

A Kahale and Claude Mystery

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# CAMP LENAPE

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*For my students, past and present.*



# Prologue

Tuesday, March 13. 2:15 a.m.

Deep in the Allegheny Mountains, three young men stood on a narrow, dirt road. It was dark save for a battery-powered lantern that sat before the men as if holding a conference with them. The lantern's glow gave off just enough illumination that the men could see their own breath as they exhaled into the chilly, late winter night.

Erik Novak's neatly trimmed beard and trendy, East Coast clothing set him apart as the leader of the trio. He glared at the two younger men, Paul and Joey Meier, who stood on either side of him. They were brothers, a few years apart, with patchy beards, dressed in faded flannels. Paul was a few years older than Joey. Where Paul was short and broad, Joey was tall and scrawny.

They were inexperienced, but Erik had limited time and needed the help of the locals. Checking his watch, Erik huffed. Paul, the older of the two brothers, had promised a contact, Uncle Tommie, who was supposed to show five minutes ago. Erik opened his mouth to speak to the brothers and send them away, but the sound of crunching leaves from the thicket of brush and pine behind the men caused him to turn in expectation.

Uncle Tommie, a neatly dressed man in his sixties, appeared. Though Erik couldn't make out every detail of the man's features, he immediately recognized the toothy, mustached grin from the pictures Paul had shown him.

"See, boss," said Paul as he bounced on his tiptoes. "I told you Uncle Tommie would show."

"You did," Erik said through clenched teeth. He turned to Uncle Tommie. "Nice to do business with you, Uncle—"

"Just Tom," said the older man, cutting off Erik. "It's nice doing business with you as well."

Erik extended his hand, and Tom shook it. The older man's grip was firm. As the two men released their handshake, Erik noticed a twitch in Tom's eye and looked at him coldly.

"You're late," Erik said.

Tom didn't reply. He didn't need to. The four of them were suddenly awash with the light of an approaching sedan.

“No, I’m not late,” said Tom. He pointed at the car. “They are.”

When the car stopped ten feet in front of the men, the doors opened. Two men, one in his thirties with a full head of jet-black hair and the other of an ambiguous older age with a clean-shaven head, got out. The older, bald man approached the group while the younger man remained near the car with his hand resting on a gun holstered at his hip.

“Erik,” Tom said. “I want you to meet...”

“Dick, or you can call me Richard,” said the older man, extending his hand to Erik, who took it. “I understand we are to use first names.”

“You’re correct,” Erik said. “It’s better that way.” Erik glanced behind Richard. “Who’s the other guy?”

“That’s Neil. He doesn’t talk much.” Richard rubbed a hand over his bald head.

Erik scratched his bearded cheek and glanced at Tom. Other than the twitch in his right eye, Tom stood there completely relaxed.

“You two are good with the arrangement?” asked Erik.

“We are,” Richard said as he turned to Tom. “But this is a big ask.”

Tom blinked. “Dick, you know how important this is.”

“I do,” Richard said. “You don’t need to remind

me. Besides, I've got retirement to look forward to, and this is going to help a lot."

"Yes, it will," Tom said. He cleared his throat as he glanced at Erik.

"Excellent," said Erik. "Shall we proceed?"

The two older men nodded to each other.

"Go ahead," Tom said.

Erik held out an open palm to Paul, one of his scruffy sidekicks, who produced two thick envelopes.

"This should be sufficient for the next few months," Erik said as he handed an envelope to Tom and the other to Richard. "You know what's expected."

"We do," the two older men said simultaneously as if rehearsed.

"You both understand that Detroit won't be happy if they're double-crossed," Erik said sternly.

Both older men shifted their weight. Even Neil stood erect next to the car where he'd been casually leaning.

"Excellent," Erik said. "We'll revisit in, say, three months."

The two older men each shook hands with Erik. They stuffed their envelopes into their pockets, sealing an unwritten contract agreed upon months ago. Tom turned and disappeared into the darkness of the forest. Richard returned to the

sedan where Neil was already seated in the passenger seat. Richard slammed the door shut and backed the vehicle up, leaving the other men to squint and shield their eyes from the glare of the headlights.

When the sedan was gone and the glow of the lantern was all that illuminated the trio, Paul broke the silence.

“You sure you can trust them?” Paul asked.

“You sure I can trust you two?” asked Erik as he glared at the scruffy brothers. They were hired hands, but more importantly, they were clean.

“You can count on it, boss,” Joey chimed in, far too eager to impress the boss.

Paul slapped his younger brother in the back of the head. Joey rubbed his head but didn’t whine about being hit.

“Good,” Erik said. “Joey, grab the lantern. We’ve got work to do.”

Without waiting for a response, Erik entered the shadows of the forest, stopping momentarily for the lantern’s glow to catch up with him. Erik preferred to do business with people he knew, but time was of the essence. Besides, these two men, just like the three that had left, were dispensable, and he would not hesitate to act against them, should the need arise.

# PART ONE

# Chapter 1

Monday, July 16.

