

Part 1: Barr's Meadow

This is the first half of a chapter from *Barr's Meadow*. It takes place in the second half of the book, during the second day of camp. It is representative of the characters, their inner thoughts, and some of their free time activity. The characters are introduced earlier and are well known at this point in the story.

17 Tom's First Move

Tom ran down the trail at full speed... the others weren't far behind. The firewood loading detail had gone very nicely, but it had taken a little longer than he wanted. He was all set to move on his usual game plan, but Mark threw a curve with that firewood assignment. Well, no problem... he was fairly sure Julian would be there for the first free swim period. That's one choice set of buns I saw this morning. They need to be broken in *properly*. That means by me! Ah! Nick's right where he's supposed to be. Excellent. He always comes through.

"Sorry to keep you waiting so long." Tom came to a distance runner's stop. He had to catch his breath. He bent over, hands on knees and looked back—his crew of firewood packers was just coming around the junction. Hmm... they should have done better than that.

"No problem." Nick stood up and massaged his backside back to life. He watched Tom panting heavily. "Did you run all the way from camp?"

"Yeah..." Tom stood up, hands on hips. "Nathan did a brag, so I had to show him." He looked up. They were just now passing the amphitheatre. Tom still reigned supreme. I'd feel better if it was a contest. I expected one of those guys to make me work. "Let's go swimming."

They stepped down to the Buddy Board and snagged their badges on the way to the gate. This was like an old habit.

"Hey hey! It's Big Tom!" Leonard quipped. He didn't enter Tom and Nick's names; they were familiar faces. He returned their badges. "I thought last summer would be it for you." He eyed Tom with appreciation. It was nice to see him again, in fact—it did wonders for his fantasy life. It

was nice to know he had another lifeguard handy if needed, too. This afternoon, in fact: the lifesaving qualifications needed a tower guard. He looked forward to springing this.

Tom removed his sunglasses and winked. He knew what was happening in Leonard's lap. Too bad he's sitting at this table where he's all hidden from view. Tom had seen him in previous camps, and he was pretty good stuff, probably. Tom had never played with any of the Counselors. He preferred the smaller buns, the new ones.

"My fee for lifesaving duty has gone up, you know." Tom tried to be off-handed.

"I'll pass that on." Leonard kept his response even. "Meanwhile, plan on a short one this afternoon."

"Huh?!" Tom was stunned. He did not expect to be hit this soon. He had no escape plan in place.

Leonard pulled the other clipboard over, found Nick's name, and put his fingertip on it. "While Nick here is qualifying." Leonard relished this. "Everyone is on duty, and we need you in the chair." He was pleased to see that Nick was still in favor... Tom didn't seem to stick with anyone else for very long.

Blast! Lifesaving again. I should have known. He looked at Nick.

"Yep... One last hoop to swim through." Nick expected to get his Lifesaving merit badge this very afternoon. He had done everything except the mock rescues in the water. That would make him eligible for Eagle in the fall.

"Oh." Tom was mollified somewhat. I don't mind helping Nick out. "Okay. I'll do this one free. For old times sake." He tried to imitate Leonard's smile.

"Thanks. Briefing at 3:15." He returned a "ta-ta" wave and watched Tom and Nick try to find an open cubbyhole. Leonard was *very* pleased with himself. One of his secret pleasures was corralling Tom. His attempts to get him on staff had all failed. This was his consolation. He adjusted himself as he watched Tom and Nick undress. *Lordy!* I had forgotten just how big Tom is. This table is a blessing. Sweet dreams in the night, what a tool!

Tom was mildly annoyed... he had thought arriving late would shield him from getting stuck with lifeguard duty. I was right about that for this session, anyway. Well, at least it won't be a full shift this afternoon. It made sense to have an experienced crew today... it's the first free swim. I'm lucky they didn't put me on as an extra this morning: the place is really packed. Last year they drafted me on the first day to man a special rowboat—ruined the whole session. The Counselors on duty today are familiar faces, as far as I can tell. They can handle it. He folded up his sunglasses and tucked them carefully under the towel. He wasn't worried about them being lifted, but he didn't want them to get broken. He had that happen once down here because he'd been careless. The Trading Post stocks them now, but man do they cost a bundle.

He stepped out of the cubbyhole aisle and moved to the edge of the boardwalk. How to locate Julian? Look at that sea of splashing arms and bobbing heads! It's going to take forever to do the Buddy checks. Hmm... I'll search systematically, starting from here at the boardwalk. If I don't spot him in the shallows, I'll go along the F dock.

“So, what are you planning?” Nick needed to know where to find Tom when the Buddy Whistle blew.

“I'm going to find our new patrol member. I want to know more about him.”

Oh-oh. Nick had forgotten about the slipup Tom made at breakfast. Well, then... I'd better keep an eye out. Mark is counting on me to work with Julian on the newsletter. I might have to do some blocking moves. I should have expected this. Julian's little butt is just what Tom likes best. That's a very bad thing nowadays. Tom has outgrown this hobby and doesn't realize it... he's almost nine inches now. Even big butts have trouble handling that.

The Buddy whistle blew. Tom and Nick raised their arms, hands clasped. After three years at camp it was a reflex action, on dock or off. Tom used the opportunity to scan the area. He was in his element: stalking the game is a major part of the fun.

Julian tried doing some underwater breaststrokes, but he kept hitting legs all the time; he resorted to a modified underwater dog paddle, scooting along close to the bottom. He couldn't stay down for very long; having to come up for air all the time was a bother. He did this for quite a while, trying to improve on that. He scooted along, dodging legs... it's kind of a

dirty sand down here. Out of breath again... he surfaced near the boat dock. Yow! Everyone has his arms raised.

