

BY THE BOOK SURVIVAL



BY CULEX PIPIENS

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coincidental. Names, characters, places and incidents
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Chris was heading home from work and stopped at a gas station to fill up his tank as it was nearly empty. He finished and headed inside to pay grabbing a candy bar off the rack on the way to the counter. He tossed it on there along with his 60 bucks. The change was five dollars even.

"Give me five quick picks for the lottery tonight."

The clerk put the 5 back in the register and punched a few buttons on the lottery machine. Out spit Chris' ticket.

"Good luck to you," said the clerk as he handed him the ticket.

He put his mirrored sun glasses back on and walked out to his 2010 Mustang. Chris started it up and headed into traffic for the rest of the drive home munching his candy bar as he went. It was Friday and he hadn't called Mandy yet to see if she wanted to do something tonight.

Definitely not engaged, they might be loosely considered boyfriend/girlfriend but a more accurate description was friends with benefits. It seemed to suit him fine as he didn't want anything serious and this kept his options open in case something better came along. Chris dated on and off but most never made it much more than one night or occasionally a weekend. Mandy had previously been serious with a guy for awhile but when they broke up she just didn't want anymore commitments at that time and had off and on spent time with Chris ever since.

He reached over and grabbed his cell phone off the seat and started scrolling through the names looking for hers. A horn blow caused him to look up, swerve back in his lane and flip the bird to the person he had almost wandered into. Continuing through the phone he found her work number and punched it up.

"Jack Caruther's office, this is his assistant Mandy speaking."

"Mandy, it's me."

"Oh, hey Chris. What's up?"

"You wanna do dinner and a movie or something tonight?"

"Yeah, sure, but I have to work tomorrow so I'll have to leave early. I can't stay the night."

"Work on Saturday?"

"Yeah, they got some big case going to trial on Monday and they're no where close to ready yet."

"OK, I'll swing by around 6 to pick you up. Alfredo's good?"

"I had Olive Garden for lunch... how about fish?"

"Pier 19?"

"Works for me. See you in a few hours."

He hung up and realized he was doing about 15 less than the limit and people were passing him all with angry expressions.

Dinner that night was good and they rented a romantic comedy. If Mandy didn't have to work in the morning she would have definitely stayed the night but she needed the money so when the movie ended she said she had to be going. Chris flipped the entertainment system back to TV mode and took out the DVD figuring he'd drop it off on the way back from taking Mandy home. He was about to turn off the TV when the lottery drawing came on.

"I don't know anyone who plays these. You got a better chance at getting hit by a bus," said Mandy.

"Actually..."

"You didn't?"

"Yeah, I stopped for gas and got a quick pick."

Digging in his wallet he found the ticket as they were reading the numbers. He checked each of the 5 quick picks he had. "Loser. Loser. Loser. Loser. Lo... wait, what are the numbers again?"

Looking to the screen and back to his ticket he shouted, "I won!"

"You're kidding?!?"

"No, really! I got 5 out of 6 numbers! That's got to be worth something. Isn't it?"

"Let me check," said Mandy as she surfed on her smart phone. A few minutes later she said, "Looks like 5 numbers this week is around \$25,000."

"Holy crap... I'll still net about 15k after taxes."

"Well you can't retire on it. Any other ideas?"

"Haven't thought that far ahead."

"How about taking that dream fishing trip you always wanted? A week or two up on a lake in the middle of the woods."

"That's not a bad idea. I'll put it on my short list," Chris said smiling.

He drove Mandy home while they dreamed up stuff to do with the sudden windfall. Chris kept going back to the fishing trip idea and Mandy thought, but didn't say, that the two of them in a cabin by a lake for a week or two would be a great vacation.

The following Friday Chris emailed Mandy at work telling her all about the fantastic fishing trip he had booked. Just him and the guide for 2 weeks. Middle of nowhere. No phones and no one to bother him. Mandy noticed the fact that she wasn't included and thought the 'no one to bother him' comment might have been directed at her. It wasn't but she didn't take it that way. She didn't reply and let his calls go to voicemail for a few days. She had to admit to herself that after her last break up she didn't want anything serious but in the past few years she'd spent enough 'friends' time with Chris that maybe she did want a more serious relationship again.

If she wanted more then she had to see if Chris did too or was content with their current arrangement. If he didn't want more then maybe she'd have to cool it with him and start looking for someone else. Finally on Monday she had gotten over the imagined hurt and replied to his email that she hadn't answered sooner as she was real busy with work. She wished him a good time on his trip and made note of

the dates on her calendar. He had sure moved fast as the trip was already setup for next month.

When Chris booked the trip with Flying Fish Outfitters he went all out on the deluxe package. Basically he didn't have to lift a finger other than to fish. The guide would take care of everything else. He just had to be at Missoula on the correct day. The pilot/guide would pick him up, fly him out to a remote lake where he would setup camp and do all the cooking. Call it rustic pampering or whatever you wanted but Chris figured since he had the lottery winnings that he was going to spend it on himself as he deserved it.

The evening before Chris talked to Mandy and tried to get her to come over for the night but she begged off saying that the case at work was still taking a lot of the firm's time and she had to go in early again. No loss, he thought. It just gave him a chance to turn in early. He didn't have to leave for the airport until 9 the next morning and he was already packed. Mostly jeans and t-shirts along with some plaid over shirts. The program said that for mid September he should expect lows at night in the 40's or even 30's and 60's-70's during the day but should pack for extremes in both heat and cold as a two week trip was too long to accurately predict what might happen. It could potentially range from 90's to snow depending on weather conditions.

Chris, rereading the pamphlet and his customized vacation package notes from the outfitter, decided to throw in a few pairs of shorts and a wool sweater figuring that would be enough. His flight went into Missoula, MT. From there a pilot in one of those water planes would meet him, he's sign the waivers and then they'd fly off to Boulder lake where he'd do nothing but fish for two weeks.

