

SISTERS
of the
LAST STRAW

The Case of the Campground Creature

Karen Kelly Boyce

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Campground Creature

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To Tai Ulrich, one of my first fans

In memory of Susan Lamia,
who is polishing mirrors in heaven

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Chapter 1

Camper Creatures

Sister Shiny stood on the side porch. She was covered head to toe. She looked like an astronaut on a foreign planet. Goggles covered her eyes, and a medical mask covered her mouth. Vinyl gloves reached past her elbows. The skirt of her habit was partly hiked up into her belt, displaying rubber boots that reached past her knees. In one hand she held a spray bottle of disinfectant, and in the other a bottle of bleach cleaner. She looked like a cowboy ready for a showdown.

Weighed down with all that cleaning equipment, Shiny stomped off, swaying from side to side—one stiff, heavy leg at a time—to the camper in the driveway.

The thought of going camping sent chills down her spine. *The Great Outdoors! Isn't that what they call it? What's so great about it? GREAT BIG BUGS! GREAT BIG ANIMALS! GREAT BIG DIRT!*

Last night, Sister Shiny tried to talk the other Sisters out of using the camper, but they didn't listen. She tried to convince them that a nice hotel with daily maids and room service was the way to go. But it didn't help. All the other Sisters were excited about the planned camping trip.

Then, failing to change their minds, she tried to finagle her way into staying home. "Someone should stay home and watch the house."

Sister Mona agreed. "Oh, thieves could break in and take all our stuff!"

"That's just silly! What's to watch? We can just lock the house up!" Sister Wanda said, as she thumbed through the owner's manual for the camper.

Shiny paused for a moment and then tried

again. “Someone has to stay home and feed the animals.”

Sister Mona, the visiting nun, moaned, “The animals will starve! Or die of loneliness. That would be horrible!”

“Oh, don’t worry. I already asked Farmer Murphy, and he’s happy to swing by each day to feed and check on the animals!” said Sister Krumbles.

This isn’t going well! thought Shiny, but she tried again. “What if the poor come by for food? I should be here to help them.”

Mona paled. “Poor People will wither away. We’ll be arrested for murder!”

“There are other food shelters, so no one will starve. How kind you are, Shiny, but we all deserve a rest after all the work we did this year,” said Sister Lovely.

“B-b-but . . .”

“YOU ARE GOING!” said Mother Mercy. “Case closed!”

“Well, if I must go, I’m going to sleep in a spotless camper.” Sister Shiny wasn’t happy, but she realized she could not get out of it. Shiny then made her own plans.

As Sister Shiny swung open the door to the camper, a sour smell hit her sensitive nose. “Ugh!”

The kind Farmer Murphy had given them the camper as a gift, but it had been sitting unused in a barn. Squirrels, chipmunks, or even bugs would have made the camper their home. Shiny’s skin crawled.

And *crawl* was the right word! When Shiny opened a drawer, she saw ants crawling everywhere.

Sweat dripped down her forehead. Her heart pounded. *This is the most disgusting and grimy place I’ve ever seen.*

Shiny pulled up her yellow vinyl gloves. She hiked the skirt of her habit a little higher so it wouldn’t touch the icky floor.

Still, she couldn’t shake the feeling that mil-

lions of germs were watching—just waiting to pounce on any spot of skin they could find. She wanted to run away but instead squared her shoulders and whispered, “You may be many and I just one, but God is on my side!” Shiny wanted all the nasty bacteria to be afraid.

She continued to spray and scrub the inside of the camper. Stepping way back, she knocked down all the cobwebs that had accumulated in the hidden crevices and corners of the long-neglected camper. With eagle-like eyes, she watched for any spiders that might attack, upset by the destruction of their hanging homes. Seeing none, she let out a long sigh of relief. *Maybe I can get this camper clean without meeting any creepy creatures!*

Unfortunately, Shiny was wrong. When she opened a drawer in the little kitchenette, she froze. A mouse, afraid to move, stared up at her though little beady eyes. Shiny looked down at it, frozen in fear. Neither she nor the mouse moved.

