

“Seeking God’s Treasures”

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ONE- Introduction

Derek Esparza and Jodi Dover were best of friends. They both went to the same school and the same church. But it wasn't school or church that made them best of friends. It was the summer at the coast when they almost died.

Derek 11, but was tall for his age. His brown hair was always ruffled and his eyes were bright and green. He lived with his parents in Scholls, OR in the country where his dad drove into Beaverton to work. His dad was gone a lot. Sometimes on business trips, sometimes golfing. But he was gone a lot.

Jodi was 12 and blonde. She liked best to keep it back in a pony tail. Occasionally her mom would braid it in dread locks and that was fun. Either way it was easy to care for. In the summer, her hair got even more blonde—almost white. And her face grew dark in the sun. She had freckles that crossed under her eyes and across her nose. She HATED them, but every summer they came back. She lived with her mom and her seven-year old sister Cheyenne. Jodi's dad lived somewhere in Texas. Her mom had fought a lot with her dad when they lived together and she remember the yelling. Jodi would lay in her bed afraid. Afraid for her mom—that her mom would be hurt. And afraid for her dad—afraid that he would be taken away. Cheyenne was too young to remember the yelling. She just always knew that their dad lived in Texas.

Jodi could remember the time when they were together and in some ways she looked back to them and wished they were still a family. But other times she remembered the fights and was afraid again.

Jodi's mom had begun to attend church when Jodi had been eight. A neighbor lady had invited them and mostly she liked it. She wasn't sure about all this talk about "becoming a Christian" or "receiving Christ" and that baptism thing was really weird, but most of the people were nice.

She had seen Derek at school, but didn't know him. But at church, they struck up a friendship and Derek's parents occasionally would have Jodi and Cheyenne and their mom over for dinner.

For two summers the two families had vacationed together on the Oregon coast in Bayshore and they loved being at the coast. Derek's parents had a house that belonged to Mrs. Esparza's mother. The house was old and rustic. It had a big ship captain's wheel on the front, and like most of the houses in the area at one time had been painted a light blue-green. But for as long as Derek could remember the house needed painting. It felt worn and comfortable. It FELT like many people had lived in it over the years.

They would spend hours hiking on the dunes and splashing in the water. It was usually pretty cold, but Jodi loved to sneak up on Derek and soak him with a few well placed splashes.

On the third day that they were there Derek and Jodi were coming back up the hill from the beach. It was warm out and the sun had almost blinded them as it reflected off the waves.

As they came around the corner from Mrs. Moore's house Jodi froze. "Derek, stop!" she whispered. He looked at her puzzled. She pushed him back around the corner of Mrs. Moore's house.

"What?" complained Derek.

"Shh...look slowly. There are two men by your house. And one is on the ground trying to look under the house."

"What? No one should be at the house. Dad has gone golfing at Neskowin and my mom and yours said they were going to Pacific City to buy more groceries at the Riverside Grocery. Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure!" Jody protested, upset that he might not believe her.

Derek got down on his knees and looked around the bottom of the corner of the house. "There is only one...but I don't know who he is."

"There WERE two."

"OK, OK." Derek continued watching. "Wait. He's talking to someone. He's leaning down sticking his head in like there is someone UNDER the house!"

"What!?" Jody said loudly.

"Shhh.... be quiet!" Derek snapped. "They'll hear you."

"Who are they?"

"I don't know. But they shouldn't be there."

"What's under your grandmother's house?" Jodi asked.

"I don't know. I've never been down there. I think it is spiders & bugs & stuff. Maybe snakes—I don't know."

"Yuck." Smiled Jodi "Let's go see who they are!"

“What are you crazy! They could be thieves. They could be murderers!

“Now you think they’ve hidden a body down there!” Jodi rolled her eyes.

“I don’t know WHAT to think,” said Derek. “But let’s go find out!”

“Are you CRAZY!” whispered Jodi, here eyes getting big.

“No. They shouldn’t be under grandmothers’ house.”

“But they might hurt us!” whispered Jodi.

“So, now you’re too scared to go?”

”No...I just don’t like what this looks like.”

“Neither do I, so let’s go!”

Derek started around the corner and said in a voice loud enough he thought the outside man could hear: “COME ON, JODI! WE’RE ALMOST HOME” He started for the house.

Jodi came around the corner of the house...her eyes big. She ran a few steps to keep up with Derek. As she came beside him she whispered...”If he shoots us, I’ll kill you.”

“Be quiet,” Derek replied.

