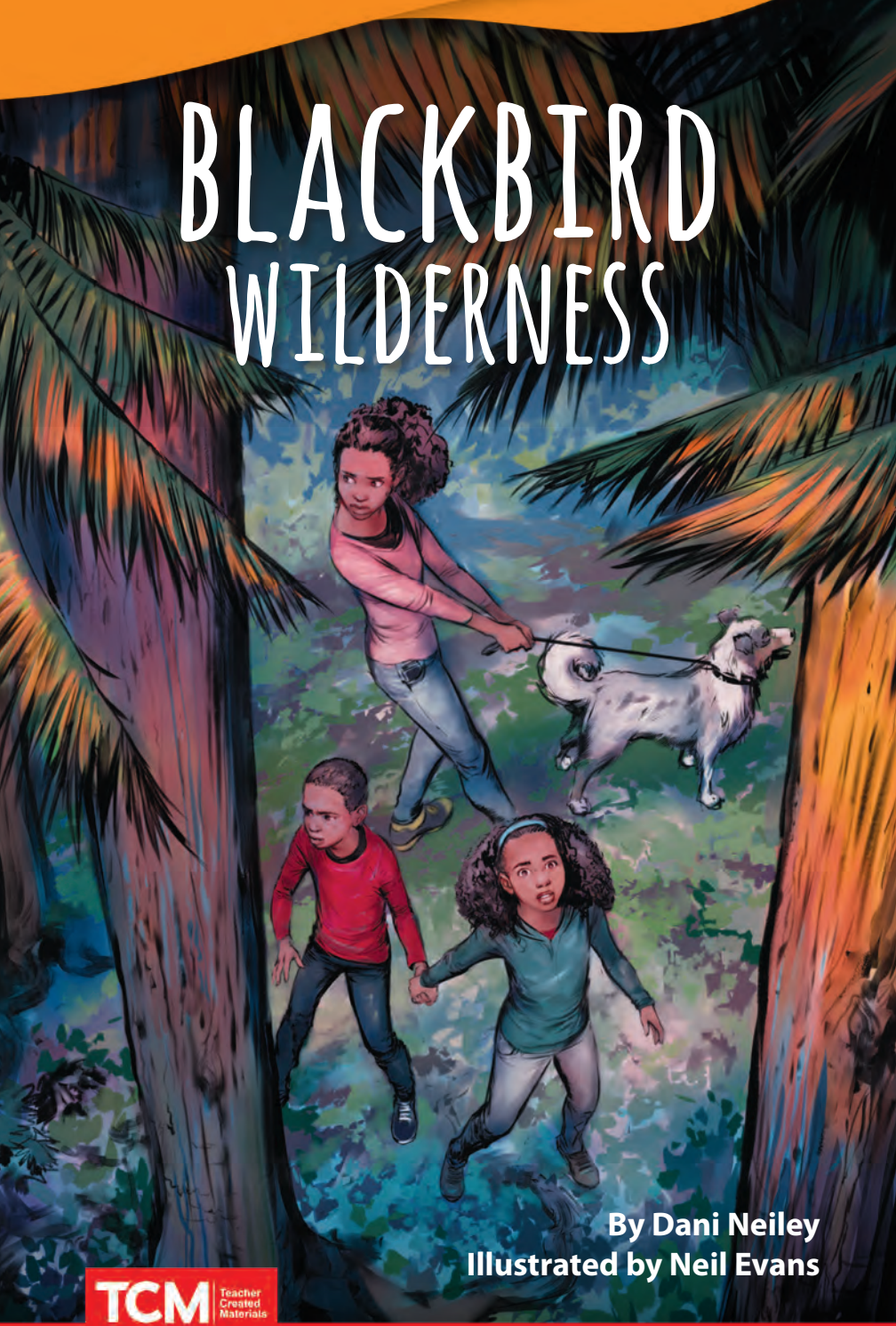
BLACKBIRD WILDERNESS



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TCM Teacher Created Materials

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CHAPTER ONE



RV There Yet?

I always hated summer in the suburbs. All the lemonade stands, melted popsicles, and sweltering 90-degree heat for three months made me miserable. I longed for winter, cold air in my lungs, and the silence of freshly fallen snow.

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The closest I can get to winter is spending summer in the mountains. Dad taught me that the elevation makes everything cooler and the air is thinner. That's why I always looked forward to our annual Harris family camping trip in the Rockies.

"Blackbird Wilderness! Look, Kit!" Michael, my eight-year-old brother, squealed beside me. I watched pine trees and the weathered sign pass us by in a blur from our SUV. Our pop-up camper bumped behind us, latched to the back of our car. Five minutes to absolute freedom. I couldn't wait! Bandit, our Australian Shepherd, barked in agreement.

"There's no cell phone service?" Stella, my 13-year-old sister, whined from the back seat. "Mom, you promised!"

"That was cautious optimism, sweetie," Dad said, winking at me in the rearview mirror. The tires crunched as we pulled onto the dirt

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road of Campground C. We stopped at spot 31. We were finally here!

I stepped out of the car, marveling at the height of the pine trees around me. We'd chosen a campsite toward the back of the campground, and it was dark and secluded. A large meadow, bordered by a fence, ran along the edge of our campsite.

Now for my least favorite part—setting up the camper. Even though mom and dad did most of the work, it always felt like a chore to me. I sank onto a stump and watched Dad unlatch it from the car, putting wood blocks around the wheels so the camper wouldn't move. Mom attached the handle to the front of the camper and started to crank it. I watched in amazement as the camper started to pop up.

"When's dinner? I'm hungry," Michael said, running circles around the picnic table in our campsite.

"There's fruit in the car," Mom said,

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wiping sweat from her forehead.

"Mooooooom," Michael wailed, sitting down in the dirt. Stella rolled her eyes and led Bandit into the trees.

"Kit, please deal with your brother," Dad said, grunting as he pulled one of the sliding beds onto the camper's platform.

"Hey, what if we go exploring?" I asked Michael.



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"Exploring!" he yelled. Bandit's ears perked up at the noise, and he started to bark. Stella winced and plugged her ears, dropping Bandit's leash, and Michael and Bandit ran to Dad. Michael sank to his knees and begged him to let us go exploring. "Please, with a cherry, hot fudge, peanuts, and rainbow sprinkles on top!"

"Excellent idea," Dad said,



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exasperated. "Surely, that would be more useful. Just remember to wear your whistles in case you get lost."

As I retied Michael's hiking boots and then my own, I eyed the huge grove of trees along the fence that was just waiting to be explored. After promising Mom that we'd follow the fence, only be gone for half an hour, and begrudgingly allow Stella to come with us, we were off on our first adventure.

Bandit drooled as he ran to catch up with us, dragging Stella behind him. I was annoyed at Mom for thinking we still needed a babysitter. I'd be in sixth grade in August, and we'd been coming here since I was five. What could possibly go wrong?

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