

Ryan and the Beaver

That's pretty funny, isn't it? I like funny things.

The single funniest thing that I've ever seen in my entire life had to be my little brother taking a shit on a Beaver Dam.

See, we grew up on a farm in Iowa, nothing but corn and bean fields for miles. This was before cable television, so there was exactly fuck all to do, especially in the summer. All we could really do was get into trouble. Fuck around in the barn, break something, get our ass beat. This was when spanking was in, and let me tell you something, Dad made good use of corporal punishment.

Summer I was eleven and my brother Ryan nine, our family was going through some tight times, money wise. Dad was working during the day at construction to make extra money, then doing chores and stuff at night. Mom had taken a part time job as a checker at the grocery store ten miles away. So me and Ryan were alone most of the day. We had chores to do, course, but we always managed to do them in the last ten minutes right before the folks got home.

So what we did do was play games, starting usually with army man, then as the corn got higher we moved on to cowboy and Indian, planet of the apes, all kinds of shit. Our farm covered a few acres, and as long as we didn't leave our land, we avoided a licking. Sometimes Joe Berger, kid lived next farm over, he'd ride his bike over and join us, but he usually had his shitty kid brother with him, Darin, who was six and a whiney little fucking brat. God, I hated that kid. Tell his folks fucking everything you did, and let's face it, a kid has got to have his secret adventures, you know what I'm saying?

This was this creek that twisted through our property, just a little one, few feet wide with no decent fish in it or nothing, and if you followed it about a mile into one of our fields you came to this little island of trees and brush, almost like an oasis, and it was right there that some beaver built a very large dam and pooled the water up some. That was the Beaver Dam. The Old Man was always gonna clear it out, but he never got around to it.

Now Ryan was obsessed with the beaver dam that summer, part of it was the name, beaver dam, beaver DAM. He got a kick out of just saying it, he'd say, let's go to the beaver DAM, you wanna go to the DAM? Tickled the hell out of him, it was like he was cussing but couldn't get in trouble for it.

Course, we were expressly forbidden to go near the Beaver Dam, water was too deep, too dangerous, all the usual dumb excuses adults throw at you which never work and so of course we went out there whenever we could. It was fun, there were lots of trees and brush right around there, one big low hanging branch that crossed the creek right over the Dam, if you were real brave, you could hang on the branches and swing over the water like Tarzan of the Apes.

We never saw any beaver there of course. There weren't much beaver in Iowa back then, almost all trapped out. Still, Rye would drag me there every chance he got, we'd stay on the side of the creek, reading comic books or something, and every once in awhile Ryan would go "Shh, did you hear that, was that a beaver?" and we would stop and listen and never hear anything except the wind going through the corn. Ryan would set traps for it, you know, big box held up with a stick on a string, that kind of thing. I told him, I said, Beaver can chew through an entire tree, that old cardboard box won't stop him.

"I don't wanna keep him," he said, "I just wanna see him."

I just shook my head and went back to what I was doing, he was crazy, he'd put out little pieces of wood on a plate, 'cause that's what he thought they ate, prime wood, he'd call it, come and get the prime cuts of wood, Mr. Beaver. Beaver never showed, not once.

Come August, times in the family went from tight to terrible to about as bad as it can get. Ma and Pop were fighting a lot, and were quick to give us a smack if we even looked like we were thinking about trouble. One night, after we went to bed, we lay there listening to our folk's fighting like all get out. It got pretty rough that night, the yelling. We could hear it. All of it. Ryan gets up out of bed, goes to the window and starts to climb out.

Where are you going, I ask him.

"For the damn beaver," he says.

You mean the beaver dam, I says.

He stuck his tongue out at me and hops out the window.

I jump out the window after him and we spent a large part of the night out there, watching the stars, listening to crickets and searching for that damn beaver. Caught a licking for it the next day, but it was worth it.

We ended up losing the farm to the bank. Lost everything, house, land, tractors, tools, furniture. Toys. It all got auctioned off. We were all gonna have to move, leave the only place Ryan and I had ever lived, go up to Wisconsin and stay with some relatives after everything got sold. Dad couldn't look nobody in the eye at the auction, he just sat in the shade with Uncle Terry and drank Bud out of the can, not talking. Ma was inside crying with her sister Betty. Piece by piece, everything we owned was sold off in a single afternoon.

I'd been following the auctioneer around, because that was a pretty interesting job I thought, get paid to talk real fast, but I lost interest after he sold my bike. Joe Berger's dad bought my bike, bought it for Joe's little snot-nose shit brother Darin. Only paid five dollars for it, too. I had to leave after that.

