

## *A Camp Haunting*

By Amy Gibbens

A howling voice piercing through the night sky. A frigid, shimmering lake swirling restlessly beneath a calm sky. A soft glow, pallid and dismal, traveling through the woods surrounded by total blackness...These were all things I had heard about Camp Hideaway. Nestled snugly in a valley of the Shenandoah Mountains, Camp Hideaway was a secluded, picturesque campground that my two older brothers had both been to for numerous years.

That summer, I finally turned thirteen, old enough to go to camp. Being the youngest child and only girl, it seemed that I was last to do everything. Jake and Ben boasted of their adventures for years, and finally I was old enough to go. I loved a good haunting, even if it was something my brothers just made up to scare me. They probably just heard this stuff from some friends at camp. I wasn't sure about all the spooky stories they told me, but I couldn't wait to swim in the lake, roast marshmallows over an open fire, and hike through the beautiful Shenandoah Mountains as the leaves changed to vibrant reds and oranges. I was planning to attend the usual Thanksgiving camp session. It was about a week long, and my brothers had been multiple times. The night before leaving, I talked on the phone with my best friend Bethany for what seemed like an eternity, comparing packing lists to ensure that we were ready to go.

"Hey, don't forget your flashlight. There's no way we're leaving the cabin at night without one! We're also going to need some extra batteries," Bethany reminded me.

She was much more reluctant than me about this sort of thing. She also happened to be afraid of the dark, spiders, snakes, and any body of water that wasn't a swimming pool. It had taken some convincing, but finally Bethany agreed to join me on my exciting camp excursion.

The next morning, my mom picked up Bethany and drove us to camp. We said our farewells, eager to explore the campground. The first thing I saw was Lake Hideaway, resting peacefully in the shadow of the surrounding forest. The camp dog, Lucy, trotted up to us as we prepared to carry our bags to the cabin we were assigned. Jake told me about the little beagle, who lived at Camp Hideaway. Bethany and I made our way to Cabin 4, where we saw a list posted on the door. I saw my name at the top of the list, Elizabeth Burbank, followed by three other names: Bethany Connor, Alexandria Harper, and Maggie Sewell. The list also noted that our group counselor would be Kate Rogers. As we were about to put our bags in the cabin, two girls approached excitedly.

"Hey! I'm Maggie, and this is Alex. I guess we'll be rooming with you!" the friendly blonde exclaimed. Bethany and I introduced ourselves and observed Alex, an attractive cheerleader-type who wore a sinister face. I made an extra effort to smile at her, but it didn't do any good. Maggie pointed out that she and Alex were cousins. Apparently Alex wasn't thrilled about being at camp. The awkward mood was lifted when our excited counselor approached and introduced herself. She was seventeen years old and wore her brown wavy hair in a ponytail. She showed us into our log cabin, which had two sets of bunk beds and a single bed for the counselor.

"I'm sleeping on a top bunk," Alex snapped, her first words since we had met her. Maggie tried not to roll her eyes, and contentedly set her things on the bottom bunk.

Bethany and I took the other beds, and I agreed to sleep on the top bunk. Kate laid out the ground rules of the camp, briefly explained our itinerary, and urged us to share a little about ourselves. Maggie happily offered to go first.

“Ummm...I’m Maggie Sewell. I’m in eighth grade and I live in Charlottesville. I really like horseback riding and reading. My mom thought it would be cool if my cousin and I could go to camp together this year...” Kate butted in.

“Oh, wow! You’re cousins? I can actually see the resemblance,” she said. “So, what about you?” she asked, gesturing toward Alex. Alex began, with a look of annoyance.

“My mom *decided* I would enjoy camp here, so I came with Maggie,” she said. Everyone looked awkwardly toward the ground, so I decided to share.

“My name is Elizabeth Burbank...well, Liz. I love all kinds of outdoor stuff. Camping, hiking, whatever...My brothers have come here for years, so I guess I’ve wanted to come here for as long as I can remember.”

Bethany politely introduced herself, but being the shy girl she is, didn’t say much. We finished setting up our cabin and started off the day with some outdoor activities and a great meeting in the dining hall. Lunch was delicious. Afterwards we fished in the lake for about an hour.

That night, all forty campers gathered around the campfire for one of my favorite activities: ghost stories. I noticed Bethany inch nervously closer toward the fire, and Maggie grinned as we began. I also saw a look of mild interest on Alex’s face for the first time all day. The camp managers then led us in some cheesy songs and we roasted marshmallows over the fire. Finally, people started drifting off to their cabins, tired after

a long first day. It was completely black all around us, the only light coming from the dancing flames of the fire. Kate instructed us to get our flashlights out and head back to our cabin. The counselors were to have a brief meeting by the fire. We got our flashlights ready and headed toward the cabin, when a devious smile crept across Alex's face.

