

“There’s Just One You”

By Calvin P. Habig



Pacesetter Publishing

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CHAPTER ONE

Nick and Kayla were so glad it was summer. They had been friends for as long as they could remember and they lived for summer. They went to school together in Cloverdale, OR. Every day from September through June they were picked up by bus in Bayshore and driven to school.

Nick and Kayla lived at opposite ends of Oceanview Drive, the main street through Bayshore. But whenever there was no school and it was not raining (and many times when it was) they would meet somewhere in the middle.

In the summer time it was beautiful, and they could spend hours outside exploring. Kayla’s parents were busy with the summer tourists at their gift shop and so the two spent much of their days combing the beach, reading books in the sand dunes that they had checked out of the Bayshore library and riding their skateboards down the streets and sidewalks of the town.

Ah, their skateboards. Their boards seemed to be extensions of their legs. During the summer there were parts of downtown

Bayshore that were too crowded to use their boards, but they always found a place to practice their tricks.

Once they had tried skateboarding down the sidewalk of Oceanview Drive while several tourists came in and out of stores. There were a few close misses.

When Kayla got home, however, there had been a phone call to her mother. Mr. Brungardt, from the Sudsy Sea Laundromat, had called to complain that the two kids had almost knocked over an elderly lady who was carrying her basket out of the Laundromat.

Kayla had been banned off of her skateboard for a week and only got it back with the promise that they would not skate on the sidewalks downtown during the summer.

After Nick found out that her board was gone for the week, he put his away.

“I’m not riding if you can’t,” he told Kayla.

“That’s dumb. Just ‘cause I can’t is no reason for you not to.”

“Aw, it’s no fun if you can’t,” Nick replied.

“But I can watch you practice tricks. Your Ollie is getting pretty good,” she said referring to the trick of letting the back of the skateboard hit the ground knocking it up into the air. Kayla had never been able to get hers more than five inches off the ground. Nick’s Ollies were almost a foot high.

“If one friend can’t skate, neither can the other one. That’s settled,” he said firmly.

Kayla smiled.

She was glad that Mr. Brungardt had called her mother and not Nick’s dad. When Mr. McDaniel was home off the fishing boat, he was usually drunk. Mr. McDaniel’s sister came and stayed at the house while he was out at sea. But she would hurry back to their parents house when Nick’s dad came home. She could not take the yelling and throwing of things that happened so often when he was drunk. Nick had one older brother, Cade at the house as well. He was sixteen and Nick had sometimes talked about the fistfights they got into.

Kayla’s parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harris, did not permit Kayla to go over to Nick’s house. The stories of Mr. McDaniel’s heavy drinking and rumors of drugs made them very cautious about Kayla spending time there. They didn’t mind, however, if Nick came over to Kayla’s house. Mrs. Harris usually had laid something out to eat before she went to work in the summer months.

Kayla was 11. She had red hair that was REALLY red: almost as red as a cherry. She kept her hair cut about shoulder length. Her dad called her his “little china doll” because her face was almost dainty. A very small nose and mouth were balanced by deep brown eyes.

But Kayla did everything she could to undo the nickname of “china doll.” She was usually loud and could hit a ball better than any boy in their class at school. She had had Nick teach her to skateboard and while he was always better, she was a fast learner.

Her parents ran a small gift shop on Oceanview Dr. During the winter they opened later and only one of them had to be at the store at a time. But in the summer, they went to work early, stayed late and hired additional help. The summers were very difficult, but they made enough money then to at least get them through the winter months.

There were times when Kayla’s mom or dad would ask her to come in and help put merchandise on the shelves or run the vacuum cleaner. But mostly, Kayla had her summers free and if she kept from knocking down old ladies in front of Mr. Brungardt’s Laundromat, everything would be OK.

During the winter, Kayla’s parents attended Faith Christian Church, a small church that met in the community room of the Oregon Coast Bank. Kayla had accepted the Lord and been baptized in the extremely cold ocean Oregon coast water the summer before.

Through the school year, Mr. Harris taught the middle-school Sunday School class. But every summer he gave it up to tend to the store. Her parents would call Kayla about 9:00 on Sunday mornings to make sure she was out of bed. One of them would try to get away from the store for an hour to meet Kayla after Sunday School and attend worship. Sometimes she sat with her mom or dad. But

sometimes she sat with the other kids from the Sunday School class. Either way, her mom or dad were usually there, but as soon as church was done, they immediately left and headed back to the store.

