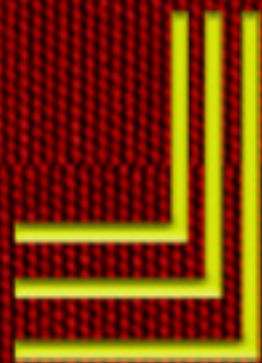


MY JOURNAL





JUNE 6

Woke up today with the sound of nature all around. I'm excited? I haven't been excited in so long. But I am excited. One week until Camp starts! I didn't think I'd like being a counselor, but so far, getting to know the other first-time counselors has been one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had. The other girls are so kind, and everyone seems like they are equally homesick. Actually, I think there are a couple of girls who seem like they have it even worse than I do! Oh no, I don't like the way that looks written down. I don't want to be happy at anyone else's distress. I'm not excited about them being more homesick than I am. But I am excited that I can help them! We can help each other! Anyway, I should actually get up and start the day instead of writing about how much I'm looking forward to it. There's food to eat, canoes to get out of storage, and a list of things a mile long to do before we open one week from today! Happiest Monday!

June 7

I think I spoke too soon yesterday. Not all of the other counselors are kind. Two of them seem downright mean. The others are nice enough, though! I'm not sure where I fit in, but I hope I'm one of the nice ones. Phoebe is probably the best of us, but I think she's also the saddest. I want to help her so much, but I feel like the best I can do is sit next to her while we both feel homesick. I think the worst part of it is that neither of us has anyone to write to anymore. It's hard to be away from home when there's no one waiting for you.

Okay, enough of that! Today was a positive day! We started clearing the bunk houses of last year's mess, as well as leaves that blew in last autumn. We also did a little repair work on the shingles! I got on the roof. I didn't do any hammering myself, but I helped Phoebe, and that was almost as good as doing it myself. She's so smart! She knew exactly what to do and how to put the shingles in the right place so water won't get through.

Tomorrow, we hike out to the archery field to clean and set up. I'm looking forward to getting a few bows out of the shed and trying out my marksmanship. I've never tried a bow before!

June 8

Phoebe is a true friend! Today, she helped me out of a tough spot when two of the other girls (I always get them confused!) started being mean to me. I was in the archery supply hut all by myself, imagining what it would be like to be Diana, or this lady I remember who rode on horseback and shot arrows at a target. We have horses here, so I thought that I could learn how to do that, and it was just such a lovely daydream. But then the two girls came in, and they started to tease me about being a centaur. It was scary because it was like they could tell what was going on in my head. I didn't like that at all! I wanted to know how they knew what I was thinking about, but I couldn't

ask them because they kept pushing me and poking me and calling me centaur girl.

But then Phoebe came in and told them to stop. I don't think they are afraid of Phoebe exactly, but they don't try to bully her the way they do ... other people? I was going to say "everyone else" but right now there's only the five of us. That's strange, isn't it? Where are the adults? Why isn't there someone here to supervise us?

June 9

It was raining when we woke up. But it was so light and peaceful, I don't think any of us minded walking to the mess hall through it. Even the 'twins' (my special name for the mean girls) seemed to enjoy it. They were pretty calm most of the morning, and Phoebe and I were able to talk without being interrupted. The other girl in our group, Charity, spoke to me for the first time today. Her voice was so familiar, but I don't think I've heard her

Speak a word since we've gotten here. She's very quiet, but I learned that she likes music and dancing, though she's never been to a dance.

I've never been to a dance either. I think we should have one. Of course, there are only five of us, but maybe when the campers get here, we can have a big dance with music on the record player, and maybe we can tune in to a radio station. Hm. I don't think I've seen a radio around, which is odd, because there is a broadcast cabin. I wonder if we're going to go in there sometime this week.

What else happened today? Boy, this is strange. I'm trying to remember, but I can't. We had breakfast. We walked out into the drizzle, and I think—no, I don't remember. I'd ask one of the other girls, but everyone else is asleep. No, that's not true. One of the twins is up, and she's staring at me. Maybe I'm disturbing her. I'm going to turn my light off and go to sleep.