The man crouching outside of the hole going under house moved his head quickly toward where he heard Derek’s voice. Derek saw the man’s mouth move. He was very skinny. His face was pale and his hair was unnaturally black. Probably dyed it. He had torn jeans on and a dirty T-shirt.

“Hey! What are you doing at our house!” Derek yelled.

The man looked around. “My dog. I lost my dog and I thought he had run under your house!”

“Oh, you want me to go under our house and check it out?” Derek bluffed.

“Uh, no... he is not there. I already looked.”

“You sure?”

“I’m VERY sure,” the man stated. “I’ll just be going on.”

“You alone?” asked Jodi.

“Sure...you see anyone else here?”

“No...” Jodi hesitated.

The man spoke, more loudly than he needed to for Jodi and Derek to hear:

“I’M... GOING... TO MY CAR NOW.... STILL LOOKING FOR MY DOG!”

Derek looked at Jodi and she rolled her eyes.

But the man walked away.

“Let’s go inside and get some lemonade,” Derek said to Jodi.

She looked at him puzzled, but he shook his head towards the front deck.

They walked up the deck and around the corner.

“What’s up?” said Jody softly.

“Just wait a minute.” Derek stopped and crouched down.

Jodi came and leaned over him and both of them looked around the corner of the house.

From under the house, they saw another man, older in black jeans & a black T-shirt slowly come out from under the house. He looked around and as he looked toward the front of the house, both Derek and Jodi pulled their heads back.

Derek leaned around slowly.

“He’s running away.” Derek said.

He watched as the man rounded the back of their house and disappeared.

“Come on!” Derek whispered.

“What? You ARE crazy!?”

“Just come on.”

The two of them ran to the back of the house and again, slowly, peered around the back of the house.

The man was gone.

“Now what?” asked Jodi.

“I’m going under the house!” said Derek. “I want to know what they were looking for.”

“You are so insane!” said Jodi under her breath.

“You don’t have to go.”

“Oh, you’re not getting away from me that fast!” smiled Jodi. “At least let me get my flashlight.”

Together they crawled under the house. They couldn’t stand, but they didn’t have to be on their hands & knees either. They sort of crouched & shuffled. Some light was coming through cracks between the stones of the foundation so that there was a dark haze on everything.

Jodi waved the light back and forth across the dirt floor. Nothing seemed unusual. Some soda cans, an old box that one time had held some snack crackers. A toy pail & shovel with a hole in the pail.

“Shine the light over here,” said Derek.

Jodi shone her light and she saw a hole in the wall. Actually a block had been chipped out. Derek took the light and examined around it. Someone had removed the block & had been chipping at the one below it.

Derek brushed away some dirt & chips & saw that the block below actually had a sort of lid. The block was the same size as all the other blocks, but when you looked at it top-down, there was an inch ridge all away around the block. And in that ridge was a lid. A wooden lid.

“That guy must have thought something was here and was trying to get at this block.

A quick trip up to the tool chest on the porch brought back a hammer & screwdriver. Jodi took the screwdriver and with a few quick blows with the hammer, she jammed the screwdriver under the lid. With a little prying the lid popped off.

“What’s in it?” Derek cried.

“I don’t know and the hole is too small to stick my head up and look in. YOU’LL just have to reach your hand down into the box and pull out whatever is there!”

“Why me? There might be spiders in there. I HATE spiders” protested Derek.

“Because I did the hard work of getting off the lid.”

“But it was my grandmothers tools!”

“Don’t be a baby,” sneered Jodi.

Derek came up to the block and cautiously at first reached up and felt around the top of the hole.

“Nothing,” he said.

“You have to check the WHOLE thing.”

So, Derek pushed his hand deeper into the box and Jodi could see his eyes widen. He had found something.

He slowly pulled out his hand and there was a leather case. It was about as big as a checkbook. But it looked very old.

Derek laid the leather case on the dirt and untied the string that was tied around it. Jodi held the light down so they could see.

As he opened up the case, there was a folded piece of paper inside.

“What is it?” asked Jodi.

“I...don’t know...” replied Derek.

As he folded it he saw lines. Some were straight and others were wavy.

Suddenly Jodi exclaimed: “It’s a map! Maybe it’s a treasure map!”

At that moment they heard something behind them at the entrance to the crawl space.

They turned, and there in the light looking in was the skinny pale man with the dyed black hair!

TWO: Assurance

“AAAHHHH!!!!!!” yelled both Derek and Jodi.

“God please help us!” prayed Derek in shaky voice.

