

Dahlia stared out the car window and thought about Harry Houdini. She knew at least eight ways that Houdini had escaped from a straitjacket, including two escapes that he had performed underwater.

None of them did her any good. Her parents didn't have her in a straitjacket. In fact, although her father had easy access to straitjackets at the hospital where he worked, he refused to bring one home. Which was annoying, as it was impossible to learn to escape from a straitjacket without having one to practice with.

Three weeks, she thought again. Three weeks at this stupid camp. She'd probably be the only person there who liked math or magic tricks. Even the ride up was ugly, with the little highway taking them past a seemingly endless strip mall. Costco, Best Buy, McDonald's, Acme Fresh Market.

"Dahlia," her mother said. "Will you stop sighing like that? It's not the end of the world."

"Oh. I'm so sorry. Were my sighs bothering you?" Dahlia said. "Here's an idea — why don't you make me go to summer camp, so I won't be around to bother you so much with my *awful* sighs? Oh wait. I forgot. That's exactly what you're doing."

“No one’s making you do anything,” her father said. “You freely entered into a deal with us. To wit: You go to Camp Arava for three weeks now, and we let you go to your magic camp in August, where I presume you’ll get even better at such important life skills as drawing pigeons from hats and avoiding the sun.”

Dahlia shook her head. It was blackmail, plain and simple. They knew how badly she wanted to go to magic camp. “If you want to get rid of me for July, why couldn’t you just send me back to math camp?”

Her mother kept her gaze trained out the window. “Nobody wants to get rid of you. We just think it won’t hurt you to meet some Jewish kids.”

“Plus it’s a way for you and your brother to spend time together,” her father put in, glancing in the rearview mirror and turning right onto a smaller road. The strip malls receded behind them, giving way to fields of green, waist-high cornstalks.

“Who says I want to spend time with Tom?” It had been years since Dahlia would have been excited to spend three weeks with her brother — years of Tom teasing her every time she got 100 percent on a math test or tried to show him a new trick shuffle. Neither of her parents bothered responding. Dahlia dug a quarter out of her pocket and started rolling it over her knuckles. It was an important move in coin magic, and she still wasn’t very good at it.

After a few minutes, her father turned left onto a gravel road. Dahlia’s stomach tightened. They were almost there. Sure enough, a moment later they drove across the bridge spanning the little creek that skirted the camp.

She remembered throwing rocks off the bridge three years ago, the last time she had let her parents drag her up for visiting day. After that, she had flat-out refused to go anywhere near the camp. Until now.

She was thirteen years old now. Thirteen was too old to be afraid of . . . whatever it was that had happened. Which was nothing. There was no way lightning had really struck her. It had been a perfectly sunny day, and Tom had been, like, two feet away, close enough to make fun of her for whatever look he'd seen on her face. And Tom hadn't felt anything, so it couldn't have really been lightning. Still, thinking about it, especially now that she was back at the camp, was making her skin prickle.

Dahlia pushed the memory away and looked around. When she and her parents had come up for visiting day, they'd always left the car in the small lot next to the creek. Today, though, they drove past the parking lot and straight up the gravel road into the center of the camp.

Each cabin had a handful of cars parked in front of it, with parents and campers moving in and out, carrying trunks, duffel bags, audio speakers, and whatever else the kids had brought to camp. Her father maneuvered their minivan around the periphery of the central sports field, pulling up in front of a double cabin next to the bathrooms. He turned off the engine and said, "Here we are: Tzrif Grofeet. *Tzrif* means 'bunk.' You're going to learn a lot of Hebrew without even knowing it."

"And you say magic camp is useless," Dahlia said. She glanced at the cabin, automatically checking that it had a lightning rod.

Two girls about her age were talking in the grassy area beside

the cabin. They were both wearing tank tops and skinny jeans. The one with wavy brown hair said something, and the other one — taller with curly, sun-streaked hair — laughed.

Dahlia was wearing a faded T-shirt her grandfather had given her that said CUTIE π and old cutoff jean shorts. Her stomach turned again. Three weeks was a long time to spend living with other kids her own age. Seventh grade was bad enough, but at least she could go home in the afternoon and hang out with other magicians online. At home she didn't have anyone checking if she was wearing the right pajamas to bed or something. She bet she'd be the only one in her bunk who even wore glasses.

"I changed my mind," she said abruptly, hating the quiver in her voice. "I don't want to stay here. Forget our deal."

"Dahlia." Her mother had a bit of a quiver in her own voice. "You cannot spend the summer practicing magic tricks and playing *Guitar Hero*."

"The Wii is good exercise."

"Only compared to sleeping," her father said.

Her mother spoke before Dahlia could answer. "Honey, we really believe you'll have a good time."

"Well, I don't!"

"You know the deal," her mother said. "Just try it for one week. Tom has promised to get you to a phone next Sunday. If you want to come home then, fine."

"If you let me bring my cell, Tom wouldn't have to . . ." Dahlia let her voice trail off.

Something was *shimmering* in front of the cabin. It was like the heat shimmer you see on a very hot day at the beach, or when you're

looking past a hot stove. But it wasn't that hot out. And — she squinted, blinked, and squinted again — it wasn't just a shimmer. There was a person there. Two people. Little girls.

“Campers aren't allowed to bring cell phones,” her father said. “They detract from the sense of community they're trying to build here.”

“Uh-huh,” Dahlia said distractedly. She blinked again. Yeah. Definitely two little girls, though it was hard to make out the details through the shimmer. One looked to be about ten, and the other even younger. Probably dropping off their big sister at camp.

Dahlia opened the car door and stepped out. What was making that shimmer?

The older of the two girls seemed to notice Dahlia looking at them, and she grabbed the other girl's hand. She took a step away from Dahlia, toward the cabin, dragging the smaller girl with her. Then another step. Then another.

Straight through the cabin's wall.