Exit, pursued by a bear
by Hypatia_66

Summary

LJ Short Affair challenge 11 December 2017 (Nerve. Purple)
Thrushes can't compete with bears

Notes

The title comes from a stage direction in Act 3 of Shakespeare’s A winter’s tale

"There’s no choice. You’ll have to climb the tree.” Illya made a step with his knee and half threw Napoleon up to catch the nearest bough, so that he was then able to swing himself up and onto it. He sat waiting as Illya swarmed up the trunk to join him.

“OK, ready?”

“What, further?”

“Of course. They’ll see us here.”

“Are you sure there isn’t squirrel in your ancestry?”

“There’s obviously none in yours. Come on, even you can manage the next branch.”

Hidden among the leaves, and hardly breathing, they heard the search party stop below them. There
were three of them. “I think they’ve got away,” said one pessimist.

“Could be. Keep looking – we can’t go back yet.”

“Hey, look at this.”

The two agents glanced at each other, the same question in each other’s eyes – did we leave something?

“What is it?”

“Claw marks on this tree – are there bears in this area?”

“Hope not… Unless it’s our Russian bear.”

Illya looked alarmed. He hadn’t damaged the tree at all, the bark was smooth. If there were claw marks, it could only mean that it was a real bear – which didn’t bear thinking about.

“He couldn’t have made those marks. This is a bear’s claws. Black bear probably.”

Illya breathed again, and smiled at Napoleon. Not as bad as a grizzly, anyway. They heard the men move away, now looking more carefully at the ground for bear spoor.

The two fugitives waited before climbing down - a nerve-racking procedure. Illya steadied his partner as he made the final drop to the ground, and then examined the scratches on the tree trunk. They seemed quite new.

They started to make their way as quietly and as quickly as the tangled undergrowth permitted, towards the road and their concealed car. Their pursuers were less concerned about noise, so when they started shouting to each other, it was easy to know which direction to avoid. Illya tapped Napoleon’s shoulder to point the way, and, as he did so, he felt something touching his ankles. He turned and found that a small black bear had silently crept up behind him and was snuffling at his feet. He started back, bumping into Napoleon.

“Shoo!” he whispered, waving his hands in the bear’s face, “shoo!”

The bear reared up on baby legs, uttered a bleat of fright and scuttled away. The two men were amused but also aware of their danger.

“Mother bear must be nearby,” said Illya, looking around.

“Come on Goldilocks, let’s get out of here,” whispered Napoleon, “I think baby bear is heading for the Thrushes, but I don’t think they’ll give it porridge.”

“Its mother will no doubt follow,” said Illya, and added, “Nice for us, but they’ll probably shoot her.”

As they were considering their best move, the mother bear emerged from the trees behind them, and, ignoring them, leapt over the tangled undergrowth and headed in the direction her cub had taken.

“Phew,” said Napoleon, master of the understatement.

“She’s going the way we need to go. We could follow her.”

Napoleon looked at his partner. “Are you kidding? What if she turns back?”
“She won’t – she’s searching for the cub. We might be able to stop those men from killing them.”

“Illya, have you had a touch of the sun? They want to kill us.”

Instead of answering, Illya jerked his head, and set off, following the trail of torn leaves and broken branches. Napoleon followed, all his senses on the alert, prepared for any eventuality. It was impossible to move quietly, but as there was suddenly a commotion ahead of them, it hardly mattered. Illya started to run – or rather, leap, over and through the bushes and undergrowth. Napoleon pursued him more circumspectly, keeping a look out and acting as bodyguard.

Seeing his partner stop and aim his gun, he caught up in time to see one of the Thrush men bring his rifle to his shoulder and aim it at the roaring mother bear, who had somehow got in front of them and had found her frightened cub.

Illya shouted, “Don’t shoot, or I’ll fire!”

“She’ll kill us,” they shouted back.

“If you shoot, I’ll kill you.”

Offered the alternative between an angry bear and a determined sharpshooter, the men fled towards the lesser danger with their hands up.

“Oh, no,” murmured Napoleon, “she’s coming too!”

One of the men turned and confronted the pursuing bear, once more raising his gun. Illya fired, hitting the rifle. This alarmed the bear as well as the men; she stopped and turned back towards her cub who was squealing for her. As Illya and Napoleon advanced on the men, the two bears made for a tree and climbing it at speed disappeared from view. Napoleon disarmed the men, and forced them to walk ahead as they made their way to the road. Illya radioed for assistance to get the men into custody.

***********************

“So, the bears were unharmed?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You did well, both of you, Mr Kuryakin, Mr Solo, destroying that Thrush facility without damaging the flora and fauna of the forest.”

“I’m afraid we failed a little with the flora, though, sir,” said Illya, casting a sidelong glance at his partner. “Napoleon trampled a rather beautiful purple orchid while we were running away.”

“Tsk. Pity.” Nevertheless, Mr Waverly (not over-fond of orchids, unlike his wife) smiled benignly upon them.

As they left and walked along the corridor back to their office, Napoleon turned to Illya. “I don’t know why you had to bring that up,” he said. “Anyway, it was pink.”

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!