

Chapter 2

Church Camp. I had high hopes, but my hopes were soon dashed down a Black Hole. At first glance upon disembarking the Dodge Van from hell, it seemed more like Army Boot camp. The trip had certainly been no fun at all. The air conditioner was on the blink, and the temperature was a blistering 99 Fahrenheit outdoors. Our parental chaperones, Mr. and Mrs. Clark, had silly arguments about the directions to the camp. Mr. Clark knew of some back road shortcut he had taken as a kid that was going to shave thirty minutes off the drive while his wife kept rotating an Exxon Texas roadmap saying "No, Don, you should go this way, your way is not on the map." and her husband would say "Damn it Linda, I remember this road, it used to take us to the Lake." In the end, the road came to a dead end in some farmer's front yard and Mr. Clark had to turn the van around and go the way his wife had been telling him the whole time.

Meanwhile in the back of the van the two eighth graders, Michael Hughes and Cheryl Stephenson were French kissing and feeling each other up. Probably as near as I would get to seeing what a rated R movie was like for another 5 years or so. Every now and again, I would peek over the back of my middle seat at them and Michael would hiss at me and say something like "What are you looking at fuck head?" or "Turn your god damned head around you peeping tom ass hole". And then he'd shoot the middle finger at me and promptly go back to fondling Cheryl's breasts.

We arrived at camp, hours late no doubt. The sun was blistering, and pavement below was unforgiving. I was hungry and there were masses of people hurrying from place to place. A man with curly hair, glasses and whistle around his neck screamed "Ladies and gentlemen, please listen for your names and cabin assignments as I call them. When you receive your assignments, ladies will get on the bus and will be driven to the west side of the Lake. Men, as your cabin number is

called, please take your belongings and march promptly to your cabin behind me". He motioned to the columns of cabins behind him.

He began calling names alphabetically. It was a bit of a wait until he got to me but eventually, he yelled my name, "David Oliver-cabin twenty-three". I picked up my suitcase and joined the diaspora of teens and pre-teen boys marching through the woods to the cabins.

I found cabin twenty-three, opened the door and found five of the roughest looking hooligans I had even seen-every one of them a head taller than me. I had no idea that eleven-year-olds came in "Godzilla" variety but apparently, they did. They stared me down, I looked away and tried to avoid eye contact.

The biggest and brawniest of the hooligans with shoulder length hair walked up to me and thrust his finger into my sternum, "Listen you little pussy! We don't like you and don't want you here. Now you fucking do what I say, and we might just let you get the hell out of here alive in five days."

The other four snickered and sneered.

The leader continued, "And if you don't...". He took his index finger and made a slashing motion and sound across his neck, "And if you don't, your fucking toast."

My heart jumped into my throat and begin to race. What had I gotten myself into? Was this church camp or the chain gang my parents sent me to?

I hovered in a corner with my suitcase while they looked at me with hatred in their eyes.