Nick could not have been more different from Kayla. While he was a year younger than Kayla, he was six inches taller. He was very tall and skinny. His skin was usually very tanned, because even when he was not with Kayla, he would usually stay outside as long as he could—trying desperately not to go home. His hair was a dull brown and seemed like a comb or brush had never touched it. It went in all directions—a permanent case of bedhead. While he loved to read, he didn’t do well in school. Sometimes, it was because there was so much chaos in their house the night before that he couldn’t read his assignment or get his homework done. Other times, he was exhausted from the yelling the night before, or he had laid awake a long time into the night waiting for the signs that his dad had come home from the bars.

Because he didn’t do well at school and was the tallest one in his class (by far), the other kids often snickered at him or avoided being around him. That in turn made Nick defensive and resulted in him getting into a lot of fights.

A number of parents had called the school complaining of this bully who was picking on their kids. Sometimes Nick DID start the fights, but just as often the other kids had jumped him.

For some reason, however, he felt comfortable with Kayla. They had a kind of unwritten agreement. Nick would teach Kayla the finer points of skateboarding and Kayla would help Nick with his schoolwork—not cheating, but reviewing with him what the teacher had said in class—which Nick had usually not heard—and then answering any questions he had while he did his homework on his own.

As I said, they lived for summer. It was the time that Nick’s dad was gone the most and Kayla’s parents were always—it seemed—at the store.

One day about a week after Kayla got her board back, Nick and Kayla had been skating at the public library. There was a short stairway—six stairs that went down from the library level down to the parking lot. They would get a 20 foot run on the sidewalk at the top of the stairs and right before reaching the stairs they would do an Ollie—they would hit their foot on the back of the board and it would pop up into the air just about the time that the stairway started to go down. On a good jump, they would clear all six stairs, keep their feet on or right above the board so that when it landed they could lightly press their feet down on the board and make a smooth landing. That was the theory. That only happened about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the time. The rest of the time, if they were lucky, they landed with their feet on the ground and had to run out the forward motion of the jump. If they were not

lucky, they would stumble on landing and their knees or their hands would take a harsh scraping on the pavement.

Many times their jumping sessions ending with both of them picking bits of sand, dirt, rock and asphalt out of their hands or knees.

That day they had practiced their jumps for about an hour.

Nick was wanting to see if he could get his board in the air more than 12 inches before the stairs dropped away.

He put got the board rolling with several quick thrusts of his leg. He half-jumped and have pushed down on the back of the board to get it to pop up into the air. The force of the kick, however caused both he and the board to go off balance. He crouched as the board and he sailed over the stairs. As they came down he wanted to stabilize the board and pressed down harder than usual with his feet.

When the board hit the pavement of the parking lot it was at an odd angle. Nick pushed down with his legs and suddenly he heard a loud cracking noise. At the same time he saw the front truck fly off to his left. The truck is the metal part that is fastened on the bottom of the deck of the skateboard that hold the axle for the wheels.

His bottom of his board began to scrape along the pavement under his weight and so Nick quickly spread his legs and started pumping them. The forward motion meant he had to keep running, but he had to get his weight off of the board.

A quick check of the pieces found that the Kingpin—the pin that goes through the board into the truck had snapped. Fortunately it

had not broken the board—the board is the easiest part of the skateboard to break. But they cost about the same amount of money to replace.

“Well that ends our skating for today,” Kayla said.

“Not necessarily. I have a repair kit at home and I can get a new truck down at the surf shop. You can’t just replace the kingpin. You have to replace the whole truck. If we stop by my house I can get some money & my repair kit and we can go buy a new truck.”

Kayla thought for a minute. She had promised her parents that she would not go to Nick’s house.

“Why don’t we just try to find something else to do,” she suggested.

“Like what? Go to Six Flags over Bayshore? Even in the summer, there isn’t much to do here. If we lived in a city we might have a mall or an amusement park to go to. No such luck here. I know you aren’t supposed to come to my house, but you don’t have to come inside. Just stay outside, even outside the gate and I’ll get my money.

Kayla reasoned, *Well mom & dad surely wouldn’t be upset if I didn’t go INSIDE the gate.*

“OK, but I have to stay outside,” she said.

Kayla waited outside the white gate in the middle of the picket fence that surrounded three of the sides of Nick’s house. He said that he would be just a little bit. She leaned her skateboard against one of the fence-posts while she waited.