I knew where Ryan was, folks had told me to keep my eye on him but he was where he always was, where he wasn't supposed to be. Standing on the bank staring out at the dam.

I come up next to him, I could tell he'd been crying. We stood there quiet for a minute.

"Shit on this beaver!" he said. I knew he was real upset to say that, he never said the word shit 'cause Ma made he chew on soap if she caught him.

"Shit on this damn beaver!"

And so my little brother runs up the tree and goes out on the big branch that hung over the damn, takes his shorts down and sits, bare-assed, right over that Beaver Dam.

"Stupid Beaver, I just wanted a look! Shit on him!"

And damned if my little fucking brother didn't actually drop one, he dropped a grade A corn-fed turd right on the exact center of that Beaver Dam. PLOP! And then he started giggling, giggling like you wouldn't believe, his giggling causing the branch he was sitting on to bounce with his giggles.

"Shit on you Beaver, shit on you!" he yelled and we were both laughing now, my stomach hurt, I was laughing so hard, his little white butt was on that branch, going up and down, up and down, spitting out little tear-dropped turds and we were screaming with laughter.

Joe Berger and snot-nose Darin came wandering over, wondering what we were doing, saw my little brother's butt bouncing up and down on that branch and fell to the ground laughing. Joe was laughing so hard he couldn't breathe, he was squeaking, actually squeaking.

Suddenly there's this big crack and the branch Ryan is sitting on sags halfway down to the dam. Ryan looks at me, bug-eyed and scared, and starts pulling his shorts up.

Don't move! I yell at him, but he doesn't listen and next thing you know, branch breaks and down he goes right on top of the beaver dam, rolls forward and plops right down into the water. The whole time he's falling he's still trying to pull his shorts up. I can see him down underwater, flapping his arms, trying to come up for air. I jump down into the water, trying to get to him. I'm getting scared now, I can't figure out why Ryan won't come up for air, he knows how to swim. I finally get over to where he is and dive down to him. I grab him and pull, but I can't get him to move, he's stuck or something, I think his foot is stuck. I go down deeper and try to find his foot, the water's murky but I can just make it out, his tennis shoe is caught on some branches. I run out of breath and go up for more air. Ryan ain't moving as much as before and I'm beyond scared now, I'm at that type of scared where everything is cold and tight, you know? I can hear Dad yelling and I take another breath and go down to his shoe. I pull and pull, trying to get it off or untie it, but Rye always double-tied his shoes. I try to break the branch, something, Rye ain't hardly moving now and I am ter-ii-fucking-fied. I'm seeing spots now, can't breathe and I start back up. I ain't gonna leave without him, so I grab him under the armpits and pull like I've never pulled before and a funny thing happened. Rye looks up at me, in

the water he turns his head up to me and he smiles. Smiles at me. Next thing you know he's free and up we pop to the top of the water like corks. Dad's in the water by now, screaming and splashing toward us. Grabs up by the back of our necks and hauls us to the bank, where Uncle Terry and Joe Berger and little shit Darin are waiting. I'd never seen Dad like that, he was almost crying. Ryan was still smiling, the little fucker, and he was awake, he was actually awake. He looks at me and says,

"I seen 'em Taylor, I finally seen 'em."

Pop threw us down on the bank, started checking Ryan out, making sure he wasn't bleeding or broke or something, whole time promising us we were in for the beating of our lives and what the hell were we thinking?

"Just wanted to see the Beaver, I saw the Beaver," Ryan said.

What the . . . WHAT the hell for?! Pop was yelling, now that he knew we were okay he was feeling free to be seriously pissed off.

"Because. Because Uncle Terry said getting to see a Beaver was a real good thing," Ryan said.

Pop stared at him for a second, all the blood going to his face, than he looked at Uncle Terry and back again at us. Then he started to shake and smirk, and damned if he didn't start laughing, something he hadn't done in good while, laughed long and hard from the belly, Uncle Terry joined in and all us kids, though at the time we didn't really get the joke. We laughed because we were glad to be alive.

Funny thing was, seeing that Beaver did turn out to be a good thing. After we moved Dad got a great job, everything got better, we bought another house and things were never as tight and fierce as they were that summer. We didn't know it then, but that day was the beginning of the best time in our family. Thanks to Ryan and the Beaver.

Another funny thing, after we went back to get cleaned up I got a look at Rye's tennis shoe, the one that'd been stuck. Sure enough, he'd double tied them and he liked them big thick laces as well, so I would have never gotten them untied. Lucky for us, I didn't have to. They'd been cut clean in two, right under the bow, like someone taken a

knife and slit right through them. A knife or a powerful set of incisors.

Seeing the Beaver turned out to be a damned good thing.