

Striker Jones  
and the  
Midnight Archer

By Maggie M. Larche

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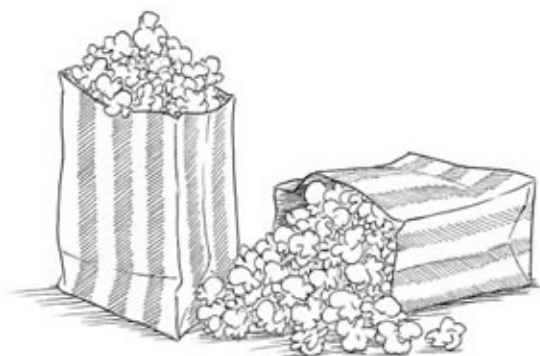
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## Chapter 1

### Pop Secret

“Let’s do this!” said Bill Flannagan. “Six weeks of swimming, sports, canoes, campfires, and no parents!”

Striker Jones laughed with his best friend. The two boys were in line with 20 other kids in the school parking lot, waiting to load a bus that would take them to Camp Leopold for part of the summer. There they would join up with kids from across the county.

This was Striker’s first year to attend the camp, but Bill had attended five years in a row.

“You’re gonna love it,” said Bill.

“I’m just glad I get to go,” said Striker, thinking back to his mother’s goodbye that morning. She hadn’t exactly cried, but Striker had noticed some definite sniffing. Now, he kept glancing over his shoulder, expecting to spot his mom hiding in the azalea bushes or on the school roof, simply to sneak a few more looks before he left for camp.

“Look, there’s Amy and Sheila,” said Bill, pointing to their two friends, Amy Beckham and Sheila Meyers. Striker and Bill had known Sheila for years, and Striker had had a crush on her for almost as long. Amy moved to their school the previous year, and the four friends had been inseparable since.

The two girls were getting out of a car driven by Sheila’s dad. He jumped out of the car and lifted Sheila high into the air in a big hug.

“Dad!” Striker heard Sheila say with a red face. “I’m too old for this!”

“Bill! Striker!” yelled Amy. She waved the one hand that wasn’t loaded down with her canvas bag and pillow.

“Hey!” called Striker and Bill.

Amy ran over, while Sheila gently disengaged herself from her dad’s arms. Striker watched as she kissed her dad quickly on the cheek and ran to follow Amy, waving behind her as she went.

“I’m so excited,” Sheila said as she and Amy joined the boys. Her blue eyes sparkled. Like Bill, Sheila had also attended the camp for years.

“Me, too!” said Amy as she quickly pulled her red hair into a ponytail. “I’ve never been to camp before. This is the first time we’ve lived in one place long enough for me to go!”

“It’s fabulous,” said Sheila. “The cabins are so cute, and we get to decorate our bunks however we want.”

“And there’s every sports competition you can think of,” said Bill, “plus a bonfire every night.”

“And we get to do adorable crafts,” continued Sheila.

“And kayak and canoe and snorkel,” said Bill.

“And the lake is just gorgeous,” finished Sheila with a sigh.

“Don’t forget the best part,” added Striker. “No Ralph!”

“Yes!” they all shouted together. They threw high-fives and laughed. They were thrilled for the summer away from the class bully, Ralph Johnson.

“All right, kids,” said a counselor at the front of the line. He held a clipboard and pencil. “Time to load up!”

Sheila and Amy squealed and ran to add their luggage to the pile of bags beside the bus. Striker and Bill hoisted their backpacks onto their shoulders. They were off!

The bus ride passed fairly quickly between jokes and choruses of “100 Bottles of Beer on the Wall.” The kids never seemed to get past 85 bottles before the song petered out, only to be started anew five minutes later.

Sheila and Amy were sitting in front of Bill and Striker. Both the girls turned backwards in their seats to chat with the boys.

“So, lots of kids come from other schools, right?” said Amy.

Bill nodded. “Yep. Why?”

“I was just thinking, since I don’t know any of them, maybe I’ll pretend to be someone else for the summer.” She turned to Sheila. “Do you think I could pull off a French accent? How’s *theez?*”

“Terrible,” said Sheila with a laugh.

“Okay. No French. Then maybe I’ll be the daughter of a millionaire. Or an orphan!”

Striker laughed. “Try all you want, Amy, but I don’t think you could ever pull off being anyone but yourself.”

Amy looked at Striker. “You could pretend to be someone else this summer. It must get tiring being ‘Striker Jones, Boy Detective.’”

Striker was known for solving mysteries that left others in the dark. He had discovered solutions to many sticky problems in the past and now had a reputation among his classmates as a real detective.

“Don’t be silly,” Sheila answered for him. “Striker’s the best detective around. He shouldn’t hide his gift!”

Striker felt red creeping up his neck. Time to change the subject.

“Look,” he said. “We’re leaving the highway. Are we getting close?”

“No,” said Bill, looking out the window, “but we are almost to my favorite part of the bus ride!”

He explained as the bus rumbled around country roads. “There’s this lady that sells bags of flavored popcorn by the side of the road. We always stop, and everybody always buys a bag and eats the popcorn on the way to camp. Look! We’re here!”

The bus pulled off at a roadside stand.

“Oh, no,” said Striker. He patted his pockets as kids jammed the bus aisle. “I didn’t realize I’d need money. I didn’t bring any.”



“No problem,” said Bill, sliding out of the seat. “You can share my bag.”

They piled off the bus with the other kids and joined the line at the stand.

“One small bag, please,” Sheila said to the old woman behind the stand when it was her turn.

“Butter, cheese, caramel, or kettle?” asked the saleswoman, tucking a stray gray hair underneath the bandana she wore on her head.

“Kettle, of course!”

“Me, too!” said Amy.

“Here you go, sweethearts.” The woman handed two bags over and smiled.

“Thanks!” The girls gave the lady their money before turning away.

Bill stepped up to the stand.

“I’ll take a small cheese, please.” He turned to Striker. “Sound okay?” Striker nodded. “I’d get two, but I don’t have enough money. There’s still a decent amount for us to share though.”

“Thanks, buddy!”