A couple of minutes after Nick entered the house, his older brother Cade came out the front door. As soon as she saw him, Kayla was uncomfortable.

He was smoking a cigarette that was shorter than most she had seen.

“Who are you?” he asked as he sat down on the front step.

“I’m a friend of Nicks. He’s getting a repair kit for his board. The kingpin on the truck broke.”

“Oh,” he said, smirking.

Kayla could smell a sweet/bitter smell coming from the cigarette Cade was smoking. She knew it wasn’t tobacco, but she wasn’t sure what it was.

Cade pulled the white rolled stub out of his mouth. “Want a smoke? It’ll make you feel relaxed. Maybe take away the pain of some of the scrapes on your knee.”

Kayla was suddenly sensitive to the scrapes that she had incurred in that morning’s practice. They just happened, but now that Cade was pointing them out, they seemed to smart a little more.

Cade looked at the joint in his hand. “I’m offering. You’ll feel really good.” He took another puff.

Suddenly Nick threw open the front door.

“Where is my money? I always keep it in the drawer of my desk and it is all gone. You took it! That was my birthday money! There was almost \$30 there.”

“Just a loan, little brother, just a loan. You’ll get it back. What do YOU need money for anyway?”

“You use up all YOUR money to buy your drugs and then you STEAL mine.”

He moved toward his brother like he was about to jump him and then he glanced at Kayla.

She shook her head, back and forth.

Cade took another deep puff of his cigarette. “Thanks for the loan little brother.”

Suddenly there was a scream from behind the house. A hideous, piercing scream. All three of them jumped from where they were and ran towards the noise.

CHAPTER TWO

The backyard of the house ended in a dune which rose even higher than the house. From the top of the dune you could see the shoreline spreading out before you and the crashing surf of the Pacific Ocean. Down on the shore there stood a girl in her swimming suit but with a small backpack on her back. She was about their age and size. She was dark skinned with long black hair. She was not African-American, but she was too dark to be Hispanic.

In front of her lay a dark black shiny pile, covered in seaweed.

Nick and Kayla looked at each other and started to giggle. Immediately they knew what had happened. A dead seal had washed up on shore covered in seaweed. This tourist had come upon it and, curious and not knowing what it was, had come close to examine it. And getting close and suddenly seeing and smelling what it was—a partially decayed seal—the girl had screamed.

Cade muttered, "Stupid tourist," took a deep drag on his joint and headed back to the house.

“Hey!” Kayla called. “Hey you! Come up here!”

The girl turned to look at them. Her hands still covered her mouth and her eyes were wide.

With one last glance at the dead seal she ran at top speed toward Nick and Kayla.

When she arrived at the top of the dune, she was panting. “Did you see that! Somebody has killed a seal! It is dead down on the beach.”

Kayla laughed gently. ‘Nobody probably killed the seal. They get sick, they get old, they get injured and they die. Often the sharks feed on them, but sometimes they wash up on shore. It’s kind of gross, but it happens. I’ll tell my parents & they’ll call the sheriff and he’ll send somebody out to take it away. You obviously aren’t from here or you would know that dead seals just wash up on the shore. There is even a large family of seals that live down south of town where the river pours into the ocean. This may be one of them.”

“You’ve seen this before?” the new girl asked, obviously disgusted.

“Oh yeah...not every month, but a couple times a year you hear about another one that has washed up.”

“I think I’d rather be in Tigard. The worst thing you see there are dead squirrels. I love animals.”

Nick rolled his eyes at Kayla.

“I’m Kayla. This is Nick. We live here. Who are you?”

“I’m Pooja. I live in Tigard. We are here at a condo for a week.”

“Pooja!” cried Nick. “What a name!”

“It means ‘prayer’ in Sanscrit or ‘living your life in such a way that it is a prayer to God in everything you do’.” My family are Christians and they moved from India to America for my father to work.

“Still...Pooja!” said Nick, snickering. “Do your friends call you “Poo!?”

Kayla glared at him.

“Do you skateboard?” she asked Pooja.

“No, I don’t. I would like to but I never have. My parents believe it is too dangerous.”

“It’s not really dangerous, if you’re willing to wear a helmet and take a few scrapes and bruises,” said Kayla.

“But you’d have to get your own skateboard, because I don’t want any “poo” on MY board,” said Nick laughing again.