Jodi flipped off the flashlight, hoping that the man could no longer see them.

They seemed to startle the man, but quickly his face took on a determined look and he stuck one foot in the hole.

Suddenly he stopped, turned and darted away.

As he did so, they could hear the sound of Jodi’s mom’s car pulling up to the house.

“Quick! Let’s get out of here. Grab the map!”

“Mom! Hey, mom” both kids shouted as they crawled quickly out from under the house. They ran in the back door just as their moms carried several bags of groceries in the front door. Cheyenne was tagging along slowly.

“What is up with you two?” asked Mrs. Esparza. “You’re filthy and you’re panting.”

They quickly told Mrs. Esparza and Jodi’s mom the story.

“Maybe we should call the police? Mrs. Dover said, concerned.

“Maybe...” replied Derek’s mom. “I think we should wait and see if they show up again. I think they’re gone.”

“MOM?” cried Derek. “They’ve been here twice.

“If all they want is an old piece of paper, they can’t be very serious. Let’s wait. And if they come around again, we will call the police.”

She looked intensely at Mrs. Dover. “What do you think Deborah?”

“Well, you know this area best. If you think that’s best, then I’m OK with that. Anyway, kids, we just stopped back in; I didn’t have enough money for some lawn chairs we saw at a yard sale & I wanted to come back and get them. Jodi, you will really like them. They’ll be good for here at the beach, but also at home.”

Disgusted, Derek and Jodi went into Derek’s bedroom and unfolded the crumpled up map. Jodi had just grabbed it and it had crumpled because there was no time to re-fold it under the house.

“It’s a good thing our moms came home when they did.” said Jodi.

“Yeah, it is. But I prayed to God and he helped us. He sent them home at just the right time.”

“Oh, I don’t think that was it.” scoffed Jodi.

“What?! Of course it was. God always answers prayers.”

“No he doesn’t.” said Jodi flatly. “I prayed my mom & dad would get back together & it hasn’t happened.”

“Well, we don’t know what the future holds. And it may be better that they not unless he will stop hurting your mom. But God protects us when we pray to him. I’ve just seen that happen time and time again. God is with us at all times and can hear us when we call out to him.”

“Maybe...” replied Jodi. “Let’s look at the map!”

“It is a part of Bayshore, but not all of it is here. See...whole sections are missing.”

“That is because they weren’t built yet! This is a REALLY OLD map.”

“It is marking a line out to the ocean. I don’t understand it.” Jodi wondered out loud. “No treasure would be out there in the ocean. And if it was we couldn’t get it!”

“We don’t even know for sure that it is a treasure map. And if it is, I’m not sure it is out IN the ocean. It is leading right out to the edge. It is a part of the beach I haven’t been to.”

“What’s out there?” asked Jodi.

“Well there are lots of bluffs. Some pretty rocky areas. I think there are some caves that the water has washed out. I’ve always wanted to go out there, but Dad says to stay away from them—he says they are very dangerous. They fill with water and if you get caught in there, you probably won’t live to tell about it. Some of them completely fill up with water at high tide and you will drown and others only fill half-way, but the water would be several feet deep and the strong pull of the tide would pull you out to sea.”

“Wow,” said Jodi quietly.

“I think that is definitely where the map is leading. To one of those caves.”

“Which one?”

“I don’t know,” said Derek.

“Would your dad know?”

“Maybe.... But I’m not sure I want to tell him.”

“Huh?” asked Jodi. “Why not? You’re not going out there without HIM are you?”

“I dunno. We could just go out and look.”

“I don’t think so,” said Jodi as she shook her head.

“OK, I’ll tell you what I find out there,” teased Derek. “But if it is a treasure, it’s mine.”

“You’re not serious,:

“Kinda. I don’t have to go INTO any of the caves. I just want to go look and see where the map leads. If it has been there all this time, it will still be there tomorrow. I can go look and see if it is a cave. And if it is, we can take dad back. No reason to waste his time if it isn’t pointing to a cave.”

“Derek...this isn’t too smart.”

“What I need are a pair of binoculars and a flashlight. Something to let me see the caves without getting too close and a flashlight if we’re gone past dark.”

“I still have the flashlight and my mom brought an old pair of binoculars. They belonged to her grandmother. She doesn’t use them much; I think they are pretty valuable. But she brought them in case we could see any whales from the house.”

“Get them! Let’s follow the trail on the map & see where it leads.”

Jodi hesitated, and she knew she should ask her mom for the binoculars, but she quickly went into her mom’s bedroom and found them.

