

Chapter Nine

Winsett's Vile Human



The first day of camp was a successful one. Jocelyn had decided after the morning introduction circle and songs that they go on the habitat hike around the Center. This was the first year the campers in their group were able to attend summer camp and most of them had never been to the Center before. She thought this would be a good activity and a fun way to give them the tour. Beanie thought it was a good way to tire them out so they would eat their lunches and then do a coloring activity in the afternoon.

The hike went as planned, the campers were in awe of all the different areas of the Center. Later that evening Georgie, who had asked Jocelyn the meaning of his word, was able to tell his mother that he had an *inquisituri*ent group of campers this year, especially curious while on their habitat hike. The campers were diligent explorers but listened closely when asked to stay on the worn paths and trails throughout the Center grounds. They noticed everything and thoroughly tested Jocelyn's knowledge with all the questions they asked.

Georgie thought the campers in his group were hilarious. Everything about being at camp excited them and it did not seem that a single one of them was intimidated by their new surroundings. They shared every thought, whether it had to do with nature or not. While they were walking, the majority of their questions were directed at Jocelyn, Georgie and Beanie, asking questions that ranged in topics from Beanie's unique hairstyle and how Georgie could tell a mouse or lizard would cross their path to what Jocelyn's favorite foods were.

The campers found several piles of deer droppings, which a small dark-haired boy named Mikey called "scat," and a colony of chipmunks in the stone wall that lined the trail through the woods. At the pond they discovered tadpoles entering their adolescent stage and sprouting their rear legs. Beanie pointed out two newts racing around a moss-covered beech tree. The campers were especially excited about the newts and started a competition to see who could spot the most. The competition grew fierce until one of the campers saw a wild turkey across the field, drawing everyone's attention away from the newts. The campers, as Beanie had predicted, were exhausted by the time they returned to the picnic area.

Georgie sat with three of the campers in his group during lunch. As he was opening his lunch bag, his table was joined by Matt and Rose, fellow CITs who began to share the activities they had organized during the morning. As Rose was explaining, to a great roar of laughter from the first graders at the table, about how Jacob, the counselor she and Matt were working with, had fallen into the water during their ponding adventure, the unmistakable screech of a hawk could be heard overhead. Georgie, along with most of the campers, counselors and CITs looked up in time to see a magnificent hawk soar over

the picnic field.

"It's Boop!" Georgie said as he pointed up. "Look, you can see his band when the sun hits it."

"We'll be able to see him up close later this week. Right, Georgie?" Jocelyn had slid onto the bench across from Georgie. "Did you have a chance to talk to Mr. Ferrus?"

Georgie had not been paying attention to Jocelyn and did not answer her question right away. He was still looking toward the sky, watching the progression of the red-tailed hawk as he caught an updraft and settled on a high bough of a pine tree overlooking the picnic tables.

"Georgie," Jocelyn said again. Georgie turned toward her, surprised at first to find her sitting across from him. He smiled, still not aware she had asked him a question.

Jocelyn laughed and repeated, "Did you talk to Mr. Ferrus?"

"I didn't have a chance yet, Joce. I'll talk to him today. I'm sure he will, though." A second screech sounded overhead, this one with a slightly higher pitch. Georgie looked up again. A large gray hawk flew over the field and out of view. "Gray hawk," Georgie murmured as he stood up slowly and began walking in the direction the second hawk had flown.

"Georgie?" Jocelyn and Rose called together.

Georgie held up his hand to them, turning slightly to look at them over his shoulder. "I just want to see what kind of hawk that is. I think I saw him earlier today." Georgie walked toward one of the paths that started from the picnic area. He staggered as he walked, looking up and around. As he approached the trailhead, he walked more slowly, eyes on the trees and straining his ears to hear the cries again.

Keyeeeeer!

Georgie turned toward the cry sounding behind him. Beanie and Kelsey were walking in his direction followed by two campers. "He's up there," a camper called Alex said as he pointed over Georgie's head. Everyone looked up to see Boop perched in the beech tree next to where Georgie stood. "There's another one!" Alex yelled again, pointing to a higher bough in the same beech.

