



CHAPTER ONE



candis campgrounds



CANDIS CAMPGROUNDS has been providing gorgeous views, luxury outdoor accommodations, and tons of opportunities for family fun in the forests of Massachusetts since 1978.

name

The **name of the campground** was inspired by our founder, Hank Hawthorn. When he and his family used to live on these grounds, they would always feed the skulk of stray foxes that crossed their backyard every mating season. It happened season after season until they officially became part of the family. In continuing the tradition, it was Hank's grandson, Jordin, who decided to name the campground after their family's faithful furry companions.

legends

Over the years, the name has taken on a new meaning, as many of our patrons claimed to have seen more than just foxes roaming the woods bordering our campgrounds. Sightings have ranged from bobcats to occasional coyotes. Campers have ventured into the forests, only to return days later in the form of large wolves. The only thing giving away their identity, or so some campers say, is their eyes, which are always a distinct and perfect match to the eyes of the camper who disappeared into the woods.

I SUCK IN MY BREATH AS DAD'S SUV bounces along the dirt road. Wait . . . werewolves? A mischievous smile slithers onto my lips. Maybe this camping trip won't be so bad after all.

"Lyssa? How are you doing back there, kiddo?"

Huh? My head snaps up and I almost jump out of my seat but look up at Frankie, who's turned halfway around from her spot in the passenger seat next to my dad.

Flushing, I click the power button on the top of my phone until the screen goes dark. "Oh, um, fine." I do my best to plaster on a sincere smile as I flip my phone over in my lap and meet her hazel eyes.

It's not that I don't like Frankie. I do, a lot. She and my dad met at the beginning of the month after he attended one of her psychic readings. She's become a regular guest around his house, even when I go over there for the weekend. She's funny and adventurous and always has new ideas for crazy games when I get bored. Not to mention her cooking—she makes the best Arizona Mexican food I've ever tasted. Which makes sense, I guess, since that's where she grew up.

But when my dad first introduced the idea of this camping trip, he said he wanted it to be "family time." He had tried to convince my mom and Addie to go, but neither she nor her girlfriend are too big on the outdoors. The only exception Mom ever made was over the summers when she was a little girl. It was her dad's favorite activity. I haven't met Grandpa Marty yet. He and Mom don't talk as much anymore since Grandma Beth died, before I was born. But when I asked about him after Dad brought up the idea of camping, Mom agreed to give him a call. Maybe this year, I'll finally get to see him in person instead of merely hearing stories about him.

After some pestering, Mom explained she would be happy to take me camping, but she wanted to go with just the two of us, the

way she used to do with Grandpa Marty. I tried my best to understand, but even as we got in the car this morning, I was still disappointed she wasn't coming with us.

Instead, my dad asked if I'd be okay with him inviting Frankie. I said yes right away. I could see how important it was to him and I thought I would be okay with her joining us. Like I said, she's a lot of fun. I love spending time with her when I'm over at Dad's house.

But as I climbed in the car when they picked me up after school, I couldn't help the funny feeling in my stomach. Kind of like butterflies, except I wasn't nervous. Why did he want to bring a "friend" on a family camping trip?

"Good." Frankie's reply pulls me back to the present. She smiles and brushes her crop of curly hair away from her sun-kissed cheeks. "Are you enjoying your new book?"

A tiny pang of guilt stabs me as my eyes dart over to the brand new, glossy copy of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, which Frankie had given me a few hours ago. "Oh, um . . ." I trail off and bite my lip, glancing out the window through the endless groves of trees. Not wanting to be rude, I clear my throat and brush a piece of auburn hair behind my ear. "I thought I would save it for the campfire tonight. You know, if we run out of ghost stories."

The truth is, I can't read in the car, not physical books at least. They make me carsick. But I don't want her to think I don't like the gift. The fact that she remembered how much I love mysteries is pretty cool. It didn't make the bees waging a war on my insides go away, though.

Frankie nods and gives me a wink. “That’s a great idea.”

Nodding, I look back down at my phone, clicking the button so the screen flickers to life.

“What are you gabbing about?” he asks, glancing between us.

Frankie laughs. “Oh, nothing. Lyssa said she wants to read to us tonight.” She reaches over to squeeze his hand and he smiles.

My stomach churns again and a copper taste coats my tongue, but I shake it off. Dad and Frankie lapse into easy conversation and I keep scrolling on the campground website, stopping when I reach the paragraph I was reading earlier about werewolves before Frankie had interrupted me.

Maybe this will be an adventure after all. A tiny smile curls up my lips as I scroll to the end of the page before closing the browser and pressing my forehead against the window again. Nothing but trees, trees, and more trees. Well, with a few hills in between.