In the morning Chris was up, cleaned, dressed and off to the airport just before nine. Getting through security was actually a breeze. He didn't have anything but clothes in his luggage plus a few toiletries and his carry on included just his cell phone and Kindle. The flight was uneventful and they landed at Missoula International right on time. The instructions were to go to baggage claim, get his luggage and then go to the airport food court and look for his name. His bag was one of the first off the plane which means all the rest got piled on top of it and he was thus one of the last to get his luggage when they unloaded it. He extended the handle and piled the duffel bag on top of

his rolling bag and headed for the food court. Right off he saw a guy dressed in mostly camouflage with a piece of paper containing his name written in marker along with the FFO logo. He went up to the guy.

"Chris?"

"Yes."

"Hi. I'm Steve. I'll be your pilot and guide. Here, let me get those bags for you."

Chris handed them off to Steve. As they walked Steve made small talk about the local weather and asked the customary questions about how the flight was and if he was looking forward to the vacation. Of course he said reports are that the fish are really biting this week too. Chris finally noticed that Steve was leading him outside towards the parking lot.

"I thought we were flying out of here?"

"We are. They don't handle the float planes at the main terminal here. We need to go to the remote hanger. It's on the airport grounds, just a few minutes drive."

Steve led him to an older model Jeep SUV. It was raised but not unreasonable so with tires that looked like they could go off road pretty easily. The top had a roof rack with a few spare tires and some gas cans along with extra lights attached to the front of the rack. It was painted in a flat dark grey color. As much as the vehicle was modified and tricked out, it also, surprisingly, blended in fairly well, thought Chris.

"Nice looking ride."

"Thanks."

"It looks old but appears to be in good condition."

"Yep. I put a lot into it so I take good care of it. It's a 1980 Cherokee Chief but runs just as good as any of the new stuff on the road."

He loaded the bags in back and they both got in. It started right up and sounded a bit off. Steve put it in gear and started driving.

"That engine sounds a bit different."

"Good ear. I replaced the original with a diesel 4bt."

"Why?"

"Well, for one the old one had nearly 250,000 miles on it and either needed a major rebuild or to be replaced. Second, I believe in being prepared for the unexpected. It's not just important in my job but a part of my lifestyle too. That's why I installed all the extras on here."

"But what does a diesel have to do with being prepared for the unexpected?"

"I don't want you to think I'm some nut job, but most modern vehicles running on gas could be a liability in the event of some type of major problem. Less cars on diesel means I can probably locate some long after regular gas supplies are gone. Plus there aren't any fancy electronics on this engine that could get fried with an EMP."

"Gone? How could gas not be available and what is an EMP?"

"Gas is easy. There are only a limited number of refineries. In the midwest there are literally thousands of pipes crossing the New Madrid fault along with all the bridges on the Mississippi. If there is a large earthquake on the fault line it could be months or years until enough infrastructure is repaired sufficiently to easily get gas around the country again."

"Really? But isn't that a long shot?"

"I'm sure it is, but in the mean time I take advantage of the diesel engine giving me a bit better mileage. To answer your EMP question, it stands of Electro Magnetic Pulse. It results from a nuclear explosion..."

"Ha! Yeah. Cold war is long over Steve."

"Yes, but you never know what some terrorists might do. However you've heard on the news about solar flares this year, haven't you?"

"Yeah."

"A big solar flare could have the same affect on the planet. When electronics are exposed to an EMP they have a high likely hood of getting fried."

"So you're saying a solar flare could make my cell phone and Kindle useless?" said Chris holding them up.

"Exactly. Granted it isn't a high likely hood of occurring but it could. Well, we're here," said Steve as they drove up to a smaller hanger with a half dozen small single engine planes sitting on the tarmac around it. Steve got out and popped the back taking out the bags. He didn't see Chris getting out shaking his head in disbelief as he did.

Noticing only his bags Chris asked, "Don't you have any bags?"

"My stuff and all our equipment is already loaded. I stopped here first, loaded the plane and did the preflight before I picked you up."

"Make sense." He followed Steve over to a float plane that had the wheels extended out so it could also work on a concrete runway. The bags were placed behind the seats in the cargo area. Chris saw the half dozen fishing poles along with a number of other bags all strapped down in back too.

A clipboard was presented to Chris. "Here, these are the waivers and emergency forms. Please read and complete them. Chris signed away his right to file a lawsuit in the event of an accident or other 'act of god or nature'. The emergency form included information on allergies and medications along with who to notify in the event of an emergency. He didn't have any family left so he put down Mandy as he couldn't think of anyone else to fill in. Steve took the forms, went into the office and came back out a few minutes later and said, "We're good to go."

The plane could hold four people including the pilot. Since it was just the two Steve told Chris he could ride in the other front seat. It would be about 45 minutes to the lake and with the clouds coming in and the wind picking up they should get going.

Once they were belted in Steve started the engine and after warming

it for a few minutes said some stuff on the radio and started to taxi out to the runway. He paused, said a few more things and then increased the throttle making the engine roar as they started rolling down the runway. It didn't take long until they were air born. Steve banked the plane turning to the north east and climbed to about 5000 feet. Thirty minutes into the flight Chris could feel him starting to descend.

As they came down the plane was getting tossed around a bit in the wind causing Chris to get a queasy feeling. He hoped he could hold it in before they landed. Steve caught his expression in his peripheral vision and handed Chris a disposable 'barf' bag just in case.

Looking out the window Chris could see them descending toward Boulder lake. At least he assumed the lake was their destination. Steve made a few more turns and came in for the water landing. As they decreased speed and were approaching the surface another sudden gust blew them hard to the side. Steve fought with the controls to recover and level the plane out again. He finally did and realized they did not have enough lake left to land on. He'd have to make another pass. Just as he slammed the throttles to full they got hit with another wind gust throwing the plane to the side again.

