

Stuck in a Boys Camp!

By Ann Herrick

Chapter One

"It's not what I had in mind," I muttered, as I threw some jean shorts into my suitcase. "Going to camp with my mother is bad enough. But a boys camp? Ugh!"

Brianna gave me a look like *Are you kidding me?* "I'd so be in heaven in a camp full of guys."

Brianna was already twelve—I wouldn't be until the middle of the summer. But she was light-years ahead of me when it came to boyfriends, crushes, romance, you-name-it. I thought guys were okay for rock collecting and math and science projects, but other than that, well, I just wasn't interested.

My best friend, Kaitlyn, moved to Iowa last August. It was over a thousand miles from Connecticut, so it was not as if I could ride my bike or hop the Shoreline Bus to visit her. On the first day of school Brianna was assigned the locker next to mine. So we kind of fell into being friends. Except...she was totally boy crazy, and always wanting me to go on "manhunts" with her. I mean, yuck. I was good at refusing to go on those boy-chases.

"I don't want a camp full of guys," I said. "I always wanted to swim, ride horses, do arts and crafts, play softball, stuff like that, with other girls, the way camp is supposed to be. Not me and a hundred boys!"

Brianna rolled her eyes. "Well, I'd trade places with you any day."

"Ellie, hurry, it's time to leave!" Mom called up the stairs.

"Coming!" I closed and grabbed my suitcase. "Well, Brianna, I guess this it until I get back from camp."

"Yeah," Brianna's phone dinged. She smiled as she read or looked at whatever, but didn't share it with me. "Keep in, you know, touch."

"I'll try," I said as we bumped down the stairs. "Remember, my Mom said cell-phone service is very iffy up there." I had only just gotten my own phone about a month ago, and I didn't mention to Brianna that my Mom was going to let me use it only once a week at camp at the most, regardless of the level of cell-phone service. Mom said part of the reason for going there was to "get away from it all."

Brianna sighed. "You really are going to the middle of nowhere."

"Hey, look!" Ryan said, as we rounded a corner on the winding dirt road. "There's the sign—'Camp Challenge, On the Shores of Lake Pollywog.'"

"Big deal," I grumbled. Ryan could get all excited. He was fifteen, so he'd be staying in a cabin and working part-time in the kitchen. I would be stuck in the infirmary with Mom.

"Here we are," Mom said, as we pulled up to a gray house with a big porch. A woman in a white uniform stood watching, as if she'd been waiting for us. "That must be the other camp nurse. If she has children, you'll have a playmate or two, Eleanor."

"Woo." At the age of almost twelve, I was beyond playmates. What I wanted were friends, and all my friends were back home in Glenwood.

Ryan laughed. "Just what you need, Ellie. A couple whiny little kids to play with."

"Ryan," Mom said in her voice that meant *cut it out*. She pulled into a parking spot. "Please help Eleanor and me carry our things inside before you go to your cabin."

I grabbed my suitcase from the trunk of the car. If only I had the freedom Ryan had.

"Hello," said the woman on the porch. Her voice was soft. She looked fragile, as if the breeze from the lake could knock her over. Even her short curly hair looked delicate. "I'm Abigail White."

"Nice to meet you." Mom shook Mrs. White's hand. "I'm Mary Endicott, and this is Ryan and Eleanor."

"My son, Jack, is about your age, Eleanor." Mrs. White pointed to a path, just a few steps from the side of the infirmary, leading to the lake. "He's down there, feeding the ducks."

I squinted as I shielded my eyes from the sun with my hand. I saw a scrawny little kid who looked about eight years old. Not exactly someone I would have chosen for my only "friend" for the entire summer.

Ryan must have spotted Jack too, because he snorted under his breath. I knew what he was thinking. My potential "playmate" looked like a real wimp.

"You must meet Jack." Mrs. White reached into her pocket and pulled out a whistle. At the sharp sound, Jack came running.

Ryan and I exchanged glances. How embarrassing to be whistled in by your mother! Thank goodness Mom had a voice that could be heard halfway down the street.

"Yes, mother?" Jack said as he ran up the path. He had the same whispery voice as Mrs. White. But he did look a little taller and older up close.

"Jack, dear, I'd like you to meet the Endicotts." Mrs. White ran her fingers through Jack's wispy curls. Ryan elbowed me in the ribs. He'd have a fit if Mom ran her fingers through his hair.

"This is Ryan and Eleanor," said Mrs. White. "Eleanor will be staying with her mother in the other apartment above the infirmary. You'll have someone to play with."

"Hi," Jack said with a shy smile.

"Hi," I said. Enough with the introductions, already. I wanted to check out our apartment.

"Jack will be eleven in September," said Mrs. White. "So he's too young to stay in a cabin this year. But next year his father insists he enroll as an official camper." Mrs. White patted Jack's shoulder. "My husband teaches history at a high school where he also coaches football. This summer he's off doing construction work in Alaska. Will your husband be joining you at all this summer, Mary?"

"I'm a widow," Mom said.

"Oh. I'm so sorry."

"Thank you," said Mom.

Then there was a silence that made me uncomfortable. I never knew what to say at times like that. So, I didn't say anything.

Ryan cleared his throat and shifted his weight. "Can we get this stuff inside, Mom? I want to stop by the kitchen and then find my cabin."

Ah, good. Prompting from Ryan. Sometimes he was actually useful.

"I'll help," Jack said. I didn't think he could lift anything heavier than a glass of water. But he grabbed my suitcase with one hand and carried it in.

We headed up a flight of stairs that branched off halfway up. Our apartment was on the left. At the top, Mom opened the door. "Well, Eleanor, here's our home for the summer."

I took one look inside and wanted to jump in the lake.

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