Neither girl smiled.

“That’s not funny Nick,” said Kayla.

“Oh lighten up. I’m just kidding.”

Pooja looked at Nick and said, “My father says, ‘*Like a maniac shooting flaming arrows of death is one who deceives a neighbor and says, “I was only joking!”*’ (Prov. 2:18-19) Actually, that is from the Bible, Proverbs chapter 2. My father quotes a lot from the Bible.”

“Very funny.” said Nick, pouting.

“Nick just broke a pin on his skateboard and we were going to go to the surf shop and buy a new part and fix his skateboard. Do you want to go with us?” asked Kayla.

Nick stood behind Pooja shaking her head furiously back and forth. *No, no, no!*

“I’d like that. I’ll have to stop in and tell my parents I’m going downtown instead of walking on the beach. But I don’t think they’ll mind.”

“Oh, that’s too bad”, said Nick quickly. “We’re in a hurry and can’t wait for you to go home and then come back to go with us. Maybe another time.”

“Actually our condo is right down this street that goes into town. You have to pass by it get downtown. That is where you would buy skateboard parts isn’t it?”

“It is,” said Kayla. “I’m glad you can come.” She headed out toward town. “Did you bring your money, Nick?”

“Didn’t you hear me?” Nick said glaring at her. “Cade stole all my money. There isn’t any money to buy a new truck.”

“Then why are we going downtown?” Kayla asked.

“To see how much they cost and see if they have a blue one that matches the back one I already have or if I need to buy a whole new pair.”

“You don’t have to do that today,” said Kayla.

“But I WANT to,” Nick said firmly.

“OK, OK...” Kayla replied. She didn’t like how Nick behaved when he became angry and he really appeared to be angry. But at whom?

Pooja straightened her backpack purse that she had been carrying on to her back and declared, “Well, then let’s go!”

The three of them sauntered towards town. They paused just long enough for Pooja to stop in at her parents’ condo and let them know what she was doing.

They arrived at Sealeg Sally’s Surf Shop after about a fifteen minute walk. Nick grouched that the walk normally took only five minutes on their boards.

Mr. Spier, Sealeg Sally’s husband seemed to be doing some bookwork at the computer behind the register. Kayla and Nick were here often enough that he knew them by name.

The front two thirds of the store were surfboards hanging from the walls and from the ceiling. There was a glass case where sunglasses, goggles, lotions, waxes and repair tools were located.

The floor was covered with racks and racks of clothes. There were wet suits, but most of the clothes were for surfing wanna-bees: t-shirts, baggy shorts, hats, long pants, towels. This time of year the tourists would buy anything that had a surfing theme.

The back third of the shop was dedicated to skateboards. Complete boards were hanging from the walls. Across from them hung a variety of helmets. On the counter across the back were a wide variety of decks—different colors, designs, even shapes. The decks ranged in price from \$30-70. In front of that, like the rest of the shop, were racks and racks of skateboard t-shirts, pants shirts, helmets and pads. Back in the very corner was a rack that was completely filled with trucks and wheels. Not just silver trucks, but pink, black, red, gold and several shades of blue. There was even a greater variety in the colors of wheels.

Kayla headed over to where the newest skateboards were displayed. She really wanted a new board. Her skateboard was a used one she had been found at the Library Thrift Store. It had old half-peeled off stickers on it and bands she had never heard of. But it was HER board.

She stood in front of the new ones and dreamed about how much better she might be able to be if she had one of these new ones.

Nick had taken Pooja over to the section with the helmets.

They seemed to have patched things up, Kayla thought. I’m glad.

She could hear Nick explaining about the various types of helmets and the advantages of each.

When Kayla came around the shelving unit that separated them, she was surprised to see that Nick was holding Pooja’s backpack purse. He had casually thrown it over his shoulder. They had moved away from the helmets over to the area where some older, used boards were displayed. Pooja was standing on a skateboard and Nick was explaining how to keep her balance and move the board with her other foot.

“Did you find out about the price of the trucks?”

“Omagosh...I forgot. We were talking about skateboards. I’ll be right back.”

He went back down the aisle, still dangling Pooja’s purse over his shoulder.

Kayla turned to Pooja and said, “Have you been to Bayshore before?”

“Only once. We usually go to a house south of Lincoln City, but my dad had a friend at work who would rent him his condo here a lot cheaper. And it is much newer and nicer. We were here last summer and then just got in last night.”