Steve was able to recover quicker this time but had lost precious altitude in the effort. Chris watched in horror as the trees rushed towards them and Steve fought with the controls trying to get the plane to climb. He didn't make it and they slammed into the trees right at the edge of the lake about 30 feet up. At least that is what Chris surmised after coming to. Tentatively moving around he realized he was still alive and nothing felt broken. He had a lump on his forehead but it wasn't that large. He turned to see how Steve was doing. The bloody tree branch coming through the wind shield, through Steve's chest and sticking out the back of his chair told Chris all he needed to know. Steve was dead.

Chris moved around in his seat and the plane shifted dropping a foot or so. He took that as a sign to get out now. He undid his seatbelt and found the door still worked. He got it open and was trying to climb onto a tree branch when the plane finally gave way and dropped to the steep bank below slid a few feet down it and into the water. The shaking of the tree as the plane fell was enough for Chris to lose his

grip and he bounced down from branch to branch landing hard on his left foot and spraining his ankle.

Ignoring the pain, Chris jumped in the water and found it to be in the 40's. Shockingly refreshing. The plane was slowing going down and drifting from shore and all his stuff was in there! He swam the dozen yards to it and looked in the door but the entire back of the plane and all the equipment was already under water. He saw a sizable backpack behind Steve's seat, just under the branch, and grabbed it getting out just before the plane slipped under and continued sinking out of sight.

He swam back to the shore dragging the pack with him and scrambled up the steep bank to a level area. Dropping the pack next to him he sat down with his back to a tree to wait. The rescue team should be here in a few hours he figured. Two hours later his clothes were still damp and he was wrapped in a ball shivering in the cool air.

Chris woke still cold but with the sun starting to warm him a bit. He wondered when the clouds had cleared. Looking at his watch he saw it was 8am the next morning. He had been asleep nearly 16 hours. Well, best to get up and stretch a bit. He stood up, gasped in pain and immediately fell over. His sprained ankle had ballooned up and was almost impossible to stand on. Since he had tried to stand on it, the ankle was now throbbing with pain again too.

"Why didn't any rescue show up?" thought Chris. "They should have been here by now."

Slowly the realization that they were going for a two week excursion and wouldn't be missing until they failed to return came over him. So he'd have to either hike back, not likely with his ankle, besides he had no idea how to get back or which way was back or he'd have to somehow survive out here for at least 2 weeks when the search and rescue people would come looking for them. He hoped.

Having never had to survive in the wild before Chris was at a complete loss. If he had a pole he could try to catch a fish or something but he had nothing. A cell phone in his pocket, wet and ruined, along with his wallet and car key didn't leave him much to work with.

He leaned back against the tree just soaking in the sun and trying to warm up when he remembered the backpack that he had gotten from

the plane before it went down. He turned and found it on the ground next to the tree and slightly behind him. Reaching out he grasped it and pulled it to him. The logo said it was a Kifaru Navigator and it was covered in camouflage patterns similar to how Steve had been dressed.

Steve. "I wonder if he had any family?" Chris said out loud. "Great. Now I'm talking to myself." He figured since no one was around to notice that talking out loud to himself was probably OK and besides the sound of a human voice, even his own, was somehow comforting to him.

He proceeded to open the bag and examine and remove all of the contents.

- 1 Kirafu bag
- 4 half liter water bottles
- 6 Cliff bars, assorted flavors
- 1 Katadyn Mini - some type of pump thing
- 1 Ziplock bag with bandages and bandaids in it
- 1 Ziplock bag with ointments and creams
- 1 small metal cup and plate and spork
- 1 multi-tool, it said Leatherman on it.
- 1 large orange foam strip wrapped in a roll
- 3 small orange foam strips
- 2 tan rolls of stretchy material
- 1 black rifle stock
- 100 bullets
- 1 Ziplock bag with a book in it
- 1 LED flashlight
- 1 metal bar and shaving looking apparatus attached to the bar with a short chain
- 2 space blankets
- 1 roll of thick string or cord
- 1 roll of TP
- 1 notebook
- 2 pencils
- 2 thick crayons, one red, one blue
- 6 tea light candles
- 6 matches
- 1 windup radio

- 2 pairs socks
- 1 pair of underwear, size 36-38
- 4 folded up Hefty trash bags
- 1 Altoids tin with fishing line, hooks, sinkers, flies and 2 small lures
- 1 four pack of bobbers
- 1 ten foot square blue tarp folded up
- 1 small hatchet

Chris wolfed down 3 bars and 2 bottles of water as soon as he found them. He obviously knew what toilet paper and a notebook and pencil were for and could fairly easily figure out the multi-tool. The windup radio took a bit more investigating but other than listening he couldn't do anything with it and this far out he wasn't getting very much anyway. Some of the items, like the medical equipment (other than band aids), the orange foam rolls and the metal bar were beyond him. He couldn't understand why there was a rifle stock and bullets. It seemed kind of useless to have bullets and part of a gun.

Since he couldn't eat the rest of the stuff he put it back in the backpack for safe keeping. One of the last items he went to put in was the book but stopped when he saw the title... 'SAS Survival Guide'. Even through the ziplock bag he could tell it was well used, obviously read many times, but still in good shape. Taking it out he opened it and saw the copyright page said 'Revised Edition' and 'Copyright 2009'. He felt this was good as it should be pretty current. He started paging through it and saw lots of drawings and text. He stopped at Page 425 when the word 'sprain' caught his eye.

He read about how to wrap a sprain and what to use and realized the tan stretchy stuff was exactly what he needed. Chris removed his sock and shoe and rolled his pant leg up a bit to fully expose his swollen ankle. Following the instructions in the manual he scooted down to the lake and dipped his ankle in the cold water for as long as he could stand it to help reduce swelling. When he couldn't take the cold anymore he pulled it out, dried it off and wrapped his ankle up. It took a few tries before he felt it was on correctly and positioned to do the most good and provide him with some support.

A cloud passed in front of the sun and he felt chilly until the sun returned. Chris knew he would need some type of fire for warmth and

something to protect him in the event of a rain or other bad weather. He took out the book again and found in chapter 5 specific instructions on shelters and fire. Given his limited resources he finally settled on trying to make a bough shelter over a fallen tree.

