

REVENGE

OF THE HAPPY CAMPERS



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SCHOLASTIC PRESS / NEW YORK

TO DAD,
FOR THE MEMORIES WE MADE AND
CHARACTER WE BUILT AT PAPPY
CAMP



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CHAPTER TWO

Space Race

Darby

That first morning at the campsite, I woke up with Dawn and Delaney shaking me and saying that we'd been infiltrated. It took me a moment to remember where I was and realize I wasn't dreaming.

"Get dressed!" Dawn said, pushing clothes at me. "We have to do surveillance!"

"There's a meeting. Only it's not our meeting. Our meeting is finished. I mean we didn't have a meeting," Delaney was babbling.

Over the years, I've learned to just do what they say. If it had been one sister, I might have asked a lot of questions. But when it's both, I figure I'll be safe just going along with them. At least, probably.

So even with my brain still half asleep and the trailer all cramped and crowded, I managed to put on my shorts and shirt and shoes — and none of them were inside out or

backward. Plus, we didn't wake up Aunt Jane, which was amazing.

I followed Dawn and Delaney out of the camper, and Dawn put her finger against her lips to signal that we had to be super silent. Then the three of us crept toward a clump of trees near the picnic table.

As we came closer, muffled voices grew louder. I heard a boy's voice saying, "You mean you already got into the provisions? Why?" followed by another's voice saying, "I couldn't help it. I was hungry."

We got to the grove of oaks and mesquites and carefully picked our way through it for several yards. When we got to the last part of the brambles, Dawn motioned that we should all stop walking and hunker down.

At first, I couldn't see anything. The sky was slowly filling with a pink light, but there were still lots of shadows. And my eyes were all blurry with sleep. Eventually, I could make out shapes and slight movement through the branches.

There were three boys — all different shapes, heights, and colors. The tallest one looked around thirteen. He was skinnier than the other boys and his black hair was curly. The medium-height boy seemed like he was our age. His dark hair was straight and he was a rounder shape than the tallest boy. I guessed the third boy, who was the shortest of all, to be around nine or ten. He had red hair — not gold-red like

ours, but red like my red-orange crayon. It glowed like fire in the sunrise.

The tallest boy was the one talking. “In approximately one and a quarter hours we will have breakfast. The food we brought is for scheduled meals only. If you get hungry between meals, you have to eat off the land.”

“Eat off the land?” repeated the boy with bright red hair. “How?”

“By looking for berries,” the tallest boy replied. “Or catching fish.”

“Fish is grody,” the red-headed boy said, making a face. “What if I hunted and roasted a rabbit?”

Delaney let out a huge gasping sound, lost her balance, and fell forward, snapping a few twigs on her way down. Dawn and I froze like worried statues.

“What was that?” asked the tallest boy.

“I think it came from over there,” said the medium-tall boy, pointing in our direction.

I groaned. We should have realized Delaney would be incapable of staying still and quiet.

“Think it’s a wild animal? Should I go get my bow and arrow?” asked the shortest boy.

Dawn and I exchanged scared looks. “Nope! Not wild animals,” she called out. She held her hands up in surrender and stepped forward through the brush into the clearing where the boys stood. “It’s just us.”