Georgie turned to get a closer look. The larger hawk had the same gray and brown feathers Georgie thought he recognized from that morning. The two hawks seemed to look down at Georgie as he stared at them in concentration. Beanie and Kelsey walked closer to Georgie. Alex and the other camper, Sarah, had already walked to stand under the tree.

A whistle sounded to announce the end of lunch and the beginning of the afternoon activities. Kelsey started to walk back to the field with Alex and Sarah.

Beanie linked her arms around Georgie's elbow and steered him back toward the field. Before they left the path she whispered, "Is it the same one you saw this morning?" Georgie turned back and paused, causing Beanie to jerk to a stop. He had explained the curious scene he had witnessed that morning while they had walked to camp. "I only saw it for a quick second, but I'm pretty sure it is."

Jocelyn had already started explaining to the campers about the next activity when Georgie and Beanie reached the table where their group was sitting. Georgie gave Beanie a look and mouthed the words *we'll talk later* as he started lining the campers up for their next excursion through the forest. During the hike, they helped the campers collect a fallen leaf from each kind of tree Beanie planned to teach the campers about. Once they returned to the main building of the Center, she helped them match the leaves they found with the pictures she'd made and then they colored the trees the way they remembered them.

The day had gotten hot by the time they finished their activity. After a snack, the campers played dodge ball with large round sponges dipped in buckets of water.

Georgie walked over to Kevin, the camp naturalist, while the campers finished their game. "Hey, Kevin," he said.

"Hello, Georgie Green! How's your first day as a CIT treating you?"

"Oh, great, just great," Georgie replied. "But, hey, I wanted to ask you something. Did you see Boop earlier?"

"I believe so."

"And did you see that other hawk too?"

"Not clearly. I wasn't sure if it was a hawk or a large falcon. I didn't see it well. Why?"

"Well, that's what I wanted to ask you about. Do hawks usually hunt with other raptors? I mean, I've seen a couple red-tails together, but I've never seen two different kinds of hawk so close together. You see, I think I've seen Boop and that gray hawk together before too."

"Hmmm," Kevin shifted his weight and looked toward the sky as if hoping for a glimpse of the birds together to help him form his answer. "I can't really think of a time I've seen it before, but maybe it is just a coincidence. They have the same prey, after all. Perhaps they just have the same hunting radius. Did it look as though one was going after the other? Did either seem territorial?"

Georgie wanted to say, *they seemed like friends*, but thought it might sound strange. He said instead, "No, it didn't look like they were bothered by each other. It just seemed odd to me. I've never read or seen anything like it before."

"Well, there's still so much to learn about these birds. Feel free to check the library to see if there's any information. I'll see what I can find too. Seems you've found something you don't know about hawks yet, Georgie. This could be your scientific contribution to the field of ornithology." Georgie laughed as he thanked Kevin before joining the group to help clean up from the dodge sponge game.

After closing circle, Georgie and Beanie set off from camp together. They planned to walk to the athletic field to meet up with David to see how his first day of sports camp had been. They took the path that led behind the Nature Center toward town where the athletic center and town square were located.

"Good first day," Beanie said enthusiastically. "I'm so glad we are with Jocelyn this year. Do you think she had something to do with the groups? I asked her the day she told me, but she didn't admit to anything."

"Probably. Either way, I'm glad too!"

"And I can't wait to get started on the festival float! The Center's always so beautiful! I loved it last year with those little rivers! Are you going walk with the float?"

"I think so, but I'm not sure if my mum is doing something for the store too. I might go with her if she needs me to. I definitely want to help out with the one for the Nature Center though. I talked to Jocelyn a little bit more about it when we were cleaning up and she said they've already started working on it. She said anytime we want to stay after camp we can help out."

Beanie clapped and twirled around, letting her paper coat blow around her. "I can't wait to paint and make stuff!"

