



Camping with Charlie

By Juliana Carter



The sun had almost disappeared from the sky on a warm July night. Charlie surveyed his supplies. Comic books, checker board, and s'mores that his mom had made earlier and wrapped in wax paper. One bag of chocolate-covered peanuts. One thermos of milk (his favorite). Oh, and his flashlight. Mom grabbed her magazine and the fluorescent lantern. "Ready, Charlie?"

They made their way across the backyard with their supplies, while Ruby, their sheepdog, ran in and out of their legs, nearly causing them to drop their bundles. "Ruby!" Charlie reprimanded her, to which she replied with a big wag. Ruby was a friendly, silly dog, and almost never got her feelings hurt.

Once Charlie and his mom deposited their gear into their tent, they sat back on two chaise lounges, sitting side by side in front of the tent. Charlie leaned back and looked up at the sky. It was a beautiful night and he and his mom looked for the constellations. They saw the Big Dipper and Little Dipper. They saw Orion's Belt. Charlie wished they lived in the country so he could see even more stars. He was planning one day to be an astronaut and travel to Mars and maybe beyond.

"Let's go into our tent," said Charlie. Earlier that day, Charlie's dad had set up their pop-up tent in the back corner of the yard. It wasn't very large, but it was just big enough for the three of them if they squeezed in tight together.

Mom hung the lantern from the hook in the middle of the tent and Charlie set about finding a place for his supplies. The tent had little pouches on the side into which Charlie promptly put his snacks and thermos. His comic books he placed in a stack next to his pillow. After he was all set up, Charlie and his mom played checkers. Charlie played checkers with his dad a lot. Dad taught Charlie how to win, so Charlie beat his mom three games in a row.

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"I give up, Charlie! You're too good for me." Charlie laughed with delight, feeling proud of himself.

The two made themselves comfortable in their sleeping bags. All of a sudden, in burst Ruby, all wags and slobber. The tent was definitely too small for an 80-pound dog with a big, bushy tail. The tent was in complete disarray, with Ruby excitedly wagging her tail and stepping all over them.

"Ruby, you can stay if you lie down," Mom said firmly. Ruby, for being such a large dog, had the unique ability to be able to make herself very small when she needed to and curled up just at the edge of the tent so that she covered the tips of Charlie's toes. Then, hearing something in the yard, she was off again looking for her next adventure.

Mom sighed and picked up her magazine. Charlie lay back, but couldn't quite get comfortable.

"Mom, I need to use the bathroom."

"Do you need me to go with you?"

"Of course not," Charlie said confidently. Picking up his flashlight, Charlie made his way through the backyard. The tall grasses in the back corner made him feel like he was in the jungle. He imagined that he was a great explorer searching for long-lost treasure. What was that? He heard a rustling in the far corner. He wondered if what he'd longed for for so long had finally happened. A visit from a space alien! Maybe one had landed in his yard and had come to look for signs of intelligent life on earth! Charlie braced himself and quickly thought of just what to say to the benevolent being. Out jumped Ruby. She had been chasing after a very nimble lizard and was happy to see Charlie out in the yard.

"Ruby!" Charlie exclaimed exasperatedly. She gave Charlie a big lick on the hand and Charlie laughed at his silly dog.

Charlie made his way to the house and poked his head in the back door. He spied his father working away at his computer. Tiptoeing quietly, he tried sneaking up behind him to surprise him.

"Charlie, what are you doing in here?"

"Rats," thought Charlie. Dad always knew when Charlie was trying to sneak up on him.

"That's because I have eyes in the back of my head," Dad would say. Charlie imagined having eyes in the back of his head. How great would that be! But would you have to put sunglasses on them to keep the sun out?

After Charlie finished with his bathroom business, he made his way back to the tent.

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"I just about came looking for you," said Mom.

Charlie's mom turned out the lantern and Charlie tried to get comfortable in his sleeping bag. A little rock kept poking him in the small of his back. He turned from one side to the other. The ground was really hard. How did explorers sleep on the hard ice of the frozen tundra?

"Mom, I think I'm ready to go back in the house."

"Congratulations, Charlie. We've been out 45 minutes longer than last time!"

The pair made their way through the tall grasses, past the happy yard gnomes, and past Ruby chasing bugs in the moonlight.

Charlie was very sleepy now.

Mom and Dad tucked him into his bed and kissed him goodnight.

Another successful camping trip.

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