Looking around he could see he was surrounded by pines. Chris didn't know what kind they were, however with a good tree guide he would have been able to determine they're lodge poles, ponderosas, and fir. Further investigation would have revealed some scattered cottonwoods and aspens but all he had to work with was the book and it didn't get that detailed. He was able to hobble into the woods about a hundred yards where he located a fallen tree. The trunk was mostly snapped about 5 feet up and the top had fallen over with the very tip of the top resting on the ground and the trunk still partially attached about 5 feet above the ground.

Reading the section on shelters, and specifically the bough shelter on page 248 was enough for him to figure out that he needed to remove most of the branches and then use the angled trunk as the support beam. Everything would lean up against it creating a pseudo triangular tent type space underneath. He slowly worked his way back down to the lake and had to spend a few minutes locating the backpack. As heavy as it was he decided not to leave it there again as it was all he had. It would be safer in his shelter he figured. Chris removed the hatchet and strapped the pack on and headed back through the forest, and uphill, away from the lake. His ankle was still painful but he could at least move around on it now.

Once more he had to find the fallen tree again as he didn't follow the exact same path back. It took a few minutes but finally he did. The pack was set by the trunk and he went to work with the hatchet chopping off each pine branch. On the third branch his arm caught the jagged end of what remained of the first branch he had chopped off. Frustration overcoming him, Chris slammed the axe into the trunk and dropped to the ground. A quick examination showed a nasty, but not deep scratch.

Back to the book he went. Flipping through the pages he found on page 413, 'Wounds and Dressings'. Following the instructions he tried, best he could, to clean the wound and then pulling a bandage and antibiotic ointment from the medical kit in another Ziplock bag he

applied the ointment and bandage using some bandage tape to fasten it. Chopping branches was hard work so he ate another Cliff bar and drank most of another bottle of water.

Moving to the tree he wrestled the axe free from the trunk and went back to the first branch stub and chopped it off as close to flush with the trunk as he could and repeated for the second. Now since he would be much less like to injure himself again he continued on chopping off each branch right near the trunk right from the start. He slowly got a rhythm going that wasn't overly taxing but allowed him to make good progress. By mid afternoon he had all of the branches off and piled around him. According to the book he just needed to lean them against the trunk and overlap them building up layer after layer and then add some heavier logs or branches on top to anchor everything down.

It did not take long before he realized he would need more branches than he had so he went to work on the lower branches of some of the surrounding pines. By evening he had more than enough and started to pile them up until his shelter was complete. It was nearly dark so he wolfed down the last of the Cliff bars and the last bottle of water. He crawled into his shelter and opened up one of the space blanket packages. He read the instructions on the package and unfolded the blanket and wrapped up in it using the pack as a pillow. The physical activity of the day, something Chris wasn't used to, had caught up with him and he was sound asleep in seconds.

Chris woke to a chittering sound. Opening his eyes he saw it was morning with the sun already climbing well into the sky and a small squirrel perched nearby pretty much yelling at him. He sat up and waved an arm at the squirrel who scampered back about 20 feet and partially up a tree where it resumed yelling at him.

He crawled out and got to his feet realizing just how much everything hurt from yesterday's activities. Surprisingly his ankle felt much better... or maybe just everything else hurt that much. Either way he was thirsty and hungry. Chris dug around in the pack but he had finished the food and water yesterday with no more to be found. Not good he thought, at least for food, water would be easy. There was a whole lake full.

He grabbed the book and read that water should be treated before drinking or he could get all sorts of bad stuff. The best option looked to be boiling since he had a metal cup. Fire would be required so he switched over to making fire. "Ah, that metal bar is a flint and steel fire starter," he exclaimed out loud after recognizing it in the book. His outburst got him another scolding from the squirrel which he had already began ignoring. The book described clearing an area and making a ring of rocks and then what kind of sticks to use. He spent the next hour gathering rocks and sticks and preparing his fire ring. With it all ready he got out a match, struck it and lit a small twig on fire with it. He continued adding small twigs until they were burning nicely. Next was branches about as thick around as his finger. He continued moving up in size until some of the bigger chunks had been added and were blazing nicely.

Chris walked, better but not back to one hundred percent yet, down to the lake and scooped up a cup full of water. He returned to the fire and set the cup down as close to the burning logs as he could. A bit later he noticed it was boiling and reached in to grab it forgetting the metal would be hot too. He immediately burnt his fingers and dropped the cup in the fire spilling the water.

Swearing up a storm at the pain and stupidity he finally settled down, got out the book and looked up burns on page 416. According to the guide he did not have any serious burns and the medical bag had some burn cream in it. He applied it to his fingers and it felt cool and soothing. Chris packed the medical supplies back in the ziplock and returned it to the backpack. As he did he noticed the Katadyn Mini and took it out. Looking it over he realized it was a water pump and probably a filter. He could just filter water and not have to boil it first. If his fingers didn't still hurt he would have slapped himself in the head. Using a stick he nudged the metal cup out of the fire and waited 15 minutes for it to cool. Very tentatively he touched it and it was barely warm. Still going slow he picked it up and when he didn't burn himself he got a better grip on it and headed down to the lake with the cup and the pump.

He pumped himself 3 full cups of water before his thirst was satiated but his stomach was still hungry. Heading back to camp he dug through the bag one more time looking for anything to eat but he found nothing. Taking up the book he found a whole chapter on food.

He saw references to cattails and dandelions. Pine nuts on page 153 might be possible since he was surrounded by pines. He could also make spruce tea, as the book described, if he could figure out which pines were spruces. Or maybe any pine would work. "It's only 2 weeks until I get rescued. But what if rescue never comes? What if they can't find me? Why me? WHAT DID I DO TO DESERVE THIS?!?"

The only response to his outburst was the squirrel scolding him again.

Looking carefully on his way to the lake he saw a bunch of mushrooms and made note to look those up later and see if any were safe to eat. Near the water and at breaks in the trees he spotted some dandelions. The book said he could eat the leaves like a salad and dandelion juice was full of good stuff. "Well, I don't have a juicer so I guess salad it is."

