

A CAMP MOUNTAIN TOP MYSTERY

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THE MYSTERY OF THE DISAPPEARING MOONLIGHT

DALE McELHINNEY



The Mystery of
the
Disappearing
Moonlight

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The Mystery of the Disappearing Moonlight
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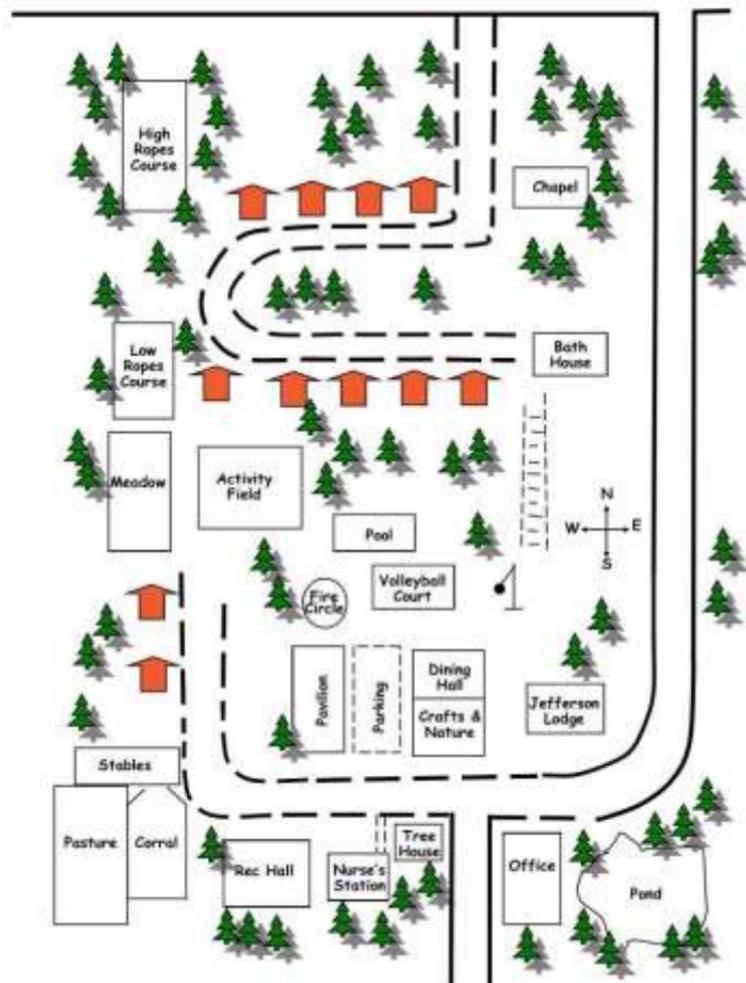
For Katie, whose passionate pursuit of life
continues to amaze, inspire, and occasionally terrify
your father.

CAMP MOUNTAIN TOP

Riflery Range

Archery Range

Fire Circle





Bonus Mystery



So you think you are good at solving mysteries? Let's see how good a detective you really are. Hidden throughout this story are the names of five horse breeds. Can you find all five? For clues, the correct answers, discussion questions and more please visit my website at campmountaintopmysteries.com.

Come let us go up to the mountain of the LORD...He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths.

~Micah 4:2

ONE

Eyes in the Night

“But Mo-om, why do we have to unload all this stuff now? The horse trailer just pulled into camp, and Molly and I wanna go see them unload the horses.” For the past week they’d been texting each other with hourly countdowns. They’d waited all year to get back to camp to be with the horses, not cart stuff around.

“You can spend time with the horses all summer,” Katie’s mom said. She ran a hand through her blond highlighted hair. “Right now we need to get the rest of these craft supplies out of the Daniellos’ SUV and into the craft center. It’ll only take a few more trips.”

A few more trips? Unloading all this stuff would take days. Katie stared at the piles of bins, boxes, and bags still crammed into the vehicle. She caught her reflection in a mirror square sticking up out of one of the bags. The storm brewing inside her was perfectly reflected in her color-of-the-weather eyes.

“It’s a good thing the Daniellos’ SUV is so big,” her mom said. “I was afraid a lot of these things wouldn’t fit, and we’d end up leaving them at home.”

She stacked one box on top of another and headed off to the craft shop.

The two families ran into a little adventure the day before, taking Shaun and Mack, Katie and Molly's older brothers, to Camp Soaring Eagle. They had to change plans at the last minute and come to Camp Mountain Top in the Daniellos' SUV.

