

Chapter 1

Just think of it!” Sommer Oldham cried excitedly. “We can spend the summer working with horses. And get paid for it too!”

Vanessa Downey grabbed Sommer’s hand. “You sure they’ll hire us?” she asked. “Are you totally sure?”

“Yes.” Sommer smiled. “My uncle owns the summer camp. He said he needs some teenage counselors to work with the little kids.”

Standing nearby, Tami Nguyen smiled too. Sommer and Vanessa were not her best friends. But they were best friends with each other. Tami hadn’t had a best friend in high school. She was shy. Making friends was hard.

Sometimes Tami tagged along with Vanessa and Sommer. But the two always talked to each other. They usually ignored her.

“How about you, Tami? Are you coming to work at Camp Colorado too?” Sommer asked. “I promised my uncle I could get two other girls besides myself.”

“Oh yes,” Tami said in surprise. She needed the money. But she didn’t share the excitement and happiness of the other two girls. Tami feared being so far from home for the first time. Worse yet, she was terrified of horses!

The part of town where Tami lived was called Little Vietnam. Along with her parents, grandfather, and her three siblings, she felt safe and comfortable there. But next September Tami would be starting college. She needed to earn some money this summer. The Nguyen family had been struggling for a while. Tami was determined to pay for her own education.



“Grandfather,” Tami said that night. “I think I can get a summer job at a children’s camp. A girl I know from school is arranging it.”

“Excellent,” her grandfather said. Just after the fall of Saigon, he had escaped from Vietnam in a flimsy boat. Many of those with him had drowned. Pirates killed many more. But he had made it to the United States, along with his wife. With them they’d brought an orphaned boy who would become Tami’s father.

“But I’m a little scared, Grandfather. Camp Colorado is up in the mountains. It’s about a hundred miles from here,” Tami said.

“We traveled over thousands of miles,” Grandfather said with a smile. “You have not that far to go, Tami.”

“I know,” she said. “We’ll have to ride the horses there. And I am afraid of horses.”

“You must not let fear control you,” Grandfather said. “You must say to yourself that you will be brave.”



A few days later, everyone applying for jobs at the camp was interviewed. Tami filled out the application. She tried to hide her fear when she spoke to the camp director. Like Sommer and Vanessa, Tami was hired immediately.

One week later all the camp employees gathered. They boarded a bus headed for Camp Colorado. Tami didn't know any of the passengers except Vanessa and Sommer. And of course those two girls shared a seat. They talked constantly to one another.

Tami sat alone, looking out the window. She didn't blame the girls for not paying attention to her. They had much more in common with each other than they did with her. Tami concentrated on feeling grateful.

This job would help her earn money for college.

The sun shined brightly. The bus rolled through traffic. Tami fought the desire to run away and hide. She had never been comfortable with strangers. And she was surrounded by teens she didn't know.

The bus began to climb the steep mountain road. "Isn't this exciting, Tami?" Vanessa said. "The only bummer is the cell reception sucks up here." It was the first time today that she had talked to Tami.

"Um, yes," she said, trying to sound enthusiastic. But in truth she was more frightened than excited. If she had been going camping with her family, she would have been truly happy.

Tami felt miserable. She knew she would miss dinner tonight. Her family would sit down to delicious *pho* and spring rolls. There would be yummy moon cakes for

dessert. They were made from sweet rice and filled with bananas and raisins. The family would have a comfortable evening. Nothing unexpected would happen.

With her whole heart, Tami wished she could be there with them. The bus climbed the winding mountain road. She felt sadder as each mile took her farther from home.