Georgie continued, "I think we are also going to do some projects during camp to help decorate too, and the younger campers are marching as insects, so I think they'll need help with their costumes. Then the Center has those big animal costumes...the owl, the skunk and the squirrel! I'd love to wear one of those but the counselors usually get to."

"It would be so great to wear one," Beanie giggled. "I used to love to have my picture taken with them! I remember when I first moved in with my grandparents, it was just before the festival. That's one of the first memories I have of living here." Georgie and Beanie discussed their favorite festival memories as they walked toward the field. When they arrived on the main street they could see the campers gathered in a large circle on the field.

"Looks like they're finishing up," Georgie stated.

Beanie squinted toward the field. "You think so?" She looked at her watch. "I thought David said they finished up at five."

Georgie pulled Beanie's wrist toward his face to look at her watch. It was 4:40. "Well, that counselor is passing out slips that say 'Today's Activities' so maybe they ended early because it's the first day."

Beanie stared at Georgie in disbelief then squinted back toward the field. "Georgie, are you joking? How can you possibly see what it says on those papers?"

"What? Oh look, Beanie," he said as he pointed to a young camper. "You can see the one that kid right there is holding. It says, 'Today's Activities: today we played baseball, lacrosse and tennis,' um, something about lunch then something about swimming...I'm not sure, his fingers are blocking a bunch of the words toward the bottom." He scanned the group. "I can't really see more of anyone else's."

Beanie continued to shift her gaze back and forth between Georgie and the group below on the field. "Georgie, those kids are pretty far away and I don't think those papers are very big. I can't even tell there are letters on those papers, never mind reading them from here."

"I don't know," Georgie mumbled, "it looks clear to me. Anyway, David should be coming up any minute. What were we talking about?"

Beanie wrinkled her nose in concentration. "Um, festival, delicious junk food, Miss Gracie loving the festival because the squirrels take a break from her yard to," she paused and snapped her fingers, "to, what was your word, *pirate* the trash cans? Then you said the chipmunk on my coat looks sneaky. That's where we were before we got here and you started reading small papers from miles away." She laughed and held out her coat, looking at the small chipmunk on the side. "I guess he does! Chipmunks always seem to be up to something. That must be why I drew him with that expression on his face." She twirled around, holding the sides of her coat at arm's length so the paper rippled around her.

"*Pillage* the trash cans," Georgie corrected, taking advantage of Beanie's preoccupation with her coat. "I said *pillage*, not pirate." He drew a breath to continue speaking but was interrupted.

"Wow." A haughty voice crept over the hill toward the place on the road where Georgie and Beanie stood. "The circus must be coming to town this summer after all."

Beanie halted mid-twirl. She looked at Georgie and rolled her eyes with an exasperated sigh. "Ugh, please tell me that is *not* Mackie Fitzsimmons walking toward us!" Her voice grew louder with each word.

Georgie looked at the approaching boys over Beanie's shoulder. The one in the middle had black hair that fell in styled disarray around his sharply angled face, covering one dark brown eye. The other two had a similar look, though it was obvious theirs was in an attempt to copy. They all walked with confident swaggers as they closed in on Georgie and Beanie. "I wish I could tell you that, Beanie. Unfortunately, I cannot."

"Groan!" Beanie said the word and stamped her foot. "Here we were having such a nice day!" She turned to look at the boys then straightened herself up, walking past them toward the field. "What's keeping David?"

"In the wrong end of town, aren't you two?" Mackie barked. "Or are you searching for lizards or something like that?" The boys guffawed and exchanged high-fives.

Georgie and Beanie glanced at each other. Beanie suppressed a smile. Georgie shrugged and said. "They really got us on that one."

"What'd you say, Green?" Mackie Fitzsimmons took a step toward Georgie. The two boys with him stepped closer as well, one thumping the handle of his baseball bat on the ground, the other cracking his knuckles. Beanie slowly stepped closer to Georgie.

"Said you really got us with that lizard comment. It was creative. I imagine because we go to nature camp, that's how you thought of it. So, good one. Sting!" Georgie said this last word with a little smirk.

"And listen to that intimidating knuckle cracking, Georgie. They've got us." Beanie exaggerated a nod but she shifted even closer to Georgie.

