

FIRST DEER CHEER



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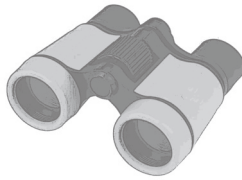
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Chapter 1

I lean over in the back seat so I can see between my dad and Greg. Through the bug-plastered windshield of Dad's truck, I see the headlights bounce up and down. We're turning onto the old dirt driveway, which marks the end of our four-hour journey.

Then I see it. Grandma and Grandpa's magical old red log cabin. It's tucked way back in the woods of northern Minnesota. The truck headlights shine on it like a spotlight shines on a star on stage.

“There she is, Crystal,” Dad says. “Just sitting there, waiting patiently for us to return.”

“Yep. And I can’t wait to get inside!” I say.

We have been coming up here my whole life. We’ve spent a million hours swimming in the lake at the bottom of the hill. Animals and birds are everywhere, which is cool. The adventures never end up here in the woods.

And this will be the best weekend ever! It’s the youth deer season. It’s a special time when young hunters like me can go after whitetail deer before the regular hunting season begins in a few weeks.

I look over at the seat next to me. Megan is curled up on a pillow pressed

against the window. She's been sleeping for hours.

“Megan, wake up! We're here!” I say, unable to contain my excitement.

Megan is my best friend in the whole world. We have known each other since kindergarten. She always has a sparkle in her eye and a smile on her face—when she's not tired, that is.

We both play volleyball and softball. We're always on the same teams. (But I'll admit she's a little better than me!)

The coolest thing, though, is that we both love shooting guns and hunting!

Greg is Megan's dad. He and my dad have become friends over the years, especially because they love hunting and

the outdoors too. They've been showing us girls how to shoot guns since we were ten.

That's why this weekend is so special. Because we're twelve, Megan and I get to hunt deer with our dads for the first time!

For a few years now, I've gone out several times to sit with Dad while he hunts. But tomorrow is the first time I will have the gun in my hands. I can't wait!

I'm not sure who's more excited: us girls or our dads. Dad and Greg have been acting a little crazy the last two weeks. They've been talking on the phone constantly and going through all the details with us girls. My dad never got me this ready for any volleyball game, I will tell you.

Dad even decided to leave my little brother, Luke, home this weekend. That way, Dad and I can spend the whole weekend

together. It killed Luke to stay home. He loves hunting and coming to the cabin as much as I do. But that little dude will have plenty of time to join Dad and me on other hunts when he gets older!

Megan and I are so lucky that our dads take us hunting. We have friends at school who think hunting is only for boys. That's crazy, I tell them! Girls love hunting too. No different than boys. Whether you're a girl or a boy, all you need is someone to help you learn how to do it, so you can get out there and give it a try. And that's exactly what Megan and I are going to do this weekend!

I look at Megan again. She's *still* sleeping.

"Megan!" I repeat, shaking her this time. "We're here!"

“What? Huh? Are we there yet?” she says through a frog voice. She pushes her shoulder-length brown hair out of her face as she slowly comes back to life.

“Yes! We’re here!”

“Welcome back to the land of the living, Megan Marie!” Greg says in a funny high-pitched voice from the front passenger seat.

Greg is always joking around. He’s about the same height as my dad but bigger. Let’s put it this way: if they played on the same football team, Greg would be a lineman, and my dad would be the quarterback.

Greg has dark-brown hair like Megan, and my dad has strawberry-blond hair like me. It’s kind of funny, now that I

think about it. I guess that's how it works sometimes.

Dad pulls the truck up to the cabin and cuts the engine. "We made it!" he says with a proud smile.

"Never a doubt," Greg says as he opens his door and slides out.

I unbuckle, pull on my favorite green volleyball jacket, and open the door. Instantly, the cold October air hits my face. I love it! I take a big breath in through my nose. A smile fills my face as the familiar smell of fresh pine is everywhere.

Instantly, I'm right at home. I love everything about the north woods and this cabin.

Dad makes his way inside the cabin and turns on the porch light. Like magic, the whole yard lights up.

I grab my blue duffel bag and head inside too. There's no need to take off our shoes as we enter. The old brown linoleum floor can hold up to whatever we drag in from the outside.

Dad is busy lighting the big black barrel stove just outside the kitchen. It's not crazy cold here inside the cabin, but we could definitely use some heat. Greg goes through the doorway that is just off the kitchen and heads to the living room to light the fireplace there as well.

I make my way over to the two little beds that sit just off the kitchen. That's where Megan and I will sleep. The dark brown wood-paneled walls are filled with outdoor pictures and a huge mounted northern pike my grandpa caught years ago.

Still looking half asleep, Megan comes in, lugging her pink camo bag over

her right shoulder. She drops the bag with a thud on the floor.

“I’m *tirrrred*, Crystal . . .” she says, dragging out her words.

“I’m too excited to be tired,” I reply. “We’re going hunting in the morning!”

Megan nods and forces a half smile. Without a word, she turns to go outside to get another load from the truck.

I can’t help but laugh. I know she’s just as excited as me. We’ve been talking about this for weeks. But one thing about Megan is that she likes her sleep!

Before we know it, the truck is unloaded. Inside, the stove is warming up the kitchen and the main area of the cabin. Greg also has the fireplace roaring in the

living room. The light from the flames are dancing on the walls.

The living room is my favorite place in the cabin. It has green carpet and a bunch of windows looking down the hill to the lake. The fireplace fills up the wall on one end, and it always keeps us warm.

On the back wall, there is a giant picture frame packed full of photos. Most of the pictures show someone posing with an