June 10

I don't remember being scared of boats, but I also don't ever remember being as frightened of anything as I was today. (Did that sentence make sense?) Today we got canoes from the boathouse and took them out on the water. Phoebe helped Charity, and the twins went together, so I was left alone, which was fine at first! There are smaller one-person canoes, and it was easy to paddle on my own. And, I don't want to make it seem like Phoebe didn't help me at all! She helped me carry the canoe down to the water, and she pulled me back up when I fell in.

Which I did.

Not right away, since it was a beautiful day and the water was calm and slow. We started up near the little bridge by the chapel and got the boats in the water just after breakfast. I didn't want to admit it to anyone else, but I was scared as soon as I sat in my canoe. I think Phoebe saw the look on my face, because she gave me the

most comforting smile. But then she was gone and helping Charity into their canoe. And then we were off, paddling down the river.

Everything was fine until we came to the big northeastern bend. Phoebe and Charity were chatting by me, though we all kept our voices low. I could see that something was bothering Charity, and even Phoebe seemed a little less ... I don't know. I was going to write 'chipper,' but she's not chipper. Maybe 'confident' is the better word. Even the twins were subdued, though they did mock me several times in hushed tones.

When we got to the bend, that's when things got bad.

There was a rock in the river none of us had ever seen. It was strange and white, like chalk or bone, and it stabbed up through the water's surface in a way that felt wrong.

Unnatural. Phoebe pointed and whispered something that I could barely hear, but I got her message. 'STAY AWAY!'

So I tried. But I failed. The current, which had been weak

until then, pulled me forward and toward that strange little white stone. I paddled as hard as I could, but I couldn't turn my boat. Then I hit it, and there was this terrible hollow sound, like there was nothing inside the rock. When I hit it, my canoe listed to the right so far that I grabbed the gunwale with one hand and tried to hold onto my oar with the other. Then, I listed to the other side, and I almost tipped onto the rock! That's when I lost my oar and had to hold on with both hands.

Back and forth, back and forth! Like someone was grabbing the keel and shaking it back and forth! I started—no! Wait! I hadn't thought about this before, but I must have gotten stuck on something on the side of the rock. Maybe that's what was happening, because I realized I should have been floating past the rock by this point! But I wasn't. I remember bashing my shoulder against it a few times (it still hurts). When I got close, something, maybe underwater weeds got wrapped up around the canoe?

Does that make sense? No.

But neither does what I saw.

The rocking was too hard, and finally, after what felt like hours, I fell in.

I've never been so scared. Everything went black! I thought that that was going to be it, that I was just going to die right then and there! I heard this awful moaning sound, like two giant pieces of metal scraping against each other, or like a wounded animal carooing for help. I didn't open my eyes, and I don't think I even splashed around to try to swim. I just floated down. I remember something bumping into my hip, and then my knee. It was soft and heavy, like—I don't know what it was like. It was just awful.

I'm pretty sure I panicked, because in my mind, I could see this huge black swirling, like a big eddy in the water, or like a whirlpool. And it was pulling me down toward its center, which was even darker than black. I know that part

doesn't make sense. It was pulling me down, and I got the feeling that it would pull the whole camp down into it, and not just the camp, but the whole world.

I'm not sure it would have gotten the whole world, but I'm pretty sure it would have gotten me if Phoebe hadn't grabbed me and pulled me back up. When I got my head above water, I saw Charity bashing at the rock with her oar, and even the twins were standing in their canoe screaming at the white stone. This scared me almost as much as being under the water. They looked so monstrous! But—I don't know. It made me feel something. I don't know how to say it, but ... they were monstrous for me. They were standing in their boat, pointing and screaming at the bone-stone thing because of me.

Of course, they mocked me once I was safely back in my canoe. When we got a good hundred yards from the rock, Phoebe fished my oar out of the water and gave it to Charity, who had given me hers. When we reached

the landing, I was still shaking. Phoebe hugged me, and Charity held my hand. The twins pulled my canoe onto dry ground and then walked away.

I guess that was nice of them. After that, we didn't do much today except eat, and read, and lie about.

It's time to put my lamp out. I can see them staring at me again. Please, God, don't give me nightmares tonight.

June 11

A dry day! No rain, no river, just dust! So much dust! Today we turned down Josie's Bunk and, boy, did it need it! It was like no one had been in there in a hundred years! I was excited to get in there and clean it up so our campers could have a cozy new home for the next two months, but wow, I didn't know how much work there would be! Also, I didn't know that we were only cleaning it for one camper! That makes me so sad! From what Phoebe said, the other bunks will be full, but Josie's bunk is only going to have

one girl in it! That's terrible! Who came up with that hare-brained scheme? I just don't see why one of the girls from the other bunks couldn't be put in with her. Or two! A bunk of three girls would be absolutely fine! But only one? It doesn't make any sense!

