I head over to the truck to help Mom unload her kitchen totes. Soon, our camp is looking pretty good. Dad had splurged on a gazebo tent with bug screens on the sides, so we set up the kitchen inside.

Sadie giggles, and I look over to see she’s putting the finishing touches on a clay face on the rough

bark of a tree between Marvin's site and ours. She bends down to a wet spot of mud and digs up another handful. She helps Maddie put a surprised shaped mouth on her tree face.

The figures with crazy expressions they've created look so out of place in the woods, it makes me laugh. The tree really does look shocked to see the tents set up next to him.

"Come on, ya'll. Let's drive up to the Sugarlands Visitor Center and get your Junior Ranger booklets early on during this trip."

Sadie waves goodbye to Maddie and comes over. "Mom, I might need a wash." Her hands are covered in wet mud.

"Can I fill the shower, Mom?" I ask.



“Sure, Isaiah. I don’t think she’ll need any hot water for her hands, so just fill it from the big jug.”

I lug the shower canister over to the picnic table where our three gallons of extra water sits. It’s fun to pump the handle even though I can still feel the effort of filling up my air bed. When the handle won’t go down anymore, I flick the tab on the small showerhead on the end of the hose.

I hear a gurgle, then a hiss. The water shoots straight into Sadie’s face. She shrieks, ducking away. I double over laughing, but unable to wipe away the water running down into her eyes, she’s angry now.

“Isaiah! You did that on purpose.”

I hold up one hand, trying to stop laughing. “No, I didn’t! I had no clue it could shoot that far.”

The honesty feels good—like my usual self, before... I try to hold on to the feeling, wishing it was still my entire world.

Mom intervenes and says, “Sadie, it was an accident. Wash your hands. Here’s a towel to use.”

I hold the stream of water low. Sadie is still frosty

when we get in the truck. Ethan saves me by making the same shocked face she'd stuck on the tree. She rolls her eyes and giggles.

"Hey, Aunt Ruth, when can we bike the Cades Cove Loop?" he asks.

Mom leans over, reading the sign as we drive past. "An 11-mile one-way loop. Do you really think we can handle biking that far?"

"Yeah!" all three of us say in unison.

"Maybe tomorrow then. We could pack a lunch," Mom says, but the mere mention of bikes makes my heart feel black again. *If I tell Dad what I did now, how stupid will I look? What excuse could I possibly give for not telling him sooner? None.* I sigh, and Mom looks at me that sad face she only uses when she knows something is wrong.

I can't do a good job of ignoring the black feeling until we walk into the Sugarlands Visitor Center door. As we pass under the arch, the building is strangely quiet—almost like we've stepped into a castle full of secrets.

A sign that says “Museum” is just beyond the huge information desk. “Mom, can we go into the museum?” I ask, eyeing the milling crowds in the gift shop and info desk. The museum is much quieter.

“Sounds good to me.” Mom and Dad walk hand in hand through the wide glass entryway. We study a huge 3-D terrain map of the park.

“There’s Cades Cove.” Ethan points, and I locate the tiny flag near the center of the map. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park covers two states, both Tennessee and North Carolina, although we plan to stay on the Tennessee side this trip.

“I didn’t know it was so steep over here,” Sadie adds, pointing east of our campsite.

I nod in agreement; the park looks like a wrinkled bedsheet, with high ridges running in multiple directions. The water seems to run into all the valleys between each of them.

“Oh, there’s the loop road we’re going to bike tomorrow!” Ethan wipes away the fog his words form on the glass.

“Cades Cove is like a big valley with mountains all around, and the loop road follows the base of them. It should be easy biking,” Mom says.

“Listen to this,” she reads a sign: “*More people get lost in the Smokies each year than in any other national park.*”

Looking at this terrain, I can see why. Getting turned around with all the smoke and the trees being so thick would be so easy.”

I imagine stepping off the path and having to survive in the wild. Inside the museum, I’m shocked by how big an opossum’s teeth are.

“Wow! Did you know these ugly buglys can eat up to 500 ticks every single day?” Dad asks, pointing at the sign.

“They’re not ugly; they’re cute.” Sadie says.

But I must admit with their naked tails and pig-like pink ears and long snouts, they are most definitely ugly.

“You’d even call a spider cute, Sadie.”

“Precisely! They are, especially the ones with

four big eyes.” She puts her hands up next to her face for extra eyes.

Soon she’s pointing to a display of Seepage Salamanders. “Look here! It says these Seepage Salamanders are endangered! They never move more than six feet from their home base, and they only live where water comes up from the ground. Look how tiny they are!”

I study the picture of one perched on a man’s fingertip. It’s orange with a stripe running down its side, and it fits easily on the man’s fingertip.

Next, on a huge old-growth slice of timber, we try to count the rings. Each one represents a year, but I lose count at 188. After we’ve gone through the exhibits, we shuffle into the gift shop, hunting for the Junior Ranger booklets.

When heavy crowds shift enough, we find an entire section dedicated to the Junior Ranger program.

“Mom, why do we have to pay for our activity books here? We didn’t in the Grand Tetons.” Sadie

asks, fingering a dark-green vest that would be perfect to display her national park badges.

“Did you notice that we didn’t have to pay to enter this park? Well, the park service still needs money to pay the rangers and to maintain the roads and such, so they charge for the maps and the booklets instead.” Mom picks up a book for Sadie that’s labeled 9 to 10 years old and an 11 to 12-year-old one for me.

“Ha! Ethan, you’re going to have to be a not-so-Junior Ranger!” I point to a sign that says ages 13 through 103.

Ethan folds his arm over his chest and juts out his chin. “Yes, yes, I am quite mature for my advanced age. I’ll be driving in a year.”

I make a horrified face, trying to imagine Ethan, who’s always looking out the windows while we’re driving, being in control of a car.

“So, *old* Ethan,” Mom says, hiding a grin, “you’ll just need a not-so-Junior Ranger card.” She selects one, “looks like you’ve got it easy. You only have to

attend three ranger-led programs and have each Ranger sign your card, then you can be initiated.”

After the long drive back to Cades Cove, we jump on our bikes, and I finger the shiny spot on my handlebar. “Stay on the camp road and be careful.” I hear Dad say, but in my mind, I’m replaying the scrape on Mr. Myers’ car, trying hard to find some way that I could’ve done something different. *Maybe crashing into the mailbox would’ve been better.* At least they’re less expensive.

“Isaiah,” Dad’s voice has that tone that says I’m in trouble again. I snap back to reality, realizing that to the rest of the world, it looks like I was ignoring him on purpose.

“Wh...what?” My reply comes out much sharper than I’d meant to respond.

“You need to ditch this attitude, son. Were here to have fun—not to dole out correction. But if you keep up like this, something’s going to give.” His hands are on his hips again; I know he’s not happy.