We’ve been winding our way through the rural areas of Boston since 4 p.m. It’s now almost 6 p.m. Dad had promised me that camping would be worth it. An hour into the drive, I doubt that. But if there’s a chance we might make a supernatural discovery while we’re here, he might be right after all. Not that I believe in that stuff, though. Frankie might be a medium, but just because she can talk to spirits doesn’t mean everything else—witches, warlocks, werewolves— are real. Even though it would be awesome if they were. Come to think of it, though, if anyone would know . . .

“Hey, Frankie?” I ask, sitting forward in my seat and pulling

up the website browser again.

“Hmm?” She swivels to face me, and I gather the fabric of my hiking pants in the palm of my hand.

“Do you, um . . . do you believe in werewolves?” I hate the way my voice shakes, and my cheeks heat up as I search her face the minute the last syllable tumbles out of my mouth. My mom and Addie have never been big fans of my fascination with the supernatural. They never discourage it, but they never play along either. Not like Dad. If Frankie believes in ghosts enough to make a job out of talking to them, then does she believe in other things too?

Laugh lines dance around her eyes, and I kick the underside of my seat. Of course not. Ducking my head, I ready myself for the lecture on fantasy vs reality that Mom so often tries to give me whenever I bring the topic up with her. Usually, Dad always comes to my defense if he’s around. Will he now, if his “friend” tells me the same thing?

I peek up at him, but his eyes remain on the road and the only sign of amusement is the slight twitch of his lips.

“You know, Lyssa,” Frankie muses, and my features scrunch at the note of curiosity in her words. Not what I expected. “I’m not sure.”

“Oh . . .” I trail off and shrug. The small glimmer of hope that her tone ignited in my chest snuffs out like an overused match. “Okay.”

“But, hey.” She reaches back to squeeze my knee. “I guess you never know, right? Just because I haven’t seen one does it mean they don’t exist. My job should be proof enough of that.”

“Really?!” It comes out more exuberant than I mean it to. Frankie laughs and I blush.

“Why not? When you’re in a field like mine, anything’s possible.”

My grin widens and I sneak a glance at my dad, who winks as if to say, *See? I told you she was cool.*

I muffle my giggle behind my palm, but by the way Frankie reaches over to squeeze his hand, she probably caught it, anyway. Of course, I already knew she was cool, but this just confirmed it.

“I guess that’s true,” I say, turning my phone to show her the screen.

“Of course it is.” Frankie returns my smile, keeping her gaze on me over my device. “Why do you ask?”

I shove my phone a little closer and she finally takes the hint and takes it. “The campground website says people have spotted them there.”

“You never know what you might find in a place like this. I hear tonight is supposed to be a full moon.” Her mischievous grin catches me off guard.

My eyes widen and my lips part.

Dad chuckles. “Seems like you two are determined to get into trouble tonight.”

Frankie whacks his arm. “Aww, come on, Grayson. What’s a camping trip without a little adventure?”

I grin. *Truer words have never been spoken.*



Half an hour later, we're *still* going in circles. The landscape looks the same, and I'm convinced we're hopelessly lost.

"Dad," I moan, blowing out a puff of air and resting my cheek in my hand while propping my elbow up on the windowsill. "Are we there yet?"

He smirks. "I was wondering when you would ask that."

Frankie clicks her tongue and shakes her head. "You gotta admit, knowing Lyssa, you should have seen that one coming."

First, they hold hands, now they're making jokes? My features scrunch. Yep, dating. I may be eleven, but I'm not dumb.

Finally, though, we swerve away from the gravel road and onto a skinny dirt path. As we pass under the wood-carved archway leading to the campground, a piece of paper fluttering in the wind catches my eye.

"Hey, Dad?" I ask, pointing out the window. "What's that?"



Dad frowns and slows to read the text. "It looks like a missing-person poster, honey." He squints to read the name above the photo: a boy a few years younger than me, with an unruly crop of dirty blond hair and striking, orange-gold eyes, wearing a

purple T-shirt. “Charlie Larson,” Dad reads. “Looks like he got lost somewhere in the woods around the campsite.”

My heart jumps into my throat and I shudder. I’m not the biggest outdoor person anyway, so I can’t imagine what I’d do if I were out here on my own. “That’s awful!”

Frankie nods and hums. “It sure is.”

“I hope he’s alright,” I whisper as a lump rises in my throat.

“Me too.” Dad speeds up again but makes eye contact with me in the rearview mirror. “When we check-in, we can talk to the park rangers and see if they found anything, okay? He’s only seven; he couldn’t have gotten very far.”

Only seven? My throat dries up and shivers zip along my spine. “Oo-kay,” I stutter out. “And, maybe, while we’re here, we can find something that might help them with their search.”

Frankie smiles. “We’ll certainly try our best, kiddo.”

Dad nods. “Absolutely. It’s like Frankie said, anything can happen. For all we know, he’s already been found, and that poster is weeks old.

I give him a skeptical side-eye. That paper doesn’t look weathered. Still, I hope he’s right. I really, really do.

End of Sample

Click [HERE](#) to Preorder