

Camp horror

I was shivering so violently my knees gave way and I found my face just inches from the mouldy rotten figure that lay at my feet, unmoving and white as a sheet. I screamed so loudly that the walls ached. I felt like weeping and fainting at the same time. Displaying amazing multi-tasking skills, I did both. When I came to, my vision was hazy and I was still frightened beyond words. A corpse. A dead body lying silently in the middle of this lively, fun-filled camp, rotting away as oblivious campers slept. It was absolutely putrid.

The body was a man's. Tall, lean and fair skinned. He had slick black hair and a sort of George Clooney look about him. His flesh was in chunks, some shrivelled some gone completely, others in perfect condition. What was left of his skin was so deathly pale he looked as if he'd been deep frozen. I was too petrified to touch him but I'd bet you anything you like that his skin was as icy as the vast planes of Antarctica in the dead of winter.

If his appearance wasn't startling enough, in his left hand, he clutched a glinting silver blood stained knife. This made me seriously doubt his dying of a heart attack or seizure. Regaining my composure, I planned my next move. I had to tell someone. If I kept it bottled up I would go crazy, nightmares would pummel me from every angle. It had to be someone I could trust.

"Rebecca?" I called knocking on the door of her bunkroom at two in the morning. I opened the door a fraction. I tiptoed cautiously over to her bottom bunk. Gently I shook her awake.

"What is it?" She slurred, half asleep.

"I can't tell you here, you have to come with me. And bring your torch."

"But why—"

I cut her off.

"I'll tell you when there's nobody around."

We managed to exit her cabin without waking any of the other campers. When we were outside, and safely out of earshot of the camp, I told her what I had discovered.

"A body? Right." I could hear from her tone that she didn't believe me.

"I'll show you then," I pulled her along toward the small shed by the horse paddock.

"Look, Izzy, it's two o'clock at night. I'm tired. Can't this prank wait 'til the morning?" Despite her protests, I continued to lead her toward the shed. Shining the torch on the padlock bolting the door, I skilfully picked the lock with a bobby pin. I opened the door and shone the torch in, leaving the grotesque body in plain view.

Rebecca began to scream but I was ready with a hand which I clamped tightly over her mouth.

"Who- who is it?" She stammered, her voice cracked with terror.

"That's what I was hoping we could find out. See that knife in his hand? I don't think it was an accident."

Rebecca, past speaking, nodded. I dug in my pocket for my digital camera and took several photos of the body.

"We'd better go back to sleep- we've got a big day ahead of us." I led her back to her cabin. She obediently allowed herself to be pulled along. She was in shock. She was in for some nightmares tonight.

The next morning, Rebecca sat next to me at breakfast. There were deep shadows under her eyes from lack of sleep.

"I couldn't get to sleep last night," she whispered, "I kept thinking about that freaky dead person in the horse shed. How long do you think it's been there?"

"A while," I replied, "cause it's rotted quite a bit. Today I'm going to ask the manager if anything strange ever happened at the camp in the past few months."

"Do you think it was murder?" She whispered, quieter than her usual talking-level whisper which she amusingly displayed in social studies. I shrugged in answer to her question. I wasn't jumping to any conclusions. We continued eating our toast in silence.

In free time, Rebecca and I approached Willy, the camp manager. We asked whether anything particularly strange had happened at the camp in recent months.

"Why do you ask?" He asked casually, but his voice was edged with suspicion.

"We came across something rather frightening in the horse shed," I answered, choosing my words carefully. His eyes widened slightly.

"How much did you see?" He questioned nervously, his voice quiet and fast.

"Everything," Rebecca replied, grinning slightly at the grown man, shaking and sweating before her.

"Let's go somewhere more private and I'll tell you everything," he promised. Then seemingly to himself he murmured, "I knew this day would come some day, should have done something about it."

"Last month," Willy began, once we were comfortably situated in the empty staff lounge, "a man- one of the boys who was staying here's father- went missing after supper. He said he was going out to cut one of the horses free that had got tangled up in a rope somehow.

"He went out with a sharp meat cleaver from the kitchen. I followed, because he wasn't supposed to touch the horses without supervision from a staff member, even if he was a grown man.

"Anyway, he went out to the horse paddock and began using the meat cleaver to carve something into the horse's flank. It was a horror to watch, the animal was in extreme pain. Worried that he might turn the weapon onto me, I grabbed a dustbin lid and burst out from behind the horse shed and yelled at him to stop.

"He was so surprised that he took a step back, leaving himself directly behind the horse. In a split second, he was lying on the ground, a large hoof mark adorning his chest. It was easy to see he was dead.

"In a nervous outbreak of panic and confusion, I dragged the body into that shed, worried that if I told anyone, I'd be charged with his murder. I mean, it was me who made him step back, and the man was holding a cleaver covered in blood for crying out loud! I know I should have got rid of that body long ago. But I just couldn't think *how*.

"The boy was told that his father spontaneously combusted. The camp was cut short and they all went home."

So the mystery of the body in the horse shed was solved. But from it another mystery was born.

"What about the horse? Did it live? What did he carve into it?" I inquired.

"The horse was fine but it was too timid to be ridden anymore. It went to a sanctuary in Nelson. As for the carving, well, it was a weird sort of symbol. I'd never seen anything like it before. I've got a picture if you like."

"Yes, thank you," Rebecca replied. Willy disappeared and returned a minute later with a picture of a horse's flank, with a gory red wound on it. The wound was in the shape of a diamond with a cross through the middle surrounded by wavy lines like sun rays.

"That's Bassanette gang!" I exclaimed, "Any animal rights activist would recognise that symbol, they're a bunch of animal torturing sadists!" I explained further, "It all started when one man- Gregory Bassanette- decided that humans were so much better than any other living thing, that there really was no need for them. He started a gang devoted to wiping all the animals in the world. Gregory Bassanette died in 1976 but his gang has continued to grow full of people trying to eliminate all the animals in the world."

Rebecca gasped in horror. "That's sick," she remarked. I nodded in agreement.

"I guess that's that mystery solved as well," I concluded.

"Willy, you really should go to the police," Rebecca advised the traumatised camp manager.

"You won't be blamed," I added. Willy nodded.

"I'm going to free myself of the burden once and for all," he agreed.

"Hey, we've got horse riding in ten minutes, what say we leave this to the police and try to enjoy what's left of camp,"

Rebecca suggested. I agreed.

"Great idea, bye Willy!"

For the last time on that camp, Rebecca and I made our way to the horse paddock. This sure was a camp experience unlike any other.