



The Summer Detectives III

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Storybook, fiction

Age: 10+

Cousins Marcus and Martin are once again spending their summer holiday at the family cabin. But unlike in previous years, there's not much going on this time. They've gone swimming, played football, and added a second storey to the treehouse, naturally, but nothing as riveting as the events of previous summers comes up. Yet when the boys discover a point of light moving strangely across the sky above the old Pioneer camp in a video they make while stargazing, finding out the cause becomes item number one on their agenda.

The Secret of the Old Camp is the third book in Vaher's young-adult series about two boys who summer together in Northern Estonia.



Reading sample

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Chapter 4

“Do you know what I’m thinking?” Martin asked Marcus as they were biking home along the country road.

“I think I do,” Marcus replied.

“What, then?”

“That it’s about time to go to bed.”

“No! The exact opposite! I was thinking we should go straight back to the woods by the shore. To where that weird light disappeared,” Martin whispered.

“You think we might see something?” Marcus asked hesitantly.

“Sure! Just think—if there *is* something there, then that’d be super! A sensation! If not, then what do we have to lose? Am I right?!”

Marcus reckoned he was a little bit envious of Martin, who had caught the weird light on camera with his mobile. And he realized that if they went into the woods to look for it, then maybe he’d have a chance to film something never seen before with his own mobile, too. The prospect stamped out all his fear and doubt. He was just so curious!

“Let’s take Ricky along. So that . . . we can walk the dog, too,” Martin suggested, though it was really because he thought they’d be braver with a canine friend.

“Definitely. Ricky is a member of our team. And it’s good to take dogs for walks,” Martin replied, also thinking that having Ricky around would boost their courage to go out alone into the woods. For although he himself had floated the idea, he was already starting to have some doubts. It was pitch black outside and the streetlights were turning off now, too. They were always shut off at night. Apparently to save energy.

“Hey!” Mr. Harry called out. The man was squinting at his phone on his own way home. “An old man has gotten lost. They’re searching for him with a helicopter.”

“Somebody from the retirement home?” Martin’s dad asked.

“No, not from there. Though a social worker does check in on him from time to time. No . . . he’s a neighbor. Yeah. One of his neighbors is a social worker and discovered the old man gone. He found it strange, an old person just disappearing at night.

So he told the authorities and now there’s a big rescue operation underway.”

As if right on cue, the same helicopter that had pointed its beam at them on the beach buzzed past overhead.

“I reckon nobody’s going to be getting any sleep tonight,” Mr. Harry said.

“It’s a good thing they’re out searching. An old man . . . who knows what trouble he may be in. No doubt they’ll find him. These days, they’ve got all kinds of clever instruments—*infrared cameras* and gadgets like those,” Martin’s dad replied.

Mr. Harry showed them a picture of the old man. He was much older than their neighbor, Mr. Verdi. This man had thinning gray hair combed back over his scalp. A scar ran along one of his eyebrows and he had a hooked nose. The lost man even looked a little scary. Neither of the boys would have wanted to come across somebody like that in the dark, in any case.

“I’m sure they’ll find him,” Mr. Harry said.

Martin and Marcus remained conspiratorially quiet.

[...]

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What were they to do now? What came next? The chain of events was a little too much for Martin to handle. He needed a moment to think. They’d gone searching for a UFO, had run through the dark woods until they were short of breath, were nearly startled to death, and in the end come across the lost old man instead. But Martin was no “lightweight” whenever he talked about what he was up to, as Mr. Harry often liked to say.

“You got lost. But we found you now. Everything’s going to be just fine. Don’t be afraid of our dog, he doesn’t bite. In fact, he’s the one who discovered you!” the boy chattered.

Ricky had calmed down, but something still seemed to be bothering him.

“But . . . one more thing before we go, just in case, I thought I’d ask . . .” Martin stammered on. “Thing is that . . . well . . . what I’m trying to say is . . . you haven’t seen a UFO around here by any chance, have you?”

His question was met with stunned silence. The old man probably hadn’t expected a question like that.

Reading sample

"I haven't seen a soul in quite some time. You boys are the first people I've met in what seems like ages," the old man finally wheezed.

"I'll call for help right away!" Marcus exclaimed as he came to his senses.

Martin picked up his mobile from the ground. To his horror, he found it was soaked and the screen would no longer light up. He groaned. His UFO video had been on it! Who would believe that he'd seen it now?! Dad, Mr. Harry, and Marcus had been witnesses, of course, but that didn't matter. He couldn't show it to anyone else anymore. What terrible luck! Still, there was nothing that could be done. Right now, he had to try to get the old man home.

He pulled himself together, took a deep breath, and turned towards the man: "We're at an old camp—an old scout camp," he explained. "I'm Martin, he's Marcus, and the dog is Ricky. He's a rescue dog." Martin spoke the last sentence with a hint of pride. There was no doubt about it. Ricky had rescued someone today!

"Oh, I don't know how I can ever thank you boys. Perhaps you can come and visit; I'm sure I'll figure something out," the old man said haltingly. "My name is Tim."

"The police are on their way!" announced Marcus, who had been a few steps away making the call.

They helped the old man up the steps and told him to sit down and rest on the building's foundation.

"How long have you been lost out here?" Martin asked.

"Oh . . . I'm not sure . . . I was out picking berries . . . But when . . . Back in 1978, when I . ." Then, old man Tim's story was cut off by sirens approaching from the distance.

The boys exchanged looks. Marcus raised an eyebrow. Martin shrugged. No doubt the old man was just tired and mixed up.

"Let's walk to the road and meet them halfway. Do you think you can make it?" Martin asked.

Marcus looked up the direction of the highway from his mobile and they started making their way towards the sound of police cars rushing to the scene. Picking up the basket in one hand, Martin supported the old man from one side and Marcus from the other. They heard an ambulance

arrive. When the trees sparsened closer to the road, they saw that the whole scene was illuminated in flashing blue lights. The medics rushed to meet them with a stretcher.

"But boys," the old man said with difficulty, "just one thing—don't you go to that camp anymore. It's dangerous."

They pricked up their ears.

"Dangerous? You mean like there are dangerous holes and sharp stakes and . . ."

"Dangerous, life-threatening. Strange things go on there. It's not all as it should be. No . . . don't go poking around there anymore," old man Tim rasped.

Marcus glanced at Martin and frowned just slightly. He couldn't tell if the old man was just delirious or meant his words seriously.

Ricky, who was keeping close to them, was whining and making weird low growls. It may have been from all the excitement or the crowd of strangers along the highway, but in any case, he didn't seem to be entirely content with the situation. Not even after rescuing the old man.

The ambulance medics in bright red overalls took Tim into their care, though he managed to tell the boys his address before the EMTs gently pushed him down onto the stretcher. They then covered him in a crinkly reflective sheet that was meant to keep him warm. Tim's basket was set onto his stomach before they carried him to the ambulance parked on the side of the highway.

Once he was gone, two police officers approached the boys.

"Well, buckos, how's it going? You're the ones who found the old gentleman?"

"That's us. Or, well, Ricky did, to be fair," Martin replied, adding: "He's our dog. Our neighbor's dog, I mean. But the neighbor's back at home. I guess he's sleeping. Or who knows. In any case, he's our friend. Ricky is. And Verdi, too. Verdi is our neighbor. The one who's Ricky's owner."

Martin could tell he was overdoing it. As long as the officers didn't start asking what they were up to out in the woods so late at night.