"It's not fair," Katie muttered under her breath. "The boys' adventure started before they even got to camp. I'll be here for days before I get to see anything outside of the craft shop." She leaned in to read the labels on the boxes and bags.

"Gimme something light this time," Molly said.

Katie straightened up with a jerk and hit her head. "Owww." She stepped back, took off her blue baseball cap with the dolphin on the front, and rubbed where it hurt.

"Sorry." Molly adjusted the leopard-patterned headband that kept her dark brown hair out of gray-blue eyes. "Didn't mean to freak ya out. I want something light this time. I don't know what was in that last box, but it felt like a ton of bricks."

Katie smiled as she put her baseball cap back on and shook her ponytail into place.

"What's so funny?" Molly asked.

"Nothing. Only you could be right. My mom brought bricks to camp."

"What? Are you kidding me?"

"Nope. In case anyone wants to make animal door stops. You know my mom. She's always prepared for everything."

"Yeah, that's why everyone wants to take crafts at camp. She always has a bazillion fun things to do."

And a bazillion bags and boxes of stuff to unload.

“Here, take this, it’s pretty light.”

“What’s in it?”

Katie read the writing on the side of the bag. “Gimp, t-shirts, tie dye and puffy paint.”

Molly headed off with her bag while Katie checked out a box labeled Fragile—Clay Pots. She’d better take this one next and get it out of the way. She grabbed one flap of the box and wiggled it out from between the two bags tightly wedging it in place. A rumbling noise grew steadily louder. She lifted the box out of the back of the SUV and struggled across the dirt road toward the craft center.

Vroom! Vroom! Katie looked up just in time to see two ATVs rounding the corner of the building. Their wheels squealed and clouds of dust rose up behind them like whirling cyclones as they raced straight toward her. Katie screamed, stumbled backward, tripped, and dropped the box. The ATVs charged past her, leaving a trail of laughter.

The dust cleared. Katie’s mom raced over to her daughter, Molly right behind her.

“Honey, are you all right?”

“Yeah. Fine. Great. Thought I’d sit down and take a little rest.”

“You shoulda put down the pots first,” Molly said. “You might be OK, but these aren’t doing so good.”

Katie scanned the area. Jagged chunks of clay littered the road as if there had been an explosion in a pottery factory. One was spinning on its side, but at least it was still in one piece.

“Oh no,” Katie’s mom said, “I spent so much time running around with coupons and sale circulars to make sure I got the lowest price. Now they’re in a million pieces.”

“Well, it’s not my fault.” Katie got up and tried to brush the dirt off her brand new aqua shorts. Her favorite shorts in the whole world, destroyed. She glanced over at Molly. “Those jerks on their ATVs nearly ran me over. Look what they did.” She swatted at some dirt embedded in the pale fabric. “They’re ruined, and it’s the first time I even wore them.”

Molly scrunched up her face. “Those aren’t the ones you went to three different malls to find in your size, are they?”

Katie nodded. “I’m only trying to help.” Her voice quivered. Tears formed tiny pools in the corners of her eyes. “No one told me there were some out of control drivers loose at camp.”

“It’s OK, Pips.” Her mom put an arm around Katie and pulled her close. “It wasn’t your fault. Sometimes things like this happen. I’m sure we can get that dirt out of your shorts with some stain remover and a little industrial strength rubbing.”

Katie pulled away. “Mo-om, we talked about the whole ‘Pips’ thing like a thousand times before we left home. Up here, I’m just another camper named Katie.”

“Oh right. Sorry, honey, I forgot. Let’s get this mess cleaned up and unload the rest of the supplies. I’ll get a trash bag for all the broken pieces. You can put the undamaged pots back in the box.” She headed to the craft center.

“I don’t know who was on those ATVs,” Katie said, giving one last swat at the dirt on her shorts, “but they have issues.”

“Major league issues,” Molly said.

They were still picking up pots and throwing broken pieces in a trash bag when Katie heard the *vroom! vroom!* A familiar tornado of dust stormed

toward them.

“Oh no,” Molly said.

“Quick, get the pots!” Katie pointed at the box next to Molly.

Molly grabbed it while Katie lunged for a few survivors that were still lying in the road. The two ATVs roared up to the girls, shot up on their back wheels, and blasted a final burst of dust at them before coming to an abrupt halt.

A tall boy with blond hair sticking out in all directions flashed them a broad smile. “Hey, kids. Whatcha up to?”

