

Chapter 1

THERESA

Welcome to Camp Sapuki!

After two hours of nothing to look at but pine trees, even my dad cheers as he steers the rented SUV under the big hand-carved “Welcome to Camp Sapuki” sign. A very cute teenaged boy with a bandage on his forehead and eyes that match his powder-blue STAFF tee-shirt steps over. Smiling, he signals for Dad to roll down this window.

“Welcome! I sure hope you all enjoyed the drive.” White teeth gleaming, he passes Dad a map, then notices my best friend, Kerry, sitting in the front passenger seat. “You ready to have some fun?”

Suddenly in the spotlight, Kerry’s goofy grin makes me doubt if she could repeat what the boy had asked her. But then, Dad saves her by asking where to park. After some quick directions, we start moving again, and Kerry immediately turns back to look at me, eyes sparkly.

“Did you see the look he gave me? What a hottie!

We all laugh, and the boys don’t stop teasing Kerry until we rumble past a big yellow and red circus tent and down the gravel drive to the edge of the big grassy field where several other cars have parked.

“Finally,” says my little brother Joey. Reaching across me, he high-fives his best buddy,

Elbie.

“I can’t wait to swing on the trapeze,” says Elbie, his brown fingers already working the seatbelt button.

“I can’t wait to walk the tightrope,” says Joey, still eyeing the big tent through the back window. “Although that tent did look bigger in the photos.”

We pile out of the SUV into the brilliant sunlight, and I squint hard after our long drive through the deep and shady forest.

"I need my sunglasses," says Joey, not bothering to run his fingers through his dark tweaked-out hair. Yawning and stretching, he sees me putting on my own sunglasses and says,

"Are those mine, Theresa?"

"You packed yours," I say, feeling a little crabby.

And who wouldn't be? Having rock-paper-scissored my way into sitting on the bump between Joey and Elbie, I'd just spent the last two hours with one or both boys flopped up against me, their snores steaming my ears and probably frizzing my already curly hair.

Seeing Dad has already popped open the car's back hatch, Joey heads over to help unload the luggage. "Give us a hand," he tells Elbie who had bent to tie his sneakers. "I need to find my sunglasses before I go blind."

As the guys sort out the bags, I brace my back with my hands, arching it.

"Sore?" Kerry asks in her lilting British accent. Of course, *she* isn't. A full head taller than me and slightly taller than Dad's six-feet, one, she had guilted me into letting her take the front passenger seat.

"Yeah, I'm a little sore." I do a few squats, making her giggle. "Hey, I have to get the blood back into my butt somehow."

Tired but a bit more limber, I straighten and have just drawn in a big lungful of sweet forest air when Dad wheels up with our suitcases.

"Beautiful place, isn't it?" He turns a circle, taking in the view. "Exactly like when I was a kid."

Since I've never been, all I know is what I've seen on the website. But Dad's definitely right about the place being beautiful. Of course, we can't see the river from where we're standing, but the log cabins seem freshly stained, and the big grassy playing field we parked next to is clipped and gorgeous. In fact, the huge tree on the far side is even more lush and green than I remember from the pictures.

The only difference I can see is that instead of kids playing organized games, today half the people on the field are grownups. These happy family groups are either milling around with their fold-out maps or standing in the check-in line in front of a canopy-style shade tent. Beneath the tent, an older man and woman sit behind a folding table, talking with some people. A sign reading CAMPERS CHECK IN HERE is staked into the nearby ground.

Dad looks at his watch. "We should get in line."

"Are you going to be late?" I ask, knowing he would be driving straight back to the airport to head out on another one of his book tours.

"Well, that roadwork we ran into set us back thirty minutes. Let's just say I shouldn't hang around here too long."

"Don't worry about us," Joey tells him. "I memorized the map, and this time we'll be supervised by highly-skilled professionals."