Derek led her out the door and they headed down the street, half watching the map and half watching where they were going. A pair of dark eyes watched them as they wandered down the street.

THREE –Love

They followed where they thought the map led, but it was difficult because there were streets and buildings now where they were no streets or buildings on the map.

They came to a fenced in yard and the line on the map went right through it.

“Should we go in and follow the line?” Asked Jodi. “We might not be able to find where it picks up if we go around some other way?”

“I don’t know. Mr. Prince has a reputation for being a grouch. I don’t want to go inside his fence. There is the open lot just next to his fence on the other side. If we stick close to the fence we should be able to stay on course.”

They went to the right of Mr. Prince’s house. While it was a wooden fence around the other three sides of the yard, here there was a chain-link fence between Mr. Prince’s well-kept yard and this empty lot.

They were walking along the fence, keeping an eye on the map. Derek was walking right against the fence and he drug his left hand drag along the chain link fence, his hand making a rattling sound as he walked (rattle, pause, rattle, pause, rattle, pause, rattle, pause).

“HEY YOU!! TACO EATER!” a voice yelled. It was Mr. Prince out on his deck.

“You dirty Mexican! Get out of my yard! Go back to Mexico! I don’t want you here?”

“What!?” Derek said softly. They stopped and looked at Mr. Prince.

“That is my lot you’re walking on. GET OFF! And keep your hands off my fence, you filthy kid!”

Derek and Jodi looked each other & Jodi nodded her head forward. “Let’s go,” she said softly.

Both Derek & Jodi took off in a run towards the beach.

“GET OUT OF HERE! NOW!!” they heard the voice behind them yell.

Once they were past Mr. Princes house, Derek’s face was red. He was mad.

“What right does he have to say that? I’ve never even BEEN to Mexico! I was born in Portland. My parents & grandparents have lived here all their lives.”

“Ignore him,” said Jodi. “He is probably a sad old man who has nothing better to do than make other people feel bad. You know that those things aren’t true. My mom told me to do that when some girls at school made fun of me. They said bad things about my mom and they criticized the clothes I wear.”

“What!?” asked Derek surprised.

“They said some mean things because they knew my dad and mom don’t live together. And we can’t afford all the skater & Abercrombie clothes that they wear. I don’t even really like those clothes. I like comfortable clothes. And we DON’T have money for lots of new clothes. But that doesn’t mean they have a right to say those things.”

“Do you remember back in our SS class last Sunday?” asked Derek. “Mrs. Main had us memorize that verse: *‘This is how God showed His love among us: He sent his*

one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us.’ (1 John 4.9-10).”

“Jonah had that plant shading him and it meant more to him than the souls of thousands and thousands of people.” But God’s love for them—the fact that he created them made them worthy of love, both to him and to Jonah. So no matter what those girls say, you are important to God and to me and my family.”

“I could say the same thing to you,” smiled Jodi. ““Mom and Cheyenne & I love you because God made you. The stuff that man yelled doesn’t say anything about you. It says a lot about how miserable his life must be.

“I guess so...” said Derek.

Soon they made their way to the beach.

“I think the caves are up to the north. And that is definitely where the map leads.”

They walked along the beach, occasionally looking at the map to make sure they were on course.

“What sort of treasure do you suppose it could be?” asked Jodi. “Pirate treasure?”

“I don’t know...” I don’t think a map to pirate treasure would be found in the block of grandmothers house. If it were a map to pirate treasure, it would have been long before Bayshore was built. And if someone in that house knew of pirate treasure well enough to draw a map, why did they leave it hidden? Why didn’t they go get it and put it in a bank or sell it?... That’s it! Maybe it is money stolen from a bank. Bank robbers robbed a bank and hid the money in the cave, knowing very few people would dare enter there. Maybe it was just thieves and they have jewels hidden there! They marked

the spot on a map so either they wouldn't forget or to show someone else. The map get hidden while this house was being built, and for some reason the robbers couldn't get back and get the money. Maybe it is still there for us to find!"

"Do you really think so?" asked Jodi,

"It could be."

Jodi looked at him, "Or it could be nothing."

"But if it was nothing why were those two guys looking for it?" said Derek.

"I suppose so," admitted Jodi.

They stopped and Derek took Mrs. Dover's binoculars from Jodi. The only cave that looks like it is in the area that the map shows is on that big bunch of rocks that stick out on the beach, almost to the water. I bet it is in there. Let's go!!"

