



A SUMMER ADVENTURE TALE

# MARTHA AND THE BOYS

BY SUE CAMPBELL

## Chapter 1: Arrivals

Martha was late -- big trouble late -- and home was still three blocks away. She wanted to tear off her hoodie and break into a run. The sun was burning off the clouds of the June morning and it was getting hot. But Martha couldn't run and she couldn't take off her hoodie. It was the only thing concealing the pregnant, unhappy cat who was squirming and clawing at her belly through her t-shirt.

Martha flinched in pain, but cooed, "It's okay, little mama. I'm bringing you to live at my house and you're going to love it. I'm really nice." She clutched the cat by the hips as it hissed and tried to wriggle free.

Sweating, she stopped her murmuring and tried to walk a bit faster. The house came into sight and Martha exhaled in relief. Her parents were not in the front yard or -- and this would have been much worse -- waiting in the car, impatient for her. Her eyes flew to the large front windows of the house. No expectant faces peering out at her. Good.

As she approached the side door, she took a deep breath and whispered into her chest, "Ok, shhhhhh! Be *very* quiet. You can meet everybody later." She pinned the cat to her body with only her left arm, waited a second for the cat to complain about the new arrangement, winced at the pawing and scratching on her belly, then used her right arm to open the screen door and slip inside.

The screen door shut too loudly behind her. Rats.

"Martha!" her mom yelled. Martha grimaced. It sounded like she was upstairs.

"Yeah, mom?" She felt the cat's body go rigid, as if she was listening, too.

"You're late! It's time to go!"

"I know, I'm sorry!"

"Meet us outside in *one* minute! We *can't* be late!"

"Okay!"

Martha hurried to her bedroom, slamming the door. Mama Cat let out an angry meow. Not daring to let her down yet, Martha pulled the blankets off her bed with one arm and threw them into the closet.

"I'm making you a cozy spot to rest!" whispered Martha, hurriedly, but lovingly.

The cat showed every sign of bolting, so rather than gently tuck her into the nest, Martha was forced to unceremoniously plop the cat on top of the pile of blankets and shut the closet door as quickly as she could. "I'll be back soon!" she whispered at the closed door.

Now sweaty and breathless, she looked wildly around the room until she saw her notebook, the one with the woodland faeries on the cover. She snatched it up and hurried out to the car.

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Sanjay stared at the fasten seatbelt light, willing it to turn off. The muffled, crackly voice of a flight attendant came over the loudspeaker. The only part he could make out was "Welcome to Portland." Even though the flight from Minneapolis took only about four hours, somehow it seemed harder than sitting still at school all day. Probably because at school there was little chance of the kid next to you having to use an airsick bag. Though, Sanjay had been relieved that his little brother managed to get all the puke in the bag and none on him.

At last, the seatbelt light flicked off.

Sanjay sprang from his seat, stood on it, opened the overhead bin and grabbed his small rolling suitcase.

"Hang on, boys," said a flight attendant. "I'll lead you two off last."

Sanjay let out a loud breath and began swatting at the name tag on his suitcase. Then he double checked that his cycling magazine, and, more importantly, the long white envelope tucked inside of it, was safe in the front zippered compartment.

Finally, the crush of people moved down the narrow aisle.

"Get your bag," Sanjay ordered. Anand scrambled to retrieve his backpack from under the seat in front of him.

Sanjay went down the aisle and then the jetway, pushing his rolling suitcase with one hand and pulling his little brother along with the other. The flight attendant trailed them, carrying Anand's dinosaur backpack.

As he walked out into the airport, he heard a girl's voice yell, "Sanjay!" His cousin Martha was barreling towards him. In a second, she grabbed him around the chest in a bear hug and lifted him off the ground. Even though they had both just turned ten, Sanjay was a good three inches taller, but so skinny Martha could easily pick him up.

Sanjay yelled, "Ahhh! Put me down!" Martha let go and turned to Anand. He set his jaw and gave a slight shake of his head to make it known that he did not wish to be picked up. Martha did it anyway. As she plunked him down, she turned to Sanjay. "You're six minutes late," she scolded, as if he could control when an airplane landed.

Now his aunt was coming in for a hug. "Hi, Aunt Fran. Hi, Uncle Marshall." Sanjay hugged each of them. His uncle's beard was scratchy and he smelled faintly of wood chips.

"Mr. and Mrs. Fitzgerald?" said the flight attendant. "The boys did very well, even though poor Anand got a little sick when we hit turbulence over Montana."

Sanjay rolled his eyes at Martha in a can-you-believe-this-kid sort of way.

While the adults were talking, Martha pulled two wing pins from the pocket of her jean shorts. "I got these from the security people for us. You must wear

them at all times," she commanded the boys. "These show that you are in the Forty-two Days of Fun Club."

Sanjay saluted her. Six weeks in Portland with Martha. If he'd had the choice, he'd be going to India with his parents. But he knew he'd have fun with Martha, as long as Anand didn't ruin it by being a baby. A barfing baby.

"Okay, boys!" said Aunt Fran, "We're going to have a great time! But first, how about some food?"

"Yes, Auntie!" said Anand.

"We're starving," said Sanjay. Their normal dinner time had long passed and they'd eaten every granola bar, banana and box of raisins their mom had packed. In addition, each of them had downed three bags of pretzels the nice flight attendant had slipped them.

"We know the perfect dinner spot," said his uncle. "You guys do the cooking and I get to drink a craft beer."

"Let's go, let's go, let's go!" said Martha, leading the way.

Sanjay walked next to the bouncing Martha, leaving Anand trailing behind.

**To be continued...**

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