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Story time: When I turned 16 my dad took me on a hunting trip. It was a kind of right-of-passage into adulthood and some father-and-son bonding. We travelled to Plumas National Forest (beautiful place) for mule deer.

We drove there. My dad seemed really into the trip. I hadn't seen him so happy but there was something off. Occasionally when discussing "my task" he would trail off and whisper. It was a little strange that he wouldn't say "the task" out loud: kill an animal.

And every time I asked if I couldn't complete "my task" he he would go quiet for a few seconds and say "it won't come to that." I wasn't really sure what that meant but I was 16 and figured I'd "man up" and make my dad proud anyway. But I was a little hurt. I don't perform

traditional masculinity very well and I was very sensitive to that as a teen. Those moments aside, the drive was a blast. Blasting The Clash in the car and talking about Civil War history (my dad is a CW buff) and enjoying the scenery.

It took half a day but we made it to a beautiful campsite in the forest. We set up our tents, made a fire, cooked dinner and settled in for the night. It was so beautiful and peaceful at night but I admit I was starting to dread the next day.

I wasn't so sure I could really do it anymore. I had shot plenty of guns but never at something living. My confidence on the drive was gone. I told my dad how I was feeling but he just said :don't worry about it. When the time comes, you'll step up. I know it."

My sleep was restless. I woke up feeling kinda sick. My stomach was tying itself into knots. I got up to use the nearest bathroom (aka tree■) and realized my dad was already up and gone. The car was still there so I figured he went out for his own bathroom routine.

It was pretty chilly so I started up the fire again for warmth and to boil water for breakfast oatmeal (that I couldn't eat anyway) and some instant coffee. My dad still wasn't back. I walked about 100 feet out of the camp and circled calling for him but got nothing.

I hunkered back down in my tent and waited. He finally came back about two hours later.

"Jeez dad, where were you?"

"I was scouting for a good place to do this. I finally found a good one about an hour's walk from here. Get your stuff and lets go."

I loaded up my backpack and got everything out of the car. When I went to grab my rifle, my dad stopped me.

"I'll carry that for now. You get it when you earn it."

With that he picked it up and started hiking.

I followed him. What choice did I have?

The situation was rather annoying. After all, I had shot that gun countless times. I knew how to handle it but something about hunting was making my dad act way differently. I guess he had a different philosophy about it. ■■■■

The hike was gorgeous tho. Everything about Plumas is pretty and it was the perfect weather. Sunny but not too warm. Gorgeous greenery and birds singing in the trees. It wasn't a rough hike either. Still my stomach was bleh the whole time. I couldn't shake the feeling.

"We're here" my dad said as we approached a clearing. "Go on a head of me. You'll see the spot."

"Weird," I thought, but pressed on ahead. Only a few steps into the clearing I saw something odd.

A small tree stump, not that odd, but on top of it was a single can of refried beans and a can opener.

I started to turned around, "Dad, whats th-" and he was aiming the gun...at me.

"Open it son. Open the can."

"Dad. I don't understand."

"You have to open it son. You must."

I felt like throwing up. "I...I just want to know what this is about" I said, or more choked out. Tears were in my eyes. Tears were in my father's eyes as well.

"You have to do it. I can't do it for you. Complete your task," he said.

My mind racing, my stomach on fire, I went to the stump. Of course I knew how to use a can opener. I was a Boy Scout after all. My hands were shaking so hard it took me a few tries to get the opener position right. But eventually I got it and opened the beans.

AS thee lid came off I heard my father sigh with relief. I couldn't even move. My legs were wood. I didn't notice my dad had walked up behind me but he had and he patted my shoulder.

"Lets go home."

We hiked back to the car. Packed up camp and drove home. We never said a word.

When we entered our home my mother was sitting on the couch and stood up to greet me.

"There are my two handsome men. How was the trip honey?"

"Mom," I said, "you have no idea what I've BEAN through."