"What? NO!" said Jodi firmly. "What if the water comes up. It is not very far away and could easily trap us in there."

"Nah, the tide is going out; I'm pretty sure of it." We have several hours. The tide is going to go farther away from the cave, giving us plenty of time. By the time the tide comes back and blocks the entrance, we'll be long gone."

"I don't think this is a good idea. You said we were just going to identify which cave it probably was and get your dad to go with us."

"OK, but we're here now. I've changed my mind. Let's go check it out!"

Jodi didn't say anything, but her face showed she was not happy. 20 minutes more of walking led them to the mouth of the cave."

"Are you sure that tide is going out?" asked Jodi. "It looks closer than it did from down the beach."

“Yeah, I’m sure.” It just looks closer because WE’RE closer,” said Derek impatiently.

They stood at the entrance to the cave and looked in.

“I’m glad we brought a flashlight. I didn’t know this cave would go back so far.”

“The flashlight wasn’t supposed to be for going back into the cave. It was for if we were out late after dark. I thought that we were going to come back tomorrow with your dad.”

“Let’s go,” said Derek moving into the cave.

“Derek, you are so stubborn,” Jodi whispered as they entered the mouth of the cave.

And the eyes continued watching them as they went out of sight.

FOUR -Protection

The floor and sides of the cave were covered with barnacles. Obviously the tide totally or almost totally filled this room.

At the entrance to the cave there was graffiti scratched into the rock: *John Loves Jodyne; Wes and Andrea(?)--love forever; RJ Howard was here.*) The graffiti was in spaces between areas covered with barnacles. Some of the graffiti was old and you could only see one name or part of a name. 194_-something Michael Sh...There was a big open room where most of the graffiti was. But then, about three feet from the floor of the cave, there was a smaller hole that went deeper back in the hillside. It was too small to walk in standing up. You had to crawl in on your hands & knees.

“So what are we looking for?” asked Jodi.

“I don’t know. The map doesn’t say,” replied Derek. “I guess we look for clues or someplace where the sand has been disturbed like something was buried below it.”

“After who knows how long, we won’t be able to tell whether the sand has been disturbed. Every tide that comes in will flatten out the sand.”

“I don’t know smarty-pants. Just LOOK!”

They worked their way around the big room moving sand around the edges, looking for anything that might be a clue. There was lots of sea trash on the floor—broken sea shells, sand dollars, rotting parts of sea-plants that had broken loose and

the tide had swept in. Occasionally a tiny crab would scurry across the sand in front of them..

Several times they stopped to dig holes where things looked odd. They found several old cans –almost rusted away. They got on hands and knees and crawled and dug, crawled and dug.

After an hour, they sat beside each other.

“What do we do now?” asked Jodi.

“Maybe the treasure is back in that hole,” pondered Derek.

“No. No. No. No.”

“We’re here. We might as well check it out. Who knows if we won’t be able to come back.”

“NO. NO. NO. NO.”

“Well, then you wait here. I’m going in as far as I can. I’ll tell you what I find. But if I find it... it’s mine and not yours.”

“WHAT!! How dare you!”

“Fair’s fair. I find it –it’s mine.”

“I’ve come with you all this way. You wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for me.”

“Then come on in with me.”

Jodi glared at Derek. This was not fair. This was not fair OR safe.

Slowly Derek took hold of the opening of the hole—about three feet from the floor of the cave and pulled himself in. He knelt on his hands and knees and ducked his head and began probing deeper & deeper into the cave. He shone the light just ahead of him. Examining the sand. 3 feet in; 5 feet in; 10 feet in. Inch by inch Derek with Jodi

right behind him crawled into the pipe-like cave. Very slowly. It was a little odd. The walls were covered with barnacles and wet, but the cave didn't get smaller or larger. It just went deeper into the cliff. The sand was littered with even more broken sea shells, crab parts & sea trash. There was no graffiti here. There were no rusty cans here. Just wet sand, sea trash and barnacles.

Suddenly Jodi stopped.

"Derek."

"What?"

"I hear the ocean."

"Of course you hear the ocean. We're on the beach."

"No, we haven't heard the ocean in here. But suddenly I hear water. Were you SURE the tide was going out?"

"I think so...I thought I heard someone say that high tide would be...well I don't remember when they said."

"You don't remember!? You had BETTER remember!"

"I don't know. Anyway, we're here. We need to keep looking."

"I'm going back. This is too spooky. And if you don't know when the tide is coming back, I don't want to get caught in here."