Ooops. Since Joey's on the autism spectrum, he doesn't always know when his honest comments aren't appreciated. Wincing, I look to Kerry. From the look she's cutting him, she must guess what he's referring to.

"He's not blaming your gran," I whisper, remembering what happened the last time Dad went on one of his book tours. Knowing Joey and I would need a place to stay, Kerry had invited us to join her on a trip back to London where her grandma and aunt live. We'd barely been there a day when poor Mrs. Declan landed in the hospital with a ruptured appendix. But things worked out. Having lived in London most of her life, Kerry knew how to get around, and we even managed to help a pair of very famous ghosts.

"Okay," says Dad, waving us all in. "Everybody gather up your stuff and head over to the tent. I'll run ahead to get us a spot in line."

Joey and Elbie pull their suitcases along behind them. Kerry and I grab ours and follow a few feet behind the boys.

"Hey, check out that little white girl," says Elbie.

Joey looks around, then back at his friend. "There are quite a few little white girls on this

field. Can you please be more specific?”

“Between the tree and that cabin behind it.” Elbie points his chin. “See? She’s got real long hair, and she’s wearing some sort of weird scout uniform with a torn shirt pocket.”

“Which girl?” Kerry shades her mismatched eyes with her hand. “The one with ginger-colored hair?”

“No,” says Elbie. “Hers is really pale. Whitish even. Like her skin. Plus, she’s hecka pretty.”

“Standing under that big tree,” I say. “Can’t you see her? I think that outfit is some sort of camping uniform.”

“I see her,” says Joey. “But her clothes aren’t like what the kids were wearing in the website pictures. These are more like what those twins had on in that old movie you guys made me watch last month.”

“Right,” says Kerry. “*The Parent Trap*.” She nudges me with her elbow as she continues to look. “Those girls looked super smart in those uniforms, didn’t they? You know, with the matching shorts and neck thingies?”

“They’re called neckerchiefs,” says Joey. “But you can stop looking for her now, Kerry.” “Why? Has she run off? I don’t see her.” Seeing Elbie wink at Joey, her cheeks flush red, and her hand drops to her side. “It’s a ghost, isn’t it?”

I focus on the little girl’s sneakers and sigh. Sure enough, they don’t quite meet the ground. “Great. There’s like a million campgrounds in the country, and I pick the one that’s haunted.”

Being way out in the middle of nowhere, I’d hoped to focus on having a good time. Doing things like swimming, canoeing, taking a few cooking classes. Fun stuff with nothing to do with spirits.

“Oh, well,” says Kerry. “Welcome to Camp Sapuki—or should I say, Camp Spooky?”

Ugh. Hoping this ghost’s happy where she is, I focus on the grass in front of me and keep walking.

We reach the end of the line where Dad's busy sorting through the forms we've filled out. Having missed the whole ghost conversation, he's just happy because the line has started

moving.

"Things are looking good," he tells us. "in a few minutes, you'll be picking out bunkbeds, and I'll be on my way back to the airport. With any luck, I'll drop off the rental car and have plenty of time to grab a latte before my flight leaves."

"Brilliant!" Kerry gives me a wink. "I can't wait to see our cabin!"

Beneath the shade of the tree a few yards away, Elbie's pretty little ghost girl raises a pale white hand and waves.

Yeah, brilliant.

Kerry must see something on my face. Smiling, she follows my gaze to the tree. "She's

still there, isn't she?"

I let out a deep sigh. "Yeah, she's still there. Think the Murphys know about her?"

"Probably," says Elbie. "There's a picnic table under the tree."

"And...?" says Joey.

Elbie shrugs. "So, why didn't they use that for a sign-in table? Why bother with a tent?"

I look over at the perfectly good picnic table sitting empty in the shade. "That is kind of weird."

"Not if that oak tree makes one of them sneeze," suggests Joey.

I suppose that's possible. And it's also possible that the ghost is perfectly fine with spending eternity here in the forest.

But I doubt it.