“Is it just you and your parents?”

“Yes. Last year we brought some aunts and uncles and cousins, but this year it is just us. I’m afraid it might be kind of boring. I knew the neighbors at the house in Glen Eden Beach. We had seen each other every summer. And last year I had my cousins. But this year I didn’t think I was going to know anyone until I met you.”

“I’m glad Nick has been nicer to you here at the store. I’m sorry he was so mean on the dune.”

“It isn’t the first time that someone has made fun of my name. But I am proud of my name. I am American...I was born in Portland...but I am proud of also being Indian. My parents had spent a long time trying to have children and so when I was born they choose Pooja because they said I was God’s answer to the prayers they had been lifting up for many years.”

“Have you ever been to India?”

“Twice. My grandparents and some other aunts and uncles are still there. It is fun to go, but it is a lot different from Portland. I wouldn’t want to live there. THIS is my home.”

Pooja continued, “I am a Christian and I believe that God created me just like he wanted me, where he wanted me, and gave me the name he wanted me to have. That way, every day I am reminded that he answered my parents prayer—even though it took a long time—and he will answer mine. My mom keeps reminding me

that God loves me greatly and it is a privilege to be called a child of God.”

Kayla said thoughtfully, “I’m not sure that God put Nick in the right place. His family is so mean and weird. He gets in trouble all the time and gets beat up a lot by his dad and his brother. I know he’s smart, but he doesn’t good in school. And he can be very funny and caring. The only thing he is REALLY good at is skateboarding. He is proud of that and would rather talk about skating than his family or school.”

“I don’t know much about him, but I believe that God put him in just the right family and place that he wants him. It may be that he put him where you could be his friend and help him.”

Kayla looked at the rack of shirts they were sorting through. “Maybe...,” she said.

Suddenly through the rack of clothes she saw something that caught her attention.

Nick was down the aisle from where she stood. No one else could see him. He was blocked by racks of clothes and display stands.

And as she watched, she saw him take a brand new blue skateboard truck and slip it into one of the pockets of Pooja’s backpack.

Suddenly her stomach felt sick as she watched Nick close up the pocket. He looked to his right and to his left.

And then he looked directly at Kayla. She stared back at him. Their eyes met for just a moment and she shook her head “no” several times. But he threw the pack over his shoulder and, pretending to look at things on the shelves, sauntered back to where she & Pooja stood.

Nick quickly came from around the corner.

“Hey Pooja! Here is your purse. I don’t want anybody thinking it is mine!”

He handed it back to her.

“Wow! It is heaven than I remembered it being.”

“You must be tired from the walk into town.” said Nick quickly.

“Could be,” said Pooja, “but still....”

“Hey let’s go. Kayla, let’s go see if your mom has laid out any food for us. I’m hungry!”

“Nick, not yet. We need to talk.”

“We can talk on the way back to your house,” he said, a bit too defensively.

“No we can’t. We can’t leave the store. And you know why.”

He looked at her directly in the eyes, “We have to go and we have to go NOW.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. We do not have to go NOW.”

“We can go if you want,” said Pooja.

“NO WE CAN’T,” Kayla said firmly.

“I’m HUNGRY!” protested Nick.

“Come on, Kayla,” said Pooja. “Let’s just get out of here. With that, Pooja slipped her arms through the straps on the backpack and walked out the door with Nick following right behind.”

CHAPTER THREE

No one said anything as they walked down the street from the surf shop.

As they walked Pooja stepped a little bit ahead of them and Kayla sternly whispered to Nick, “Nick! I can’t believe you did that.”

Nick didn’t say anything.

“You have to go back RIGHT NOW and take that part back,” she continued.

“Be quiet,” was all he said back.

Pooja suddenly had slowed and was right beside them.

“What are you guys whispering about?” she asked.

When they didn’t answer, she said, “So, what are we going to do now?”

No one answered.

“Yes, Nicholas, what ARE we going to do now?” asked Kayla pointedly.

“Let’s go to Overlook Rock.”

“What’s that?” asked Pooja.

“It is a large rock on the river that we discovered,” replied Kayla. “It isn’t on the beach and so there are hardly ever any tourists there. But you can see the ocean, you can see down the river and you can see most of the town from it when you are on top. We’ve practiced doing some jumps from the road side of the rock. The river side drops off about twenty feet into a rocky part of the river.”