Jodi started to turn and had gone only 5-6 feet when she gasped. Her hands were hitting cold water. Not wet sand. But water.

"Derek! The tide is coming in. We've got to get OUT!"

"What? You're crazy."

"I am not—there is water here on the floor of the cave."

“Huh?”

Derek turned and made a few crawls back toward the entrance and when he shone the light he saw that right in front of Jodi was water. Moving gently, but moving every few seconds as the tide pushed water into the mouth of the cave.

They had just moved a few feet when they realized that the mouth of this small part was filled with water. That meant that the big room was filled with at least three feet of water. The tide would be much stronger in there. And the water, the Oregon ocean water was VERY COLD.

They crawled to the end of the pipe-cave and it was exactly as they had feared. There was at least three feet of water filling the big room. The pulse of the water in here was fairly strong. They could wade out, but it was very possible that the current would just pull them out to sea. There was nothing close by the mouth of the big room that was level. Everything they could stand on was now under water.

Jodi sat at the entrance of the smaller cave breathing hard.

“Derek. What are we going to do.”

“I don’t know. I really don’t know.”

“I thought you believed God would protect us,” said Jodi sharply.

I believe he will. One of the verses they had us learn at church was: *You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.* (Ps. 32:7). I believe that God will. I think, however, we ought to ask him.

Both Jodi and Derek their feet standing in water by now, closed their eyes.

“God,” Derek said. “This may not have been very smart for us to come here. I know that I disobeyed my dad by coming here. God, I don’t deserve for you to rescue

me, but I ask that you help us. We don't know any way out. Please God, help us find a way out. And God...I want Jodi to go to heaven. But Jesus, she has never given her life to you. Please God, give her time to do that. Amen. Jodi, now it's your turn."

Jodi hesitated.

"Come on Jo. We need to pray. If God can get Israel out of Egypt, he can get us out of here"

"God..." Jodi hesitated. "I didn't believe you answered prayer. I asked you over and over to keep my mom & dad together and you didn't do that. But God, Derek and I are in a lot of trouble. God please help us out of here. Amen."

FIVE -Power

The water was now up to their knees. Jodi looked at Derek and saw that he, like she, had tears running down his face.

“Jodi...I think you ought to get serious about your relationship with the Lord. I don't think we're going to make it out of here.”

Jodi just stared out at the water & the entrance to the cave.

Jodi was quiet and stared at the water before her.

“Jo, come on...what's up?”

“I can't,” said Jodi. “Not now.”

Derek shook his head slowly. “You've got to....”

But Jodi kept staring.

Suddenly there was a voice, “Derek! Jodi! Derek! Jodi!”

It was Derek's dad.

“We're in here!” “Hey, over here!” they both yelled.

In just a minute they saw a rowboat come around the bend into the entrance to the cave. In it was Derek's dad...and the skinny pale man with the dyed black hair!

They pulled as close to Derek and Jodi as they could. While the skinny man balanced the boat, Derek's dad pulled them one by one into the boat.

“Are you two OK?” Derek’s dad asked after they both were in and seated. He pulled a couple of blankets out of a plastic tote and handed one to each of them.

When they both said they were fine now, he glared at Derek. “Young man. How many times have I told you not to come to the caves? This is exactly the reason why. Fifteen more minutes and we would not have been able to get you out.”

“I know dad...” Derek said softly.

“Thankfully, this young man here saw you go in. When you didn’t just come right out and he knew the tide was coming in quickly, he ran to get us.”

“But we found this map...”

“I don’t want to hear about it. We’ll talk about it when we get home, but just know there will be consequences for disobeying me and putting Jodi and yourself in such danger.”

The ride home was pretty quiet. No-one said much. Both Jodi and Derek kept looking at the young guy with the black hair. Who was he and why would he care about rescuing them? They had what he wanted.

As soon as they docked, Mr. Esparza nodded his head and said a quick, “Thanks, Daniel.” to the young man and he hurried off.

“Dad, who was that?” Derek asked.

“We’ll talk about it later. Just be thankful he saw you... thankful he was God’s guardian watching out for you. There is no way anyone would have known you were out there. You two run around town and on the beach all day long and that’s fine...but I have trusted that you were obeying me. Now, we’ll have to see what restrictions I put on you if I can’t trust you to obey me.”

Jodi didn't say a word.

After they were back at the house, both moms cried and were angry at the same time.

After everyone had eaten dinner—a fairly quiet meal—and settled down for the night, Jodi came to her mom:

“Mom, I was thinking. I have been really angry at God for not keeping you and dad together...”