"So..." she began, "did you guys believe any of that stuff about the lake being haunted at night?" she asked.

Bethany shivered and glanced nervously around. Maggie just laughed, but I wasn't sure what to think.

"You know, I would be willing to give you my dessert pass for tomorrow *and* my top bunk if you jump in the lake, Mag," Alex continued.

"Oh please, it's like forty degrees! The lake is off limits starting in October anyway," Maggie replied. Alex looked smug.

"You guys are loads of fun," she drawled sarcastically. I couldn't believe what I was doing, but I was ready for some excitement.

"I'll jump in if you'll sleep outside all night," I replied.

"Okay, this is going way too far," Bethany began nervously. "Look, what if there really is a ghost or something...or what if you get sick from the cold, or..."

"I say we all camp out tonight. Who's in?" Maggie's proposal sounded good to us for the most part, so we convinced Bethany to try it with us. This was definitely going to be an adventure. The next challenge would be getting past Kate. It was very unlikely that she would allow us to sleep outside or jump in the lake. We all reached the cabin and decided to work out our plan.

“Okay,” Maggie began, “I say we wait until Kate’s asleep, and then sneak out. We’ll probably want to take some of our camping supplies out to our spot beforehand, though.” We mutually agreed on this, then started packing a duffel bag of things to take outside. Bethany made sure we had plenty of flashlights, water bottles, blankets, and other supplies. Lake Hideaway was about half a mile away from our cabin, so we took our duffel bag out to a spot in the woods by the lake, then headed back to the camp.

Moments later, Kate arrived at the door.

“Wow! It’s late. We’d better head off to bed now. It’s already 10:30,” she said. Could she make it any easier? All we would have to do was wait until she was asleep and then sneak out. We all prepared for bed and pretended to drift peacefully off to sleep. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, we were almost certain Kate was asleep. I gently rolled out of bed and unlatched the simple hook lock on the door, the other girls following closely behind me. Kate didn’t stir as we retraced our steps to the spot by the lake.

“Ooooooh, this gives me the creeps!” Bethany whispered with a shiver. We unrolled some blankets and fashioned a “campsite” beneath the trees.

“It’s so cold! Are you sure you want to go swimming in the lake?” Maggie asked. Alex smirked.

“Don’t tell me you’re going to back out now,” she drawled, her voice icy.

“No way. I don’t back down that easily,” I replied, with more confidence than I felt. “I wonder just how cold that lake is?” I thought privately to myself. Bethany pulled out a flashlight to double-check that we were safe and we set up a small fire, when, all of the sudden, a noise crept through the trees. It started out soft, but built up gradually, like

a soft moan turning into a shriek. All four of us froze in petrified horror, too scared to move or say a word. I finally managed to look around, but saw nothing in the woods. We stood in still silence for several minutes, when Maggie finally broke through the silence.

“Guys, that was just the wind. There’s no one out here.” she said, but her usually up-beat voice was shaky with apprehension. I knew there was no way that the sound had been the wind.

“We’ve got to go back!” Bethany whimpered. Now I knew she would never go to any camp with me again.

“It’s alright, Beth,” I began, “Let’s wait a little bit longer before we make our next move.” After a bit more discussion, we decided that we would go out by the lake for a bit, to avoid the creepiness of the forest.

To our horror, we stopped dead in our tracks at the sight of the lake. The night air was still, and there wasn’t a sound to be heard, but the lake was churning violently, swirling underneath the black sky. Suddenly, a glowing figure rose from the lake. It was a young woman with flowing, wavy brown hair. She was shimmering as she soared into the air, a white cloak flowing down her elegant body.

“How dare you disturb the peace of my lake in the middle of the night!” she shrieked. “No one shall ever swim in this lake during the late hours of night again! I was once a camper here, too. Fifty years ago I was asked to jump in this lake, just like you,” she continued, pointing a finger at me, “and as I hit the shimmering surface, I lost consciousness and never came up from the water. I have been trapped here ever since!”

We all gasped and sprinted down the path as fast as we could, racing toward our cabin.

The next thing I knew, I was shaken awake by Bethany.

“Why are you screaming? What’s wrong?” she asked excitedly.

“The ghost! Did everyone make it back okay?” I cried. Bethany and the other girls looked at me nervously and quizzically.

“Ummm...I think you had a bad dream, Liz,” she said with a blank look on her face. I sighed in relief, but I was sweating furiously.

“Wow! That was the scariest dream ever! There was this girl in a white cloak, with long brown hair calling to me from the lake, and,” I was cut off before I could finish because the commotion woke Kate up.

“What on earth! What’s going on?” she asked. I turned as she rose from her bed, and to my horror I saw her stand up, her brown hair flowing, and a shiny white robe over her pajamas. I almost screamed as she turned to me, and for a split second I saw her skin shimmer as she looked piercingly into my eyes. “I’m afraid I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she said with a devilish smile.