Connor Suess

Mr. Palshaw

English IV

1-24-17

Squeezy Cheeze and Spam Singles

The rectangular packet boasted four bright, bold yellow letters: S-P-A-M. Its glossy exterior reflected the blinding rays of the midday sun. My eyes digested the tantalizing image of a mouth-watering sandwich, complete with fresh tomatoes, lettuce, and cheese. The acute sides of the plastic package scraped my dry, cracked hands as I flipped it over. The Nutrition Facts were even more encouraging; in this one little packet, I could imbibe a whopping 830 milligrams of sodium--37% of my daily recommended sodium intake. What a delightful way to replace the salt that was leaking from my pores! *How can that scrumptious sandwich fit in this little packet?* I had to see for myself. After an aggressive mutilation of the “Easy-Tear Tab,” the chest was opened and treasure awaited. I squeezed the flanks of the packet. Something was terribly wrong. No sandwich. Confused, I turned it upside down to see if I missed directions somewhere. While I searched, a pink lump of unidentified origin migrated towards freedom. As it reached the lip of the packet’s opening, it saluted with a viscous shower of drippings into my lap. With disappointment, I shook the mystery meat into my lime-green silicone bowl.

“You gonna eat that, or what?” Lurch smirked from under his saggy bucket hat that still stank from our last backpacking trip.

I looked longingly at the picture of the fantasy-sandwich and then back at the reality-mound of gelatinous pink chunks--the true face of my Spam Single. “If I eat any more, you’ll be seeing it again, back on the trail.”

“Connor, Connor. It gets even better when you dress it up! Here, try it with some of this stuff.” A disproportionately skinny arm grabbed a tube of bright yellow...something. Then Lurch professionally buried my bowlful of Spam and cracker bits in an avalanche of yellow goo.

“*What the heck dude?”* I gagged as a sporkful of the yellow goo-spam-cracker conglomeration was soundly rejected by my pharynx.

“Chill out, it’s just like nacho cheese. In a bag,” Lurch said as he nonchalantly licked his tin plate clean.

*Well, I guess it’s protein bars and High-C for lunch today,* I thought as I surrendered after bite three and scraped the remaining toxic waste into the sump pit. As I picked my way down from the lunch area to a stream, a break in the ranks of ponderosa pines caught my eye. Across a narrow gulch, rock formations loomed like cake layers as orange and brown sandstone intertwined with veins of granite. The Sangre de Cristo Mountains, a subrange of the Rockies, filled the horizon. Scraggly manzanita brush clung to the reddish soil on the banks of the stream. A lonely aspen creaked and moaned in the warm breeze. After I finished rinsing my bowl in the bronze waters, I trudged back up to the lunch scene.

“Steve, pick your junk up already!” Lurch growled at one of the odd, twin Uncapher brothers. “You’re holding us up, slowpoke.”

“But...this stove isn’t even mine. And I’m not Steve, I’m *Dan*,” whined the shaggy haired, long-legged boy.

“Whatever. Ok then, Steve! Pick up your stupid stove! And whose bag of trash is this?”

“I’m already carrying three dinners,” Steve’s acne-embellished mouth complained. “I don’t have any more room. And I’m the slowest hiker.”

He wasn’t kidding. Steve (or Dan) putted along slightly faster than the wheel-less mining cart rusting near our patch of shade.

I walked in as this scene rippled throughout the entire trek crew. While Lurch, Steve, and Dan (the identical twins earned the nicknames “Funky One and Funky Two”) engaged in a verbal slugging match, I rolled my eyes and started haphazardly stuffing dirty socks, Slim Jims, and tent poles into my dirt-red backpack.

“Whose is this?”

“Not my trash.”

“Ewww...somebody’s Squeezy Cheeze wrapper! Really guys?”

“I already have too much weight!”

“Hope this isn’t dirty TP….”

“*Fine. I’ll take it, just shut up already.”*

Tempers still seething, our group departed. Antiqued wooden chutes and shambles--all that remained of the Cimarron Gold Mine--bid farewell as the trail marched toward a looming ridge.

A lull in the action gave Steve (or was it Dan?) an opportunity for revenge after being coerced into carrying a particularly nasty bag of trash. He treated us to his own rendition of *Shrek is Love, Shrek is Life*: “I had all the merchandise and movies. I prayed to Shrek every night--”

“For the love of all that is good in this world, *stop it.”* Lurch’s knuckles whitened around his trekking poles as he bit down on his lip.

The Funkies exchanged a mischievous glance, then proceeded to recite the mantra beginning to end. “...Shrek whispered, ‘this is my swamp now’ and flew out the window.”