He pulled a leaf and took a nibble. Tasted like salad greens in those expensive restaurants. He tried a bigger bite. It wouldn't win any prizes for taste but it wasn't half bad either. Chris foraged eating as he found the leaves until his hunger subsided. Working his way along the shore he came to the patch of cattails like shown in the book. It said the leaves, when cooked are like spinach and the roots can be eaten raw or boiled. He pulled up a half dozen and took them back to camp. Now he needed water to boil them in.

Running back and forth to the lake was getting old. Something larger than the cup that could hold water would be real useful right about now. He went through the pack and was at a loss. Maybe raw roots wouldn't taste so bad. He went to slip the book back in the ziplock bag when he had an idea. Use the bag!

Chris took the Katadyn and the ziplock down to the shore and filled the bag with filtered water. Carrying it carefully he went back to his shelter where the fire was almost gone. He tossed a big log on it and it died down to nothing. Grumbling he took the log off, got his kindling and small branches together again. Lit another match and got the kindling started. He fed it back up to a good blaze and added in the log which now caught and started burning.

He explored a bit until he found a handful of forked sticks. Testing each he found one that would hold the metal cup without dropping it. Chris dug out the multi tool from the pack and found a knife blade on

it. He chopped the cattail leaves and put them in the cup and poured some water from the bag over them. He cut off a root section and chopped it into a few smaller pieces and added that to the cup. He set it near the fire and watched as it slowly warmed and then boiled. After 5 minutes he figured that was enough and this time used his forked stick to lift the cup away from the fire. He set it down and waited for it to cool enough to safely handle.

Once more he dug around in the pack until he found the spork and used it to fish out the leaves and roots. They weren't going to win any awards for flavor but they were edible and somewhat tasty, especially to someone who is hungry.

Throughout the day the clouds built and Chris had another round of tubers and then turned in early making sure the pack was in the shelter with him.

Sometime during the night it started to rain. Chris woke shivering. The fire had gone out and rain was dripping through his 'roof' and saturating the ground beneath him. He tried relighting the fire but the wet wood wouldn't catch and he just wasted 3 more matches before giving up. The rest of the night he huddled under his space blanket in his wet clothes shivering to try and get warm.

Morning dawned with clear blue skies and warmed quickly. He went down to the lake where he could get the full sun on him and pumped another bag full of water. He stripped off his wet clothes and laid them out to dry letting the warm sun shine on his body. The warmth and lack of sleep from the night before overtook him and he fell asleep, naked, right on the shore.

Hours later a chattering squirrel woke him up. He looked at the sun and it had moved well across the sky and must have been afternoon already. His clothes were dry so he put them back on, took his water and pump and headed back to camp. He wanted some more cattail soup but needed to get a fire going. All the wood in the forest was still wet. He headed back to the shore and found a few small pieces that had been in the sun and felt dry. Using his last match he was able to light them and once the fire was burning he tried feeding in the wet wood. It worked but he had to go slow and it really smoked a lot so he made sure to sit upwind of it.

Chris prepared the cattail soup and ended up making three cups worth before he felt full, or at least not so hungry anymore.

He sat and stared at his shelter. If only the roof didn't leak. What he wouldn't give for some tar paper or roofing felt or a tarp or.... "Wait, I got a tarp!" he exclaimed. Out of habit he looked around but the squirrel wasn't there to scold him that time for his outburst.

Looking in the pack he found the blue tarp and unfolded it. The size looked about right so he started removing branches until his roof was half undone. He laid the tarp down and then covered it back over with branches until he was sure it would not blow off.

With the shelter hopefully fixed and his hunger taken care of for the moment he thought about his future. Eating cattails for another 2 weeks? or was it just a week and a half now? Regardless, he wasn't looking forward to meal after meal of the same thing. If only he had the fishing poles but they had gone down in the plane. He couldn't understand why Steve had put some fishing gear in the Altoids tin. It's useless without a pole. A perch or trout would be just about perfect right now.

Chris thought about it and decided to check the book. Sure enough there was a section on fishing and it assumed you had no equipment and needed to make your own. Since he already had line, hooks, bobbers and sinkers he really just needed to make a pole of some type. He carefully read the section in the book and then went out looking for a suitable pole. Not far off he found a recently downed branch that was still fresh. He didn't want an old dried stick as that could break, but a fresh springy branch would work fine. Using the hatchet he cut off the smaller side branches and then used the knife on the multi tool to clean it up a bit more. He took the line out and saw he had about 50 feet. With no way to reel it in he didn't want any more than he could reach so he cut off about a 10 foot piece. This was carefully tied to the branch pole and a hook, bobber and sinker were attached.

Now all he needed was bait. The book suggested looking under logs for insects and grubs to use. "Makes sense," he said out loud.

"Chatter. Chatter. Chatter."

"Oh shut up you stupid squirrel!"

More chattering.

He walked away and headed for the lake checking under anything that looked promising. By the time he reached the lake he had a small handful of crawly things. One went on the hook and he dropped it in the water and waited. And waited. And waited. Just as his head started bobbing as he was drifting off he felt a slight tug on the pole. The bobber was moving across the surface all by itself. There must be a fish on the line! He quickly raised up his pole and sure enough, a reasonable side perch. Chris removed the fish, whacked its head on a rock until it stopped moving and re-baited his hook with the one crawly thing that hadn't yet crawled away. This time he was able to get a second one in just a few minutes.

Two fish would be enough for dinner so he gathered them up, took his pole and headed back to camp. He was no expert but knew the basics of preparing a fish. He cut the heads off, cleaned them and tossed the guts to the side and jammed each fish on a stick putting them over his fire. It was dying down again so he slowly fed in some branches until it started going again and then put on a larger chunk. It was still wet and smoked a bit which he figured would just help flavor the fish.

Chris never tasted fish that was so good before. It was probably just the hunger but damn, they were some good eating!