“What are we up to? What are *we* up to!” Katie stood up and planted her hands firmly on her hips. “We’re cleaning up the mess you two made the last time you came flying by. We’d like to be watching them unload the horses. Or even helping unload the horses. But instead, we’re cleaning up broken pots because of you...you...you...” Katie threw her hands up in the air as she scrambled to think of the right word. “...all-terrain menaces. That’s what we’re up to!”

“Well, sorry, kid,” the spiky blond said in a voice that didn’t sound even a little apologetic, “but camp doesn’t start ‘til tomorrow. Didn’t your mommy or daddy read the brochure?”

Katie could tell her ears were going all red. *If he calls me kid one more time I’ll—*

“We came a day early,” Molly said, casually adjusting her leopard headband, “because my mom’s the camp nurse, and her mom’s in charge of crafts.”

“Don’t you need a license or something to drive those things?” Katie nodded at the red ATVs covered in dust.

“Not on private property,” Spiky Hair said.

"Besides, I'm almost old enough to have a license. I'll be fourteen this fall, so I'll be driving a car in two years."

"His uncle is gonna give him his 1964 Ford Mustang convertible when he gets his license," the driver of the other ATV said. He was a tanned boy with shiny black hair. He clearly thought Spiky Hair was all that. "It's like a classic car or something, and we're gonna cruise all around the country."

"Right." Katie bent down and picked up broken pots for the second time that day. The image of the fifteen-year-old Camry her grandparents kept threatening to give her when she was old enough to drive flashed through her mind. Get real. His uncle was probably gonna give him some very unclassic old family car, and he'd be lucky if they let him drive to the nearest department store.

"Do you need a broom to clean up this mess?" Tanned Sidekick said.

"Maybe," Molly said, "but we have to pick up the pots we can still use first."

"Want me to go get one while you do that?" Tanned Sidekick flashed Molly a smile. "We're part of the security and maintenance crew here."

"You're part of what?" Katie glanced up at him. What's with his voice? I guess he thinks that silly accent makes him sound cool. She shook her head.

"We're part of the security and maintenance crew." He stuck out his chest and patted a walkie-talkie that hung from his shorts. "We can get keys to all the buildings. So, ya want us to get you a broom or something?"

"No, thanks." Katie continued picking up pottery pieces. "You've done enough to make us feel secure

already. We need a few crafts still in one piece when camp starts tomorrow.”

“Uh...well, if you need something, let me know. My name’s Enriqu e Delgado, but you can call me Riqu e if you want.”

“I’m Mol—”

“Oh...well, Ricky, my name’s Kaitlyn...and you can call me Kaitlyn.”

“No, not Ricky. Riqu e, Ree-Kay,” Spiky Hair corrected. “And I’m Chase Lewis.”

Chase started explaining how his parents were missionaries in Central America somewhere and worked with Riqu e’s parents who were born there. Katie tuned him out before he could make his next “kid” comment. She couldn’t imagine how the day could get any worse. At this rate, she’d never get anywhere near the horses until camp was half over.

She was daydreaming about the three-day trail ride she could go on if she could ride well enough by the end of summer when something Chase said caught her attention. She turned to Riqu e, stared at his head very carefully, and shrugged her shoulders. “Her mom can probably help you. She’s the camp nurse.”

“Help with what?” Chase said.

“Didn’t you say something about your friend having fleas? Last year a girl had head lice, and Molly’s mom got rid of them.”

Molly twisted and stared at the ground.

Both boys laughed like a couple of hyenas.

Katie didn’t know what was so funny, but these two boys were about one smart comment away from her forgetting what they learned in youth group about the whole kindness thing.

“I didn’t say he had fleas,” Chase said. “I said he

was from Belize. That's the country in Central America where my parents are missionaries. Don't you have geography in school? That's the study of maps and where different countries are located and stuff."

The blood rushed right past Katie's ears and headed straight to the tip of her nose. "Well, duh. Of course, I have geography in school. You really need to give people a clue when you're gonna say something important, so they can wake up and listen." Like he'd ever say anything important.

Molly wrinkled her nose and flashed a quick smile at the two boys.

"Anyway," Riqué was still laughing at Katie, "if you think of anything a couple of strong, muscular guys could help with, you can call us at Heron House."

"Ohhh," Katie said in a sarcastic tone she usually reserved for her brother, "if you run into a couple of strong, muscular guys, send them right over. We could use their help."

"C'mon Riqué. Let's go help them unload the horses." Chase smirked, revved his ATV, and both boys disappeared in a swirling spiral of dust.

