

# Summer Camp

**SECRET**

By Aurora S.

The bus was sweltering, and my face turned pink. The driver turned up the temperature so much it felt like a desert. I rustled through my backpack to see if I could find if my mom packed *anything* cold in my lunch.

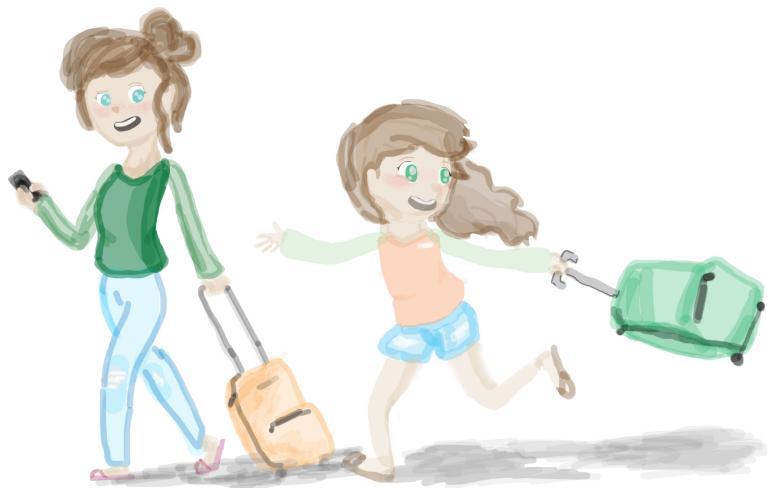
"So you're finally old enough to ride the bus to summer camp," I stated to my sister. "How do you feel?" My sister's eyes widened, and she slapped on a grin so big it could fill up the Mississippi River. I was regretting asking that question.

"AAH!"

My ears rang as she wailed with the energy of a thousand screaming chimps.

"I'm so excited! I can't even feel the heat, Skyler!" The bus stopped, and kids filed out the door.

Paisley was my younger sister and she just turned eight. I was thirteen, and camp wasn't really new for me. Mom and Dad made me go every year to get exercise and burn off the Halloween candy I hid in my pillowcase.



The chaperones led Paisley and me to our cabin, along with some more preteens and snotty little kids. It smelled like a dead body threw up and old band-aid in a hot car. It was just as scorching as the bus.

Back when I first came to camp, I found the entry to the deep woods. Every year, I would explore the forest as much as I could. I was almost reaching the end of the deep woods at the hills, when summer camp days ended for those years. When I came back to camp, I wanted Paisley to come with me to the forest.

Paisley and I set our things down on the bunk beds.

“I call dibs on the top bunk,” I shouted to Paisley. “I’m not risking my life to the rats on the bottom bunk.”

“Rats?!”

Paisley squealed so loud the boys from across the property could probably hear her.

“You never said anything about rats!”

I rolled my eyes and turned on my little fan. I felt the breeze through my hair as I spun around in circles, trying to get the wind all over my body. I tightened my bun and straightened my shirt.

I inquired to her, “Paisley, mind if you come over for a second?” She climbed the bunk ladder and sat with me. I told her my story.

“Every year, I would explore the forest with the rental bikes at the curb.” I pulled out a homemade journal of pictures. “I would take pictures and put them in here. This year, *you’re* coming with me.”

Paisley looked completely stunned. “Really? *Really*?! Oh my gosh!”

“We should go now before it’s night when we get back,” I replied, watching her jaw drop lower and lower. “You comin’ or what?”

Paisley jumped straight off the bed to head for the woods. I tried tagging along, but she was quick for her age. We stopped by the curb where I picked up a rental bike for me, and a scooter for my sister. Paisley and I hopped on and rode to our hearts’ content, that being the forest.

Once I finally caught up to her, we found our way to the gate. The fence was large and metal, with a gigantic, intimidating padlock. I revealed a

small hole in the gate behind a layer of leaves. We crept inside, slowly pulling our vehicles through. I led Paisley to where I paused my exploring.



"Here we are," I told her, after we walked for about ten minutes. "My checkpoint from last year."

There were trees all aligned around tall, spiraling stones all towering up one after the other. The canopy above looked like it had been perfectly shaped. Beacons of light ran through the leaves, almost as if the stars had sewn it like thread. Flowers bloomed upon the vast land, and little streams of ants carrying crumbs marched past my feet.

Of course, my sister climbed to the top of the tallest stone and yelled,

“I’m the Queen of the *World!*”

Suddenly, the ground shook. I thought it was an earthquake, but it was something much worse. The only expression I could feel was shock, and I felt my life flash before me. I blacked out for a moment.

“What? WHAT?!”

Where did I find myself? Well, another dimension, of course! What dimension? I have no idea. So I thought to myself, *where am I?* --like my screams from before didn’t already generate that question.



I heard static behind my ear. I looked around for a bit, trying to wrap my head around where I was. Then, I saw something peculiar in the distance. Was it fate? Mom? Superman? No, and I was nowhere close to my theory of it being Superman.

*It was me.*

I wasn't screwing around with my own head, no. Everything around me was my *imagination*. The sky, the trees, the fact that to my right was day and to my left was... Well, I didn't know. You'd expect me to have an idea of what goes on in my head. Do you think this story took a bit of a *strange* turn? Don't worry, you're not crazy: I was.

I woke up. There I sat, my cheek mashed against a hospital pillow. It *was* an earthquake, after all. I'm sorry if I lied to you, it wasn't *all* my fault. The mind can play dirty tricks, and that's no good.

I was glad I survived. The shock of waking up in a strange nightmare after running to a weird place in the woods is certainly annoying. I looked over to see my leg hanging from the ceiling. A tree apparently fell on it in the forest during the quake.

I began to think again. That dream was too real: It was a vision. What caused it? Possibly my guardian angel. I knew it from the start. It was time to find the **true** secrets of... *the deep woods*.'