Under the blue skies overlooking Camp Lenape on a sunny afternoon, Marcus Kahale stood as the third-base coach. He pulled his hair back and off his neck, in anticipation of the afternoon's heat. At first base, Alissa Claude took her position as coach. She doused water over her long braids, then shook out the excess. Marcus grinned until Alissa realized he was watching her. She waved at him.

“Get ready!” Alissa shouted.

Marcus flashed her an exaggerated thumbs-up. He had a sparkle in his hazel eyes. Marcus and Alissa, like the other teens taking their places in

the outfield, were junior camp counselors. Both had aged out of Camp Lenape's summer program after completing their freshman year of high school the previous year. They, like their peers, had been exemplary campers. Mr. Roberts, the camp director, taking up a position on the pitcher's mound, had offered them the opportunity to work at camp.

Mr. Roberts had grown up at the camp, a baseball camp founded by his father sixty years ago. He'd gone on to pitch in the minor leagues in his twenties, but an injury brought him back to the camp a few years later. Some thirty years ago, Mr. Roberts had inherited the camp when his father passed away. He made the progressive decision to expand the program to include girls. Baseball was now just one of the outlets Mr. Roberts used to teach the core camp principles of personal character, leadership, and teamwork.

"All right, campers," said Mr. Roberts. His voice sounded a little nasally, as it always did when he was excited and had to project his voice to a large audience. "As most of you know, today marks the first of our house games. Let's hear it for your junior counselors." Mr. Roberts paused dramatically as a hundred and twenty campers, plus their senior counselors, cheered.

Mr. Roberts rattled off a bunch of names, with each junior counselor striking some pose or doing

some dance that drove the kids wild. This included Janice and Nate, who were best friends to Alissa and Marcus. They, like the other junior camp counselors, were assigned to specific cabin groups for the summer. When the final names were announced, and the cheers came to a crescendo, Mr. Roberts, like an orchestra conductor, raised his hands and silenced the voices of every camper.

“Alrighty, kids,” Mr. Roberts said. “Up today, we have the Blue Dragons, taking the outfield first, and the Red Warriors up to bat. Now, let the...” Mr. Roberts paused dramatically as he raised an arm and pointed at the campers and counselors in the stands.

“Games begin!” everyone shouted. The cheers continued as players took up their positions.

The crack of the bat, the cheering of the fans, and the satisfying thwunk of a ball landing perfectly in an open glove all became background noise to Marcus as he observed all the action Alissa was getting as the first-base coach while he, at third base, was getting none at all. Alissa clapped her hands, cheering on slow runners to move faster and overrun first base before the ball beat them to it. Two runners lost the race, but Alissa high-fived the kids anyway. Marcus smiled at this gesture, realizing how well Alissa worked with the younger kids, encouraging them even

when they were down.

“Up next, Bri Kahale,” Mr. Roberts announced through the PA. Marcus felt his stomach do a flip as his younger sister planted her feet firm and wide at the plate. Like Marcus, she didn’t really like baseball. But over the summer, he and Alissa had worked with her on hitting and catching. Alissa, being one of those super athletic girls good at every sport, had pitched for her multiple times. After weeks of practice, Marcus had witnessed Bri consecutively send the ball sailing. He and Alissa knew Bri could hit a home run, even with two outs against them.

“You got this, girl!” Alissa shouted and clapped her hands.

Bri pointed her bat at Alissa. Alissa flashed a grin at Marcus, and he nodded.

As the pitch crossed the plate, Bri swung the bat and sent the ball flying. She dropped the bat and ran.

“Foul ball,” Uncle Craig, a twenty-something counselor new this year, called. All senior counselors were referred to as Uncle or Aunt.

Bri, head up and tight-lipped, returned to home plate and took her stance. Another pitch came, and she swung.

“Streee-ike two,” Uncle Craig called, emphasizing this with a swinging arc of his hand that ended with two of his fingers raised.

Uncle Craig seemed too into his role as umpire, Marcus observed. His sister shifted her feet and looked tiny compared to the older camper who was playing catcher. Marcus could tell Bri was getting psyched out.

“Hit it center field!” Marcus shouted. “Just like we practiced.”

Bri nodded, adjusted her stance, and held the bat ready.

The next pitch was wide. Bri swung and missed. Uncle Craig called another strike.

“C’mon, Uncle Craig!” Alissa shouted. “It was wide! Where’s your—”

The whistle blew.

Marcus didn’t have to guess at the insult she intended to lob at Uncle Craig.

Alissa crossed her arms and frowned. The Red Warriors with much grumbling took the field, while the Blue Dragons with much cheering got ready to bat.

Bri, head down and glove dangling at her side, joined Marcus in the outfield.

“That sucked,” she said.

“Nah.” Marcus tousled her dark, tight curls.

Bri batted his hand away. Marcus knew she hated it when he tousled her hair, which was why he reserved it for moments like these.

“Seriously,” Marcus said. “I would’ve done the same thing.”

“I know. You suck, too.” Bri punched him playfully in the arm as Alissa joined them.

“Can you believe that?” she asked indignantly. “I swear Uncle Craig is blind.”