For what seemed like an eternity, they both stared at each other.

Shiny began to tremble. The little mouse began to tremble. Overcome with fear, neither one could look away.



Sister Krumbles glanced out the front window. *Look at Sister Shiny carrying all those cleaning products out to the camper!* Krumbles's face reddened with shame.

"I haven't helped at all!" she whispered to herself. Krumbles decided that once she finished feeding the goats, chickens, and rabbits, she would help get the camper ready for their planned trip. With renewed enthusiasm, she rushed past Mother Mercy, who stood in the kitchen doorway.

"Scuse!" she said as she brushed past Mother. She rushed out to the backyard, her favorite place in the world. Sister Krumbles loved animals. *The animals love me. They never care if I'm clumsy!* The

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chickens didn't mind if she stumbled. The goats weren't embarrassed when she fell. The rabbits jumped around and got as confused as she did! *Animals never judge. They always love you just the way you are!*

Krumbles scattered cornmeal for the chickens. Ronnie the rooster was the first to start picking at the kernels. She tossed hay to the goats, and Crayons, her favorite goat, led the herd out to the hay. Cotton the rabbit and all his friends waited at the feeder for their grain. Sister Krumbles stroked the rabbit's head. "I'll always love and care for all of you. You've all been fine friends."

As much as she loved caring for them, Krumbles cut her visit short with her beloved animal friends. Today, she wanted to help the other Sisters with the camper. Tomorrow, they would be leaving for a trip to the country. This was going to be the Sisters first vacation together.

I'm so lucky to be part of this community. The Sisters of the Last Straw were a new order. All the

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Sisters had come together after being asked to leave other orders because of their bad habits. Sister Krumbles was clumsy and caused accidents and havoc wherever she went. Having grown up on the rough side of town, Sister Lacey struggled with bad language. Now she used colorful substitutes as replacements for unbecoming language. Sister Wanda was often distracted and known to get lost. Sister Shiny, pleased with her appearance, couldn't stop staring at herself in every mirror. She also loved cleaning and fighting germs.

Mother Superior, Sister Krumbles's best friend, had a quick temper. Krumbles, with her clumsiness and accidents, was often the one to set her off.

And last but not least, there was Sister Lovely. Krumbles had to smile. *Poor Sister Lovely was working hard to give up smoking.*

A new Sister had joined the order. Her name was Sister Mona, and she had her struggles too. She was the most fearful and worrisome person

Krumbles had ever met.

Just then, Krumbles looked up and saw Sister Mona strolling down the path.

“Hello! A beautiful day, isn’t it?”

Sister Mona sighed. “The weatherman says it might rain today.”

Krumbles peered at the blue cloudless sky. “Well, we could use the rain. And if it is going to rain, I’m glad I got out early to take care of the animals.”

Sister Mona looked around and her shoulders slumped. “These poor animals. I feel sorry for them.”

“Why?”

“All fenced in and locked up! They should be living in the wild. They’ve got to be so sad.” Mona looked around, turned heel, and headed for the house.

Krumbles stood silent. She had been so happy just a moment ago. Now she plopped down on the bench and stared. *I thought my animals were*

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happy. I take such good care of them. Sister Krumbles glanced around and frowned. Sighing, she decided that she would think about it later. She had work to do.

Krumbles hurried from the backyard and her beloved animals to help with the camper. *I'm not going to think about what Sister Mona said! I'm going to help get the camper ready!* When she reached the door of the camper, she found that it was locked.

BAM! BAM! BAM! She knocked loudly on the camper door.

The loud knocking startled Sister Shiny.

The banging startled the mouse.

“AHH!” yelled Sister Shiny. The mouse leaped from the drawer and landed on her sleeve!

The next sound was a loud THUMP! Shiny fainted and landed on the dusty floor.