Boys! Orangutans, she got. Wart hogs, she got. But what on earth was God thinking when He created boys?

"He's kinda cute, isn't he?" Molly said.

"Huh?" Katie couldn't believe she'd heard Molly right. Was she serious?

"Chase. He's kinda cute."

"Are you kiddin' me or what?"

"You don't think he's cute? The way his face all lights up when he smiles." Molly's face glowed.

Katie rolled her eyes. "Oh, puh—lease."

"And his eyes sparkle."

"I guess I was too busy cleaning up his mess to check out his smile or his sparkly eyes." Katie began counting the number of pots in the box.

"And Riqué seemed really nice," Molly continued. "I can't believe you thought he had fleas."

Katie fought to keep the smile that was slowly igniting in the corners of her mouth from spreading. Molly was doing the same thing. She twisted her head and stared intently at the ground, but her quivering shoulders gave her away. Katie stole a glance at Molly, and they both began to laugh. Katie howled like a monkey. Molly out and out snorted. They were still gurgling when her mom passed them carrying the last box of supplies. The girls followed, still struggling for control, bringing the surviving pots with them.

"We can go down to the corral now and hang out with the horses, right?" Katie encouraged her mom with an exaggerated smile.

"Sure," her mom opened a box and began stacking jars of different colored acrylic paints on an empty shelf. "As soon as we get all these things put away."

"But Mo-om," Katie said. "You told us we could go down to the corral as soon as we were done unloading the craft supplies. You promised!"

"I know what I promised. And you can. But putting these things away is all part of unloading them. We can't leave them sitting all over the place." She brushed her hair out of her face and started in on the bag of t-shirts and gimp. "Camp starts tomorrow and right now no one could even get in the door. Why don't you start displaying all those great samples you made on the shelves over there?" She pointed to a set of shelves on the far side of the craft room that were splattered with paint from past summers' projects.

"You can go down to the corral as soon as everything is organized and neatly put away. I always say, 'A place for everything and everything in its place.'"

Katie rolled her eyes. "Right!" She kicked a twist-off soda cap across the floor and rooted through the bags and boxes of samples.

"Meet me down at the horse corral when you're done," Molly said. "I've gotta go help my Mom get the infirmary ready." She turned and disappeared out the door.

Sure. She'd meet up with Molly when all this mess was put away. Like a week from now.



Katie was almost right. It was after ten o'clock that night when she and Molly climbed the fifty-three 4x4s embedded into the ground that served as steps up the steep hill from the main camp to the cabin area. They carried their flashlights in their hands, but the path was so familiar neither girl had bothered to turn hers on.

"So, you got to see the horses?" Katie said. "Is Beauty back? She was my favorite last year."

"Yeah, Beauty's back, and Buddy and Sprinkles. But Clover wasn't there."

"Really?" Katie frowned. "Clover was such a great horse. I hate that the camp rents horses. That's so not fair. You make friends with 'em and the next year they might not be back."

"That's for sure." Molly's voice brightened. "But there were a bunch of new horses, too. There's this

really amazing black one with white boots. He was so beautiful, he looked...umm...almost noble...like something right out of a fairytale. I hope I get to ride him a lot. Oooh...oooh...oooh..." Molly grabbed Katie and turned her sideways so they were face-to-face. "And a chocolate brown one with a black mane and a white blaze on his forehead in the shape of a star. He was right up against the fence, and he let me pat him and feed him some grass and everything."

"Wish I could have been there." Katie let out a sigh that came from the tips of her toes.

"Hey, let's get up early tomorrow and go down to the corral before breakfast," Molly said.

"Good idea." A smile returned to Katie's voice. "Maybe Pergy will let us feed them or groom them or something cool like that."

Katie and Molly passed Sparrow, Robin, Lark, and Hummingbird cabins and crossed a clearing before arriving at Owl, their home for the summer.

Katie sucked in a deep breath of fresh air. "Ya know, Mol, even if I didn't get to see the horses it's still great to be back at camp."

"Yep. It sure is." Molly nodded her agreement. "The way all the bugs are chirping and clicking it's like they're some kind of bug band welcoming us back."

"And the air smells all piney fresh. Like really clean fresh, not like that stuff my mom makes me use when I help her clean the bathrooms at home." Katie pinched her nose with her fingers.

As the two friends bounded up the three steps to the cabin deck, an Owl hooted overhead. Molly went inside, but Katie hung out on the deck, leaning on the railing. Even though the day went totally, completely not the way Katie planned, she knew this summer at