I told Phoebe what I thought about it, and she said we all had to do it. I'm not sure what she meant by that, but I think she means we all had a rough go of it the first time we came to camp. But I'm not sure I ever went to camp. I don't think I did. Or maybe I did. I can't remember.

Either way, I think it stinks. So, I got her a brand new rucksack and put it on her bed after we made it up with the blankets and sheets quarter-bounce tight! And when she gets here, I'm going to be extra-special nice to her. And if I have to sleep in one of the empty bunks in Josie's to keep her company, then that's what I'm going to do. I wish there were someone to talk to about this!

Why are we alone? Is someone in contact with whoever is

in charge? I'll have to ask Phoebe again tomorrow.

June 12

Camp is officially open! Sort of. We got our one early camper today, and, of course, it's the girl in Josie's Bunk! Why? Why does the girl who has to spend the next two months alone in her bunk have to be the one who shows up when the camp is totally empty? Well, Phoebe and Charity and I were all talking about what to do, and we decided that we're going to try to make her feel as welcome and at home as we can.

Of course, that's been a little tough, since there's a storm roaring outside. The twins were saying that the river might flood, but I don't think so. Phoebe was saying that some of the roads into camp got washed out or blocked off by falling trees, but the river doesn't look any bigger than it did this morning, and Charity says we're on high ground, so it will be fine.

Still, I don't like the idea of Ash being here alone for more than a day. So I asked Phoebe if there's anything we can do, and she said that Tuesday is the new moon, so we can have her help us make the candles and build the bonfire. I think that will be nice. I'll show her how to carve her candle so that it's unique to her. I used to love carving the new moon candle in school. Charity showed me how to— No, that doesn't make any sense, does it? Charity and I didn't go to school together.

June 13

Okay, today was supposed to be the official first day of camp, but the whole world has gone daffy! We have one camper, Ash, who is a sweet girl, and probably older than her years! The storms were bad last night, but mostly we just have some branches scattered around, and one window got broken in the printing cabin. The twins got right to fixing it, though it took them hours.

Ash came to me and asked me what we were going to do, so I told her that tomorrow is Candle Day and today we gather our wax! We will sing the song of bees and make them leave the apiary until we all have enough for our candles (and get all the honey we can eat!)

She said the strangest thing to me then. "What is Candle Day?" I thought she was making fun of me at first, and then I realized she was serious. Where does she come from that they don't celebrate Candle Day every month? I don't get it at all. I asked Phoebe and she looked as confused as I was. The same thing with Charity.

It bothered me so much that I told Ash to go to the apiary and wait for us. I went to the printing cabin to ask the twins, because as much as they can be cruel, they know things. They hurled insults at me when I walked up, but I'm used to that now. I waited until they were done. They took a while, blabbering and gibbering. They are both quite mad. I felt like Alice at the tea party. They made

jokes at my expense, at each other's, and even said nonsense things. But when they quieted down, they finally asked me what I had come for. And I told them about Ash, and that she didn't know what Candle Day was.

They looked at each other gravely. I have never seen them so serious. Then, the older one, I think she's older anyway, walked toward me and pointed her finger at me. Other than falling in the river, nothing has scared me as much as when she walked toward me, staring at me.

"She is new," she said, finally. "That is why we are here. She is new. That is why we are here."

I stared at her, and I could see my eyes reflected in hers. That was so strange and scary! And it made me think about Ash's eyes. I was so afraid, I didn't want to talk, but the question just bubbled out of me.

"Is that why her eyes are brown?" I asked.

She nodded.

"If she stays longer, will that change?"

She nodded again.

"Where does she come from where they don't know about Candle Day and they have brown eyes?" I asked.

"The same place we all come from," she said. "But now that she's here, she'll become like us."

Then she did something I wouldn't have guessed in a million years. She leaned in and kissed me on the cheek.

"She's our sister now," she said.

And I said, "Thank you, Theresa."

And she nodded at me, and I went away, not afraid anymore.

What a strange day!