Darkness was falling so he got into his shelter and was just drifting off when a sound woke him up. Not 10 feet away was a badger standing there sniffing the air. He wandered left and right until he found the fish heads and guts at which point he immediately started eating them. Chris just froze and watched. When the badger finished he started smelling around again and in his wandering ended up approaching the shelter. Finally Chris freaked out and jumped up yelling. The startled badger assumed an aggressive position and looked like it was going to attack. Not knowing what else to do Chris kept yelling and flailing around. It must have worked as the badger finally just backed away and slowly headed off.

Another mistake. Leaving traces of food by the camp. Chris was disappointed in himself. It took hours until he finally fell asleep after

all the excitement.

The next morning the fire was out again and he was out of matches. He turned to the book and while the bow drill looked like a challenge he settled for trying the flint and steel first since he already had them. Following the directions carefully he was able to, after many tries, get the fire lit. He slowly built it back up and then started his morning with cattail soup for breakfast.

Now that he had a reasonable set of tools to work with and was competent with some basic skills he started gathering a few grubs for bait and went down to the lake to try for his lunch. With the hook in the lake he filtered some more water into his ziplock while waiting for a bite. It didn't take long until he had a perch. He felt one along with some cattail leaves would be sufficient for lunch so he took his catch, a few leaves, pole and water bag and headed back to the shelter. The fire was getting low so he fed it some more sticks and got it built back up to cook his fish on. He chopped the leaves and just like before, boiled them in water while the fish cooked over the fire. He drained the filtered water into a couple of empty water bottles while the food cooked.

After lunch he decided it was time to see what else he could learn so he took the book, found a nearby comfortable tree in the sun and settled in to read it. Over the course of the afternoon he made it through about half the book before dinner time. Another trip to the lake for a fish, some more cattails and another bag of filtered water.

This time he was able to catch a trout and had it with boiled leaves. While they were cooking he cut off the roots and set them aside with a few more leaves for breakfast.

That night clouds moved in and the following day was rainy and cold. The tarp kept his shelter dry this time so he slept late. Without a fire he skipped breakfast and settled for raw cattail roots for lunch. Not feeling like going out in the rain he stayed in his shelter and finished the book.

Chris payed special attention to the section on snares and on preparing game as he really wanted a change in his diet. The bag yielded some of what he would need with the cordage and the hatchet

and knife on the multi tool would allow him to prepare some branches. He settled on a spring snare as it looked to be one of the simpler ones to build. Early evening the rain finally stopped and the clouds started to break up.

He went out a distance from his shelter and after many attempts finally succeeded in making a snare trap that didn't immediately trigger when he let go. Cautiously he backed away and when nothing happened he turned and went back to the shelter. He was hungry but given the approaching darkness he decided to forgo dinner that night.

Early the next morning he arose and went to check his snare. He was pleased to find a rabbit limply hanging from the cord. As he touched the rabbit it started trashing around kicking its legs.

Chris was at a loss... he thought the rabbit would be dead and he could just follow the book to prepare it, cook and eat it. Now he would have to actually kill it himself. Heading back to the shelter he quickly checked the book but there was no mention of how to kill it. Finally, out of desperation he grabbed the rifle stock and headed back to the snare.

The rabbit was still struggling. Chris grabbed it getting a firm hold on it before removing the cord from around its head. Lowering it to the ground he continued to hold it firmly while grabbing the rifle stock with his other hand. Swing. Crack. An accurate swing to the head resulted in the rabbit finally going limp and staying that way. Just to make sure, he took the multi tool, opened to the knife and cut the head off.

Picking up the rifle stock he noticed the butt end looked like it had come loose. He gave it a tug and it came completely off revealing items inside. Looking carefully he removed 2 magazines, a trigger assembly and a barrel.

“Well, I'll be!” he exclaimed. “Some kind of rifle that disassembles and stores with in itself.”

Putting the pieces back in the stock, he replaced the butt plate, grabbed the rabbit and went back to his shelter. The wood he gathered was not wet but wasn't really dry either so it took him a while to get a fire going. Once it was he followed the instructions on

how to prepare and the cook the rabbit.

It was a bit overcooked, with a few parts even burnt but Chris didn't care. It was meat and he was hungry. Eating every last piece of meat finally filled the hole in his stomach.

The rest of the day was spent gathering some more wood which he placed near the fire to dry out and then put it in his shelter to stay dry in case of rain. That evening he got some cattails, filtered water and caught a fish for dinner. Once dinner was finished he reset his snare and returned to his shelter and went to sleep.

Rising with the sun he checked his snare and found it still set with nothing in it. Back to the shelter he walked and then got the fire going to cook his cattail breakfast.

Chris picked up the rifle stock and removed the butt plate. Pulling out the pieces it took him a bit of experimenting until he figured out how to assemble it. He loaded the magazines, got one in the gun and finally figured out the safety and how to charge the weapon. He shot a couple of magazines of ammo at a tree and was able to hit the tree nearly every time.

He wasn't confident he could actually shoot his dinner, but at least he could kill something already caught in the snare without having to beat it to death. Heading down to the lake found Chris fishing for his next meal. After catching, cooking and eating lunch he tried his hand at foraging for some pine cones in an attempt to harvest pine nuts.

It wasn't hard to find them but he wasn't able to get any nuts from them. Perhaps they weren't the right kind, he thought. A squirrel picked that moment to chatter at him. He tossed a pine cone towards the squirrel who immediately ran over, grabbed it and took off with it. A little later the squirrel was back and he tossed it another pine cone. He kept this routine up all after noon with the squirrel.

Early evening found him back at the snare and another rabbit trapped in it. This time he had the rifle with him. He poked the rabbit with the barrel but it just hung there limply. Reaching out he found that this one had been suffocated by the snare.

He returned to camp, cleaned and prepared it and cooked it for dinner.

As with the fish he made sure to dump the head and entrails quite a bit from the shelter to avoid attracting any more badgers.

The same routine followed day after day. Find or catch your food. Prepare it. Keep the fire burning. Filter the water.