"You're one to talk, Ogden." Mackie Fitzsimmons laughed as he reached out for Beanie's coat. "This is nothing but a stupid paper bag." She jumped aside just in time to avoid his clenching fist. "What? Do you think that's cool or something?"

"It isn't anything I'd expect you to understand." Beanie said, her voice strong and clear though

Georgie could feel her shaking slightly.

"Yeah, real hard to grasp the concept of a stupid paper bag with stupid animals on it. Guess your grandparents don't care to buy you real clothes—they just send you out in paper ones!" He laughed at her again. "Real awesome look, super cool bag you got on!" Stu's laughter encouraged Mackie on. "Wonder what happens to your cool paper bag when it rains?" Mackie moved too fast for Beanie to jump out of his way this time. He grabbed his water bottle and squeezed it all over her. The colors of her drawing began to bleed into each other. Mackie kept squeezing the water bottle at her, chasing her back and forth in the street as she tried to get away. She turned to move past Stu but he put his foot out and tripped her. Beanie fell to the paved street, her paper gown—now completely soaked—began to shred when she reached out her hand to catch her fall. Mackie Fitzsimmons reached down and grabbed a handful of wet paper from Beanie's coat. He bit off a little piece of it and chewed it for a minute. He then took the straw from his water bottle and *Thwaap!* The spitball hit Georgie in the face. Martin grabbed Georgie from behind and held onto his arms as Georgie wriggled in an attempt to free himself. Beanie got to her knees, rubbing her hands, which appeared to be scratched and bloody.

Georgie could feel his anger growing. The feeling caused his toes to curl in his shoes and his shoulders to tense and rise toward his ears. Mackie Fitzsimmons' laughter throbbed in Georgie's eardrums. He could feel every note of that annoying, shrill, girly laugh plunk inside his brain. He elbowed Martin in the stomach and stomped on his foot. Martin released Georgie and began to cough and moan. Georgie bent down next to Beanie and helped her to her feet. Mackie, Stu and Martin had taken a few steps away, noticing more campers approaching, but still laughed and called out to them. The Hurley's garage door started to open and the three took a few steps further away from Georgie and Beanie.

"Just c'mon, Georgie," Beanie implored as she reached for his hand. They turned to walk away.

"Oh, little girlfriend is scared, Georgie-boy! Better take her hand and get going! Maybe she wants to go color some more clothes for the two of you?" Mackie Fitzsimmons laughed again and Georgie felt another warm gooey *pop* smack his neck and slowly slide down to his collar as his shoulders tensed even more.

"Georgie," Beanie urged, "just walk away. Please." He could feel her arm shaking as she leaned closer to him. But Georgie stopped. He smiled and let go of Beanie's hand. He rolled his shoulders and shook his arms out at his sides then raised his shoulders back up toward his ears again.

"Gonna fight me, little Georgie? Gonna show your girlfriend how tough—" but his words froze in the air. Georgie turned slowly toward Mackie Fitzsimmons. He stared at him, glaring with a fierce intensity that unnerved Mackie. Then, in a flash, Georgie moved. Before anyone on the street could blink, Georgie was standing inches away from Mackie. Beanie looked to her left where Georgie had been standing and then shifted her gaze slowly toward where Georgie now stood in front of Mackie, a stunned expression on her face.

"Why don't you just leave us alone, Fitzsimmons." Georgie stated more than asked as he stared into Mackie's bulging eyes. Georgie moved quickly, grabbing Mackie's water bottle right out of his hand. He clutched it in his fingers; and holding the bottle right in front of Mackie's face, proceeded to crush it as if it were paper rather than hard sturdy plastic. "Starting now!" Georgie dropped the crushed bottle at Mackie's feet then turned and, as quickly as he had appeared next to Mackie, was back by Beanie's side.

He held out his arm to Beanie and she wrapped her own around it. The two turned and walked down to the field, the sound of Mackie, Stu and Martin's rapidly retreating and stumbling steps fading in the distance.