I don't hear the whistle when I'm down there! He looked over at the platform. He waved at Danny—he was standing up looking around. Danny saw him at last and waved back and pointed. Julian pointed too and looked over to the Lifeguard he'd talked to before. He got his attention, finally. Boy, it sure takes a long time. Seeing all these guys with their arms up in the air is odd; but it made sense now... especially with this many swimmers! I'm sort of glad now, actually; a real Lifeguard knows I'm okay. Yeah.

Tom spotted Julian waving his arm. Terrific. He's over near the first bank of canoes. I'll watch what he's doing, then make my move. Where's Danny? Must be a ways off, with Julian waving like that. Tom looked around for a matching waving arm... ha! On the platform. Ideal. Danny won't get in the way, then.

Nick had seen Julian as well. This told him how to shape the rest of the hour. I'll keep watch from a discreet distance. Tom has to go back to the tent before lunch, so Julian is relatively safe for the time being. There isn't much Tom can do in this crowd. It's unlikely that he'll take Julian up the trail this morning.

"I'll work on my speed some today. I'll do laps out to the platform and back."

"Got it. Thanks." Tom squatted down on his haunches to watch. Julian is practicing something... at the whistle he ducked back under the water; what's he doing?

Nick looked at Tom's focus briefly. I should have expected something like this. If Tom is true to form, I should be able to delay him, at least. Nick went to the end of the dock to dive. There's no way to make a running jump today... too many bodies in the way. I'll work on my speed anyway. I want to be in good form for the test this afternoon.



Tom did a quiet entry off the boat dock near the shower. He moved along the edge like an alligator. His prey was in sight. He'd been watching for a while, planning what approach to use. After Julian surfaced from a shallow dive, Tom came up alongside. "So, how far can you swim under water?"

“Oh, hi!” Wow. Julian was flattered that Tom would pay him any attention. Maybe he can give me some good tips. “I’ve never actually measured it. I can only stay under for about 30 seconds, I think.”

“Not bad, not bad. Keep practicing and you can get it a lot better; I got up to a minute and a half a couple of years back.”

“Wow! What’s the record?”

“I don’t know; some of those pearl divers can stay down for three minutes or so, I’ve heard.”

“Do they have gills, or what?” Julian was amazed to hear that. He couldn’t imagine being under water that long—I can’t do a minute even.

“No, really. They do it in their families for generations. They learn to swim before they can walk. They even live on the boats.” Tom was somewhat proud of his knowledge of matters aquatic.

“Wow. I bet you’re a good swimmer. Can you swim across the lake?” Julian studied Tom’s face. He hadn’t done that yet. The beginnings of a mustache... nifty—half a dozen small fine black hairs ventured out just above the outer edge of his upper lips. He’s almost as tall as Mark... his shoulders are just as broad. Is he heavier? He’s more muscular. His nose is prominent... it sort of looks like the Indian on the nickel. He has straight black hair—not too short.

“Yeah, I can do pretty well, I guess. I’ve never tried to swim all the way over there.” Tom pointed to the dock on the opposite shore. “I think I could—I know I could. But getting back—that might be a problem.” He laughed... he had swum almost halfway once to avoid being drafted as a lifeguard. He hated to be stuck in that chair, so he made them search for him when he could.

Julian bobbed up and down... he kind of wanted to swim some more, but it’s important to be on Tom’s good side. Sometimes he’s a little rough on young kids like me... a lot stricter than Mark is about things. He didn’t know what to say, exactly, so he just looked at Tom and smiled.

“I have an idea. How about I help you learn some things, like how to hold your breath, and dive. Do you like to dive?”

“I don’t know any dives. Except the cannonball.” Julian was impressed... getting personal help from the troop star? Yes! This is another benefit of being in the Flaming Arrow patrol. “I could sure use help. The trouble is, all the diving spots are filled up.” He pointed at the dock and

boardwalk. They were jammed full of scouts. There was space out on the platform, but he didn't want to go out there.

"No problem. We can practice a few right here!"

Julian frowned. That didn't make any sense; we're standing in three and a half feet of water. "I don't get it... where would I jump from?"

"That's easy. I just make a stirrup, like this..." Tom held his hands up, locked together. "You raise your feet and I slip my hands under; I lift you real fast out of the water." He demonstrated, miming a lift. He squatted down so only his head showed above the water, then stood up fast. A rush of water flowed through Tom's hands.

Julian saw instantly that this would work. The water would make him light, and Tom was so strong he would zoom up. "Wow, that looks great. You wouldn't mind?"

"Naw, I've done this lots of times. We do this at the pool a lot to break in the little kids when they're learning to swim." He looked at Julian and raised his eyebrows. "You want to give it a try?"

"Sure!" This sounds like fun. "So what do I do?"

"Just bend your knees and kick off the bottom with both feet as hard as you can. I come up from underneath, take your feet into this stirrup hold, and lift you up real fast. When I do that, you hold your arms into a point, so that when you enter the water again it will be smooth. Be sure to lower your head. You zoom as far forward as you can hold your breath, then you come up." Tom looked at Julian as if this was the easiest thing in the world to do.

"Yeah, I get it! Cool! Tell me when to start."

Tom moved around behind Julian. "Okay: when I say go, you count to three and then jump. That gives me time to get my hands in position." Tom crouched down. "Ready?"

"Yeah!" This is great. Tom is super.

(This scene continues on page 169...)