

HEALING FEARS

THE SMOKEY MOUNTAIN SERIES BOOK THREE



STELLA MOORE

BLUSHING BOOKS

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Published by Blushing Books®,
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ABCD Graphics and Design
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901
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EBook ISBN: 978-1-61258-560-4
Print ISBN: 978-1-61258-619-9

Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

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CHAPTER 1



Elisa Hawthorne met the love of her life when she was eight years old. She was riding her bike with her best friend in the whole wide world, Penelope Frost. Except nobody called her that, they all called her Penny. Elisa thought it was funny because Penny's hair looked kind of like an old penny that had been lying in the street too long. It was mostly brown, but it had some of that funny red color in it, too. She and Penny did everything together because they were best friends and they promised they'd always be best friends, even when they were old and their hair was gray like mama Hawthorne's.

Their parents were excited because someone new was moving into the neighborhood. Elisa and Penny hoped they'd bring another girl their age because then they could have another best friend. They'd been riding up and down the street for hours, hoping to see the new family, and they were both getting tired. It was hot as hell outside, except Elisa wasn't supposed to say *hell* or her mama would get mad.

Finally, just before lunch time, the new family showed up. She and Penny hid behind some bushes in the yard next door and watched as they all climbed out of a big black car. A man and a

woman got out first, then another woman got out of the back of the car, holding a little kid. Elisa and Penny made a face at each other, then turned back to see if anyone else was in the car.

The last person to get out was a boy. He looked older than them, like Penny's brother, Michael. He had blonde hair that was kind of shaggy and fell over his eyes until he shook it back. Elisa felt her heart start to go really fast, like when she ran as hard as she could run for a really long time.

"Oh, he's cute," Penny whispered with a giggle, and Elisa rolled her eyes. Penny was a little boy crazy, and it made Elisa just plain crazy. Michael said they were too young for boys, but that didn't stop Penny from holding hands with Luke Maynard on the playground every day. Elisa never really got why her friend talked about them so much, until right this minute.

"I guess he is," Elisa whispered back. She didn't know why, but she didn't want to tell Penny she thought he was cute. Maybe because if she did, Penny would want to talk about it all the time, like she talked about Luke Maynard. And Elisa thought that maybe, for now, it could be her own little secret.

"What are you two doing?"

They jumped at the familiar voice and spun around to see Michael glaring at them. Michael was mostly okay, but sometimes he acted like he was so much older than them, but he was only eleven and even Elisa knew that was only three years older than her.

"None of your business, Michael!" Penny yelled, sticking her tongue out at her brother.

"Why are you spying on the neighbors?" Michael narrowed his eyes at them and put his hands on his hips like Elisa had seen Mr. Frost do a million times before.

"Hello?" They all turned as one at the new voice, and Elisa felt her heart *thump, thump, thump* in her chest again when she saw the new neighbor boy standing on the sidewalk. She stood a little

straighter, hoping to seem a little taller even though she knew she was the shortest person in the whole third grade.

“Hey. Sorry, my little sister and her friend were spying on you. I was just about to take them home.”

Elisa turned and glared at him. “You were not, Michael Frost! You can’t tell us what to do!”

The new boy laughed, and Elisa turned her glare on him. “What’s so funny?”

He held his hands up and shook his head. “Nothing at all. I’m Paul, by the way. Paul Davenport.”

Michael stepped forward and held his hand out. “Michael, but you can call me Mike. This is my sister Penny, and her super annoying friend, Elisa.”

Elisa opened her mouth to yell at him again, but Paul spoke before she had a chance. “Nice to meet you all. I’ve have to go, but I guess I’ll see you around.”

He turned and jogged across the lawn to the front steps. Elisa stuck her tongue out at Michael before riding away, wishing she’d said something really grown up sounding before Paul had left.



“I’M SO BORED,” Elisa flopped backwards on Penny’s bed with a dramatic sigh.

“Want to play dolls?” Penny flopped on the bed next to her.

“I’m tired of dolls. Let’s do something outside.”

Penny sat up and gave Elisa that look she always had when she was about to do something they weren’t supposed to do. “Mike is at a birthday party.”

Elisa rolled her eyes. “Like I care what stupid Michael is doing.”

“Then I guess I shouldn’t tell you whose party it is,” Penny said, sticking her nose up in the air.

Curiosity finally got the better of her. “Whose party is it?” Elisa asked.

“Paul’s.”

“Really?” Elisa shot up in bed, then remembered she was supposed to be pretending she didn’t like Paul. “I mean. That’s cool, I guess.”

Now it was Penny who rolled her eyes. “You have such a crush on him, Elisa. Just admit it.”

“I do not! Boys are gross!”

“Then prove it.” Penny had that look in her eye again, but Elisa didn’t care. She had to think of something to prove she didn’t like stupid, cute, sweet Paul from down the street.

“Fine. Let’s go.” She hopped off the bed and ran for the door.

“Where are we going?” Penny asked, racing after her.

“To a birthday party.”



AFTER WHAT SEEMED LIKE FOREVER, they were ready. Elisa and Penny had managed to get a bunch of their friends to come over and help them with their prank.

“Are you sure we should be doing this?” Shelley Franks whispered as they all crouched behind a bush by Paul’s backyard.

“Of course not. That’s why it’s fun,” Penny said. “Now hush and wait for the signal.”

Elisa peeked through the bushes, happy to see that Paul’s family hadn’t put up a fence. “They’re bringing the cake out now,” she whispered. “One... two... three... go!”

At her signal, a dozen girls sprang from the bushes screaming at the tops of their lungs as they raced toward the party. Without bothering to aim, they pumped water from the squirt guns they’d confiscated from the rooms of their various brothers. But Elisa had decided to take things a step further, and they’d all dropped pink dye from an old Easter egg coloring kit she’d found into the guns. Within minutes, every boy at the party was covered in splashes of pink.

Elisa stopped for a moment to admire her handiwork. Boys, dripping in pink water, chased the screaming girls around the backyard as the girls continued their attack. Paul's parents stood off to the side, looking as shocked as her daddy had been at his surprise birthday party last year.

And there, in the middle of it all, was Paul Davenport, bent over and laughing hysterically. Planting her feet wide apart, Elisa lifted the ginormous water gun she'd stolen from Michael's room, took aim, and hit him square in the face. Paul stopped laughing and looked straight at her. For a moment, she wondered if he'd be mad, but he just blinked and grinned his big movie star smile.

Elisa grinned back, then turned and ran away, screaming "Retreat!" as she led her friends to the safety of her own backyard.



"MAN, I'm sorry my little sister and her stupid friend ruined your party."

Paul grinned at his friend, who was currently soaked in rose colored water and scowling. "It's okay, dude. Party was kind of boring anyway."

Michael shook his head and moodily swiped at the water dripping into his eyes. "They're little brats. We'll get them back."

Paul just hummed in pretend agreement. He'd talk Michael off the ledge later, once his friend had some time to chill out. The prank had been hilarious and pretty brilliant for a group of nine-year-old girls. It was too bad the mastermind wasn't a few years older. He mostly avoided girls, but he thought he might like to get to know her better.

Yeah. It was too bad she was just a kid.