“Oh, Jodi, you don't underst...”

“No, let me finish. But today I learned the importance of trusting the word of those who care for you. I have learned that God loves me and he has great power that he is using to protect me. He won't always protect me if I do disobedient and stupid things, but God loves me no matter what clothes I wear, or no matter how I wear my hair, or who likes me or who doesn't.”

“That's right, Jodi,” her mom said softly. “I've told you that already.”

“I know...but I've been putting God off. I know all the same stuff that Derek does, but because of I've been so angry, I haven't wanted to put God in charge of my life and ask him to forgive my sins. But I was thinking in that cave...it was really stupid of me to be angry at God when he has been so very, very good to me. He has given me you and Cheyenne and friends like the Esparzas. He has protected me and shown his great power in sending Mr. Esparza to rescue us. I thought...I want to be a Christian, and Derek told me I should. But it seemed pretty lame to do it in the cave just hoping that if I became a Christian, God would save me.”

“God saved you because he loves you. Not whether or not you become a Christian.”

“I know that...now. But I still think I need to give him my life.”

“Do you know how to do that?”

“Oh yeah...they talk about it at church all the time. I DO believe that God exists and he loves me and that Jesus died for me. I know that I have done wrong things.”

“Like what?” asked Mrs. Dover.

“Well, first of all by not standing up when Derek was leading me to do things that I knew were wrong. I knew that if his dad said to stay away from the caves, that going there was sinful. If Derek’s dad didn’t want Derek going there, then you wouldn’t want ME going there. And so to go was sin.”

“OK, right.... anything else?”

Jodi laughed, “LOTS else! I get angry when kids treat me badly at school and I say mean things back. I sometimes hit Cheyenne when she gets into my things. There is really a lot.”

Mrs. Dover smiled. “OK. What else do you need to do?”

“I guess telling you all this is important. I am so sorry for the wrong things I’ve done and I will try not to do them again. And I know that I need to be baptized.”

“That’s right. We can talk to Pastor Gene at church about doing that this Sunday when we get back if you’d like, or we could do it here in the ocean.”

“No! I have been in the ocean water plenty recently.”

“OK. Well why don’t we pray and talk to God and then we will have your baptism when we get back to our church.”

“It WILL be MY church, then too, won’t it?”

“Yes, honey it will.”

Jodi bowed her head: “God, thank you for rescuing Derek and me from the caves. Thank you that even though we disobey you, you still love us and take care of us. God, I want you as the leader of my life. I want to follow your way for my life. I want to live the way YOU want me to live. And I want you to forgive my sins. I have plenty of them, but God, I know that you forgive them. Sunday when I am baptized, I can know you have washed my sins away and that I will be forever with you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Jodi looked up and her mom had tears running down her face.

“But mom,” Jodi asked. “Who were those two men?”

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“I don’t know, honey. Let’s go ask Derek’s dad.”

They went from their bedroom out to the living room.

Jodi gasped when she saw not only the skinny man with the black hair, but also the older man with the black jeans & black t-shirt. They sat with a stack of envelopes piled in front of them. The envelopes were stacked up and tied with very old ribbon and string. The envelopes looked like they weren’t in very good shape.

Mr. Esparza had a few of the letters unfolded on the table and he and Derek were sitting talking with the men.

Mr. Esparza glanced away from the two men when Mrs. Dover & Jodi walked in.

“Ricky, do you know what is going on here?” asked Mrs. Dover.

“I’m just finding out,” Mr. Esparza replied. “Come and sit down Jodi.”

“Jodi,” he asked. “What did you think that map was a map to?”

“Treasure! Maybe pirate treasure. But Derek didn’t think it could be a pirate map buried in this house and so maybe it was a map to the loot from bank robbers or something.”

Mr. Esparza smiled. “Boys, you want to tell the kids your part of the story? Jodi & Terry (that was Jodi’s mom)—this is David and Dan Barnes. They have lived here year-round in Bayshore all their lives. In fact their mom & dad and even their

grandparents have lived here all their lives as well. And that appears to be part of the story”

Dan, the skinny pale one with the dyed black hair looked at them and nodded without smiling.

“Boys...it’s yours...”

“We had heard that there was some kind of valuables hidden in the foundation of this house when it was built,” began David, the older of the two. “At least that’s all we could figure. Our grandfather Leonard Barnes used to talk about that there was something very valuable to him in the foundation of this house. And someday he was going to try to come and get it, even if he had to sneak under the house and take it.”