One evening while sitting in his shelter staring at the fire, Chris got to thinking about his life. He had a decent paying job but it was meaningless work. Nothing that made a difference either way. He worked to pay his mortgage on the town home and the car payment on the Mustang. He had a cable bill. Internet bill. Cell phone bill. Tablet internet bill. Insurance. Utilities. Gym membership. Multiple credit cards.

He paid and paid yet he wasn't really happy. All of these things. Everything he did at his job and yet none of it was able to help him out here. If it wasn't for a book and a few items in a back pack he would have been dead. Yet here he was. Still alive and he had not paid a cent, just relied on what he did with his own two hands.

Even his friends with benefits arrangement just left him empty. Mandy deserved more from him than just a dinner and a night in bed.

Chris finally broke down and cried at the sheer folly of modern life. How he has become so detached from his roots. From real knowledge of how to live. How to survive. How he has treated others. He laid in his shelter and cried himself to sleep.

The two week point came and went and Chris had not even noticed. It wasn't until 16 days after the crash that he heard a plane. At first he didn't give it a second thought but as the sound faded away and then got louder again he realized they were looking for him and Steve. He ran down towards the lake as the sound faded away again. As he got to the shore he could see the plane turning to make another pass.

He jumped up and down and waved his arms. The pilot of the plane wiggled the wings and then circled around again. As it flew near something small dropped from the windows of the plane. It fell to the lake about 50 feet from shore and floated there. Chris swam out, grabbed it and swam back. It was an inflated pouch with something hard inside. He tore it open and found a note and a walkie talkie looking radio. The note explained how to turn it on and how to adjust

the volume and what button to press to talk.

Turning it on he pressed the indicated button and said, "Hello?"

"Hello. Are you Steve or Chris?"

"I'm Chris. Steve is dead. He died when we crashed while trying to land."

"Repeating, you are saying only one survivor?"

"Yes."

"OK. I'm calling in your location. Rescue groups should be there tomorrow. How are you on food?"

"I'm fine."

"Roger. Be by the lake tomorrow as I'm directing the rescuers to here."

"Will do. Thank you."

"Over and out."

Chris spent the rest of the day just fishing, eating cattails and checking his snare one last time. It was empty so he took it down.

The following morning he had his cattail soup breakfast and packed away all the equipment into the backpack. He headed down to the lake and waited around until nearly mid afternoon before he heard voices.

"Chris!"

"Over here."

The group of 4 finally reached him.

"Chris, how are you doing? We have food, water and Jim here is a medic. Are you injured?"

"No, I'm fine. I had a cut, burn and a sprain but I was able to treat them."

“You look good, what have you been eating?”

“After the cliff bars and water ran out on day two I've been foraging cattails, dandelions, fish and catching a few rabbits.”

“Have you had survival training?”

“Nope. I just survived by the book.”

“By the book?”

“Yep,” he said as he held up the SAS book.

“But you've been out here over two weeks. That book was all you needed to survive?”

“Well, I knew you'd eventually be coming so I just needed to keep alive for a few weeks. It told me what I needed to know and how to do it.”

“Hmm....”

One of the other rescuers spoke up, “You told the search plane that you had crashed and Steve had died?”

With a frown Chris replied, “Sadly yes. Coming in we got hit by wind and he tried to abort but couldn't clear the trees. We hit right up there.” He pointed to a few trees with obvious damage and broken branches. When I came to he was impaled by a branch that had come in through the windshield. I tried to get out and climb down but I had no sooner gotten out when the plane dropped and slid into the lake. It drifted out and eventually sank. I swam out but was only able to grab this one bag before it sunk.”

“How far out?”

“Maybe 50 yards when it did finally go down.”

One of the guys started stripping and pulled a wet suit out of duffle bag and put it on. He had a small O2 tank and face mask. He jumped in and swam out about 50 yards, adjusted his face mask and went down. Only 5 minutes later he surfaced and swam back. After climbing

out and removing his mask he reported, "Yep, it's down there. We'll need a heavy lift helo to get it up and out of there."

"OK, let's mark the site for the recovery team and head back. Chris, are you up to a long walk?"

"Sure. No problem. My ankle is just about back to normal."

The rescue group left a couple of survey markers by the shore and after consulting their GPS headed off into the woods with Chris following along. He had to smile as the squirrel scolded them all as they left.

Shortly before dark they arrived at Finley Creek road. It was not much more than an hour walk out from the lake to the North east. They came out of the woods not 50 feet from 2 well equipped crew cab 4 wheel drive pickups. Everyone stowed their gear and got in. The drive back to Missoula was about 50 miles but with the dirt roads and the dark they took their time and it was nearly 2 hours later when they arrived at the local hospital.

"Why are we here? I said I was OK?"

"Sorry, standard procedure. Any rescue victim out at least 24 hours or more has to be cleared by the doc."

One of the guys went in with Chris. As they approached the waiting room he said, "I'll let them know you're here. They should be calling you in just a few minutes. The exam probably won't take more than an hour... unlike my paperwork," he said with a chuckle.

"You know, I didn't really thank you guys... Thanks for finding me."

"Hey, no problem. This was an accident, not someone just being careless... besides you did a great job taking care of yourself."

"Can I buy you all dinner tomorrow? Or at least a beer?"

"Chris, that's not necessary."

"I'm sure it isn't but I want to."

"OK, I'll talk to the other guys. How can we cat a hold of you?"

“Um, well my cell is dead... water damage. How about I call you tomorrow when I get a new one?”

“OK, here's a card with my number.”

“Thanks. I'll call in the morning.”

The rescuer went up to the window while Chris turned to go into the waiting room.

“CHRIS!” a female voice yelled out as body came flying towards him.

Chris found himself holding Mandy with her arms wrapped rightly around him.

“Mandy, what are you doing here?”

“When you didn't return I called the place you made your reservation at. They said they had noted the absence of their guide too and were sending one of their pilots out to the lake to look for you. They called me late yesterday saying there had been an accident and a rescue crew was being sent out today for you. I caught the first flight I could out here.”