In all likelihood, the factor that prevented utter civil war from breaking out on the Philmont trail was the mountain itself. Dust billowed up behind each footfall as the switchback trail zig-zagged up the ridge. Hot, dry air was suffocating enough to silence even the Funkies, although an occasional mutter about Canadians or League of Legends permeated through the distorted air.

“I think I’m getting another blister. Can we pleeease take a little break?”

One guess who whined that request for the 99th time.

“Fine, we’re almost at the top anyways.”

 A single dark, nebulous shape in the distance adorned the baby blue sky as we stopped on the ridgeline. The cloud was speedily joined by others, until a conglomerate of cumulus assembled into towering pillars. The clouds’ battle line stretched across the sky, eclipsing the sun. Grey darkness cast by the brooding cumulonimbus threatened trouble. Atmospheric ambush.

“Ohhhhh Nellie...those clouds look like they’re from that one movie where the guys got turned into charcoal.”

“Thanks a lot, Lurch.” Dan’s whining increased as the wind’s fury grew.

“Hurry up Steve! We gotta get off this ridge!”

Steve (or was it Dan?) fumbled as he jerked sweaty socks over his ripe, blistered feet. I wasn’t feeling great myself. The combination of exhaustion, heat, and altitude was awakening a monster in my stomach: a hybrid of squeezy cheese and Spam was stirring in the deep.

“Saddle up everyone! We need to move!” Creaking branches drowned my voice.

Precious minutes evaporated as we scrambled along the ridge-crest trail for a half-mile. A distant rumble resonated throughout our tense bodies. We picked up the pace. After what seemed like hours, the path turned 90 degrees into a narrow fold of the mountainside. We were grateful to be back in tree cover, albeit sparse. Like a creeping barrage, the discharges of lightning and rumbles of thunder grew closer and closer together. When the time between flash and boom closed to within five seconds, I gave the order: “*Drop your packs! Spread out! Lightning position!*”

Chaos ensued. Boys scattered like ants from a ruptured anthill. Packs were abandoned on the trail. We scurried down to the bottom of a ravine where more protection was offered.

“Lightning position” involved a sort of tip-toe squat that can provide an extra degree of safety in conjunction with the trees, but it tires out legs like nobody’s business. Typically, mountain storms dissipate as quickly as they appear. However, this one was bent with fury (the final straw had probably been *Shrek*) and it wasn’t leaving anytime soon.

A fat drop splattered next to me. Within seconds, the sleeping ravine awoke with monster raindrops crackling and spattering--and pelting us mercilessly. Beetles and ants lounging in the soil scuttled for shelter as the bombardment intensified. Between the flashes of lightning, I could see the Funkies huddled miserably under a shrub.

“Spread out guys! You’re too close to each other!” My concern was met with a glare from beneath Dan’s (or Steve’s) soggy mane. I wiped my dripping brow and noticed a trickle of water slinking towards my feet. Muddy streams snaked down into the depression where I squatted, until a creek began to form. Preoccupied with outmaneuvering the rapidly growing flood, I startled was by a violent flash and simultaneous thunder clap. It seemed to be directly on top of me. My head spun and my stomach churned. A loud crack and crash emanated from the nearby trail as a forest giant, slain by the lighting, toppled to the ground. The scent of charred wood filled the air.

So I squatted: quads burning, soaked to the bone, a flash flood now spilling into my boots, and a nacho-Spam mixture attempting to violently claw its way out of my body, while Funkies One and Two whimpered a hybrid prayer to the Almighty and to Shrek.

 Forty-five minutes later, the relentless deluge tired, and marched on to its next target.

 “Steve, Dan, let’s get out of here.” I retracted one boot after the other from the muddy rivulet and waddled over on cramped legs. The twins shivered and clung to each other. We slogged our way up to the trail. Lurch, looking awfully like Shrek himself, crawled out from a thicket and met us as we took stock of the situation.

 “Well, it seems our former trail decided to become a river.” He gestured to the packs which now formed rapids in the briskly flowing stream.

 Everything was wet: clothes, tents, sleeping bags, food.

 “Hey, at least the Spam and Squeezy Cheeze is dry!” Lurch rejoiced.

I moaned a little as the all-too familiar mixture made a final bid for freedom out of my esophagus. My body surrendered. I keeled over and christened the stream with Squeezy Cheese and Spam.

A brief break in the clouds afforded a view off the ridge. In the distance, a granite monolith protruded from the range running along its flanks.

“Let’s move guys, we have a long way to go. Pack up.”

“Whose trash is--”

“Not mine.”

“I’ll take it,” Steve/Dan said.

Bickering must have washed away with the deluge.

It would take a little more to wash away the Spam and Squeezy Cheeze.