“We figured it was money or gold or something, just like you two did,” interrupted Dan.

“Be quiet, Dan” snapped David. “Anyway, grandpa Len died a couple of years ago, but Dan and I kept wondering what was under there. Most of the year this house sits empty. And so a few months ago, we started coming in our free time, and checking out the blocks that made up the foundation. We looked all around the outside, but things had been painted white several times—you couldn’t tell nothin’. So we started going under the house. We didn’t figure there was anything wrong with that, as long as we didn’t try to get into the house upstairs....”

“Well, there was something wrong with that,” said Mr. Esparza seriously.

“We’re learning that,” said Dan.

“Be quiet Dan, I told you.” said David again, firmly.

“We started checking the block from the inside to see if there were any that were different....that showed that there might be something in them. We’d work our way with flashlights examining the blocks under the house one by one.

“Well two days ago, we found a set of blocks that were a little bit different color and the mortar holding them together was a different shade. So yesterday we started chipping at them. Yesterday we took the top one out and had started chipping at the bottom one. We had just discovered that the second one had a wooden lid, when we heard one of you come back. We got scared and ran away. But we had to come back and find out what was in that box....I had just gotten started on it again when Dan heard these two,” he said waving at Derek and Jodi.

“Dan ran, yelling something stupid about finding his dog. Once it looked like the coast was clear, I crawled out too. But we HAD to find out what was in that box.”

“Which we just did,” said Mr. Esparza.

“We already knew” said Jodi “—it was the treasure map!”

“Not really,” replied Derek’s dad. You just found what was laying on top—the leather cover with the map inside. You got so caught up with that you didn’t dig farther down in the box and find all these letters.”

“Letters?”

“Yes, letters.”

“Pirate letters?” asked Derek with a smile.

“No,” said Dan. “Love letters.”

“LOVE LETTERS!” said Jodi and Derek in unison.

“Yes, love letters,” Derek’s dad smiled. “You see, my mom and these boys’ grandfather were boyfriend and girlfriend when MY mom would come here in the summer and they wrote lots of letters to each other. Even after Mr. Barnes left for the war, they kept writing. But my mom and Leonard both found other people that they loved and they married other people. These letters are from one to the other. Mom has mentioned them many times. She said she had put them inside a block when this house was built as a symbol of their forever love.”

“Oh brother...” sulked Derek.

“You’ll understand that kind of love some day,” smiled Mr. Esparza. “Anyway she had told Mr. Barnes about them and he always wanted to re-read them, but mom just wanted them to stay where they were. I guess they were more valuable to old Len than mom probably knew.”

“He sure talked about them that way,” said David.

“But the map!” cried Jodi.

“I already told you,” said Derek’s dad seriously. “Young boys & girls, many times boyfriends and girlfriends used to go out to the cave and build fires and be together. They knew they wouldn’t be disturbed because it was a very dangerous place and most folks stayed far away from it. And occasionally—like I told you Derek—some kids would get caught in there and drown. They couldn’t get out and there was no one watching them like Dan was watching you two today.”

“No treasure?” said Derek glumly. “What a waste of our time!”

“Not a waste, Derek” said Jodi. “Seeing God’s gifts of His care, His love, His protection and His power are good enough treasures for me.” If we hadn’t gone on our

treasure hunt, who knows how long it would have been before I became a Christian. I may NEVER have. And now, I can add one more treasure to my list: the treasure of eternal life. Because I am a Christian, I have forgiveness of sins and will live forever with God. That sounds like an excellent treasure to me!”

Derek smiled, “It is. Another Bible verse that we learned is: *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23)*

“But what about the boys?” asked Mrs. Dover.

“That is what we were talking about on the way back in. What they did was illegal. And they know that. But what they were doing was trying to get something that also in part belonged to their grandfather. So because of that and because Dan literally saved you kids’ lives, we’re going to forget it. I am going to give them some of their granddad’s letters & get the rest to mom. Now that they are out in the open & she knows which block hid them, she can decide to keep them, put them back or give them all to the Barneses.”

“And as for you, Derek. As I said in the boat, there WILL be consequences for your action. You’re not getting off so easy for disobeying me and putting your and Jodi’s life in danger. Your mom & I will talk about it tonight and let you know tomorrow. But expect consequences. I—and you-- can’t afford for this to happen again.

“I know... but we’ll have quite a story to tell when we get back to school!” smiled Derek.

“Yes, indeed, Derek,” his father smiled, “you will.”

THE END