Chris didn't realize she had cared that much for him. He just stood there with a far away look on his face thinking about his previous thoughts out by the fire the other night.

Mandy finally realized he wasn't really paying attention and backed up a few steps. “Chris, are you OK?”

Her statement brought him back to the here and now. He looked her deep in the eyes.

“What?” She was a bit confused at his look.

Chris took her hand. “Mandy, I've been through a lot but I think it was meant to happen as it forced me to evaluate my life, our relationship and rethink everything. We've had a very casual relationship and you deserve so much better.”

“Chris?” Mandy was getting a worried look on her face like Chris was

going to break up or something, not that they were even going out but she at least thought they were good friends.

He got down on one knee and said, "I want you to know that I am going to make a lot of changes in my life. I'm not going to become some mountain man but I plan on getting out of the rat race, our artificial society, as soon as possible. I'm thinking of moving out to the country somewhere. Maybe even here. I have not respected you as I should have. That changes now. If this sounds like a life you'd like to lead and I'm someone you'd like to spend it with then, Mandy, I can't give you a ring at this moment but I want to ask if you'll marry me?"

Tears welled up in her eyes as she too dropped to her knees. She held him tight and whispered into his ear, "Yes."

"Well?"

The two of them turned to see an audience of nurses watching expectantly. They must have overheard the conversation.

"Yes!" she yelled.

They all started clapping.

One of them said, "Chris, the doctor is ready for you but take your time. I'm sure he'll understand."

They both stood up and Chris, still holding Mandy's hand, turned to follow the nurse taking Mandy along with him. "I'm not letting her go," he said with a grin.

"I think the doctor can accommodate that," she said returning the grin.

He checked out OK and they went to a local hotel. Chris tried to book 2 rooms but Mandy insisted on one. He finally relented by making sure it had two beds. In the room she asked why two beds? Chris told her no more fooling around until they were married. He said he was serious when he said she deserved better and he was not going to slip back into his old ways.

It felt good to take a nice shower and shave off his two and a half

weeks of beard before he went to his own bed.

The next morning over breakfast he told her all about the changes he had planned to make how he was paying for all of these services and entertainment but wasn't happy. She mentioned that as a kid she had grown up in the country and it wasn't until she came to the city for school that she really got exposed to the decadent way of life but she too wouldn't mind getting back to her roots. Chris had never known this about her. He had never asked.

Their first stop was the cell phone store. He found out his contract was eligible for renewal and included a free phone. Instead he canceled his contract and bought a simple phone on a pay as you go plan. He used it to call the rescue guy, Mark, the name on the card said. He talked for a few minutes and arranged a nice dinner for them, and him and Mandy.

His next stop was the outfitters office. As soon as he walked in they immediately apologized for his experience and handed him a check for a full refund, nearly ten thousand dollars. He told them it wasn't their fault but appreciated the refund. He asked about Steve and his family and they told him about his wife and young son and gave him their address.

They went to the bank and cashed the check. Shortly after leaving the bank Chris had Mandy pull the rental car over quite quickly.

“What's wrong?”

“Nothing. Just turn it off and come with me.”

She gave him a questioning look but did as he asked. He took her hand and led her back the way they had come about 30 yards and then took a quick turn and dragged her into a jewelry store.

“Let's get you an engagement ring,” he said with a smile. “Pick out anything you want.”

She smiled and went to look. In the back of her mind she knew he had almost ten thousand in cash in his pocket. He just waited patiently as she went from display to display. Finally she settled on one and had the clerk take it out. It fit perfectly and did not need resizing.

“I found one I like. It costs...”

He interrupted before she could continue. “It doesn't matter. If it's the one you want it's the one I'll get for you.”

“Ok.”

Chris went with the clerk to pay for it and was shocked when the price was only \$650. He finally saw she had picked a very basic gold ring with a small simple diamond in a basic setting.

“Are you sure this is what you want?”

“Yes. I told you I don't have fancy tastes and want to get back to a simpler way. I know you can obviously afford a lot more but it's stupid to spend just for the sake of spending. Don't you agree?”

“Two weeks ago I would have disagreed. Now what you say makes perfect sense.”

He paid for it and she wore it out.

Their next stop was to see Steve's wife. They both held her while she cried. Finally Chris handed her Steve's pack and told her how it and the book in it had saved his life and for that he would be eternally grateful to Steve. Just before taking their leave he handed her the balance of the money he had been refunded and said it was the least he could for them.

At dinner he thanked the rescuers once again and as the conversation drifted he mentioned wanting to drop out of the city and get back to a more rural way of life. The guys told him that if he had some more formal training he'd be able to join one of the rescue groups or just with what he had already learned he was already as qualified as some of the guides in the area. It gave him something to think about.

The next day they both flew home.

A few weeks later they got married and moved in together. They continued at their jobs for another year but with only one household and with the elimination of most frivolous expenses they quickly

saved up a substantial nest egg. The only shopping spree Chris went on was to a local sporting good store where he bought a couple of survival books and constructed two survival packs, one for him and one for Mandy.

Almost a year to the day of the start of his experience they both went into work and resigned. In the mean time he had taken CPR and first aid classes, a vacation together camping in the woods and they both learned more about edible plants and ended up on survival and something called 'prepper' forums where they continued to learn more and more about self sufficiency.

After resigning they moved to a rural Montana setting a short way outside of Missoula. They picked up odd jobs in the area and were never more happier living simply and within their means.



Culex Pipiens (pen name) is an amateur fiction writer focusing on PAW (Post Apocalyptic World) themed stories. Culex's work can be found on www.culexpipiens.com where many of the stories are available as free downloads. A number of Culex's stories are also available in the Kindle format on Amazon.com (search Kindle books for 'Culex Pipiens'). In addition, select stories are only available in Kindle format. If you like the stories and want to support Culex's work, consider buying one or more in the Kindle format which is readable on Kindle devices along with the free Kindle app for PC, Mac and many different tablets.

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