“No,” Marcus said with a laugh. “He just left his glasses in the bunkhouse.”

“Did he?” Bri asked.

“Nah,” Alissa said. “You ready to catch?”

Bri gave her the stink eye. “Yeah, right. These kids can’t hit a pop fly. But, just in case, I’m taking right field.”

“Good luck,” Marcus said.

Bri took off toward right field, where the ball was least likely to find its way.

“She’ll be all right,” Alissa said.

“Yeah,” Marcus said. “You taught her well.”

“We taught her well,” Alissa corrected and flashed him a dimpled smile. “Well, see ya!”

“See ya,” Marcus said. He watched Alissa run off to center field, then he took the sidelines.

Marcus sighed. Bri, though she was going into sixth grade at the end of the summer, was still one of the youngest kids staying overnight. Which was why it was so crucial for her to be in Alissa’s cabin. The two girls were close. Alissa and Marcus, being the same age and next-door neighbors, had played together as they grew up. Alissa was an only child and treated Bri like the little sister she never had. He didn’t mind that, but it did make

Alissa sort of like a sister to him. That, he thought, was definitely weird.

More cracks and cheering as one kid hit a grounder and ran toward first base. The ball rolled between the legs of the kid playing second base, and Bri was able to cover the play, tossing the ball to the boy on second base for an out.

“Nice one, Bri!” Marcus shouted.

Bri was far more practiced at catching balls than she was at hitting them. Marcus knew Bri would be fine if someone did hit a fly ball that came to her at just the right angle. He also knew most of the kids, boys and girls, batted right-handed. A few, the ones in Little League, could hit beyond the infield. But it was unlikely that the ball would go in Bri’s direction.

Then, another kid, a lefty, was up to bat. He had that narrow-eyed glint of determination as he hugged home plate. When the bat connected with the ball, Marcus wasn’t at all surprised that it went sailing toward right field. Bri raised her glove, but then turned away.

What is she doing? Marcus thought.

The ball flew over her head and landed somewhere in the woods that bordered the field. Bri looked around in surprise as the lefty rounded first base and made his way toward second. The Blue Dragons cheered; they were sure to get a home run if their runner hustled. Marcus ran

toward Bri.

“What happened?” he asked.

Bri shrugged. “I don’t know. I heard something in the woods.”

“What do you mean something?” Marcus asked.

Bri pointed to the woods. “I think it was some branches rustling.”

“It was probably just a deer,” Marcus said. “Let’s find our ball.”

Bri cocked her head to the side and shrugged. “Okay.”

Marcus and Bri were joined by Alissa. As they walked, Marcus tried not to think about how Nate would be bragging after the game for hitting a home run, even though he had nothing to do with it.

When they got to the tree line, Marcus noticed a lot of the trees were covered in poison ivy.

“How do you guys want to let this play out?” Alissa asked.

“We can’t just leave the ball in there,” Marcus said. “Mr. Roberts would have a fit if we lost a ball.”

Alissa shook her head. “Nah, I don’t think so. Not with all of this.” She gestured toward the poison ivy.

“Hey, there’s an opening!” Bri shouted. She crashed through the tree line before Marcus or Alissa could stop her. Marcus rolled his eyes.

“Geez, we should go after her,” he replied.

“Yah think?” Alissa asked sarcastically and took off after Bri.

Marcus followed close behind. Alissa and Bri were peeking under brush and kicking up dry leaves. Marcus swiveled around, careful to scan the entire area until he spotted something round and white twenty yards away. He ran toward it.

As he bent down to pick up the ball, a flash of blue caught his attention. When Marcus glanced up, a man seemed to disappear through a thicket of trees. Marcus ran after him but stopped when he came to a faint trail. Though he’d been coming here for years, he couldn’t recall ever seeing this pathway. He listened. Marcus’ heart raced. He wondered if this man was the source of the noise that had distracted Bri. Without further thought, he ran after the man.

“Marcus, wait!” shouted Alissa. “Where are you going?”

Marcus stopped, looked, and listened. The man had disappeared, so Marcus returned to the girls.

“Did you guys see that?” he asked.

“See what?” asked Alissa. She raised an eyebrow while Bri shook her head.

Marcus shrugged. “I thought I saw some guy, but I don’t know.”

“Probably a runner,” Alissa said. “These woods are a beautiful place for a jog.”

## Thanks for Reading

Thank you for taking the time to read *Shadows of Doubt*. If you enjoyed this book, please leave a review. Then check out the rest of the books in the series.

### A Kahale and Claude Mystery



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## About the Author



Tim grew up in Syracuse, New York. He currently resides in Maryland where he teaches English, Creative Writing, Film, and Theatre on the middle school level. At the insistence of his own students, he began writing seriously in 2014.

He credits his love for story to his mother, who spent countless hours reading to him and his siblings when they were growing up. Growing up, he devoured the literary words of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Piers Anthony, and many others. Mysteries, thrillers, and fantasies are among the genre he most frequently reads.

When he's not writing, he's reading, teaching, camping, or enjoying a live music concert.

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