The walk to Overlook Rock took about ten minutes. Kayla said nothing most of the trip to the Rock, not knowing what she was going to do about Nick and the truck.

They climbed to the top and Nick showed Pooja the views from the rock. The river side was pretty scary because it dropped straight down into the river. It was a straight drop and ended in a number of big rocks and fast water swirling around them.

Nick explained to Pooja how they would practice jumping off of the road sides of the rock where the drop was only 3-4 feet onto the road and if they missed they landed on grass or sand.

“That would be fun to see,” said Pooja. “I wish I could watch you guys jump on your skateboards.”

Suddenly, Nick’s face lit up. “Let’s do it! Let’s all go to my house and fix my skateboard and get Kayla’s and come back here.”

“How can you do that?” asked Pooja. “You don’t have the truck.”

“Well, in fact, I do,” said Nick.

“No you don’t.” replied Pooja.

“Mr. Spier said I could take the part and pay him back when I got the money.”

“He what?” said Pooja. “That was sure nice. But where’s the truck?”

“I was carrying your bag & so I just stuck it in one of the pockets. Here, let me show you.”

Pooja looked confused as he took the backpack from her. Nick quickly unzipped one of the side pockets and pulled out a brand new blue skateboard truck.

“Where did THAT come from?” said Pooja, her eyes getting bigger.

“He said I could just have it, so I stuck it in your bag. So now I can go fix my board.”

“That’s a lie Nick and you know it.” But this time the voice was Kayla. “I saw you put that truck in Pooja’s backpack.”

“Of course you did, but Mr. Spier had given me permission to take it.”

“Pooja, when you were with him, did he ever speak to Mr. Spier?” Kayla asked.

“Not at all. Not even hello as we entered the store.”

“And when I asked you about the truck, you said you hadn’t even looked at them. You went over to the trucks, you never went to the front of the store where Mr. Spier was before I saw you put it in the bag.”

“So, big deal. He WOULD have let me take it and pay him back if I’d asked.”

“No he probably wouldn’t have...or you would have asked. But you DIDN’T ask and so that is stealing.” Kayla said firmly as she looked him directly in the eyes.

Pooja looked mad. “If he had stopped me and asked to look in my bag, I would have been accused of stealing. He might have called the police. Did you ever think of that? I could have been arrested for what YOU did!”

Nick rolled his eyes. “But you weren’t.”

“I’m sorry, Kayla, but I can’t be around the two of you. I can’t trust Nick.”

She looked directly at Nick, “You put me in danger and stole something that belonged to someone else.”

Pooja put her backpack on her shoulder. “I thought I had found friends I could spend my vacation with. But, Nick, you tried to hurt me.”

“Ah, Poo-Poo, come on,” said Nick.

“Don’t call me that! That is not my name. My name is Pooja.”

And with that she turned and headed down the street towards her house.

Both Nick and Kayla watched her go.

After a minute Nick asked, “You don’t suppose she will go back to the surf shop and tell Mr. Spier about the truck do you?”

“I don’t know...but it would serve you right if she did.”

“Ah, Kayla, get over it. I just want to skate! If I have to pick up a truck to do it, so what? I’ve bought plenty of stuff from him before.”

“That doesn’t matter. The truck wasn’t yours. Nick, I don’t get you. We are good friends. And yet you know how serious this is. How could you do this?”

“Kayla, I love to skate. It’s who I am. Someday I want to be a professional skateboarder. Without my skating, I am nothing. My dad and brother are usually drunk or high, I do lousy in school. I don’t even know where my mom lives, and I am way too tall and so people make fun of me. Everything is wrong. But when I skate, all of that doesn’t matter. I am nothing without my skateboard.”

“That is just not true and you know it. Last week in Sunday School Mrs. Lerew taught us a verse from Psalms: *“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”*

“You are made by God to be special,” Kayla continued. “You are not nothing because your family is messed up and other people make fun of you. Those things are THEIR problems. God has created you to be unique. But by stealing, you are throwing it away.”

Nick looked away in the distance and said, “There is nothing special about me. Just my skateboarding. And with no truck and no money to buy a truck, I am nothing.”

Kayla stood in front of Nick and said, “That is just stupid talk. Just because you are good at skateboarding does not give you the right to steal from someone else.”

“Are you going to run away from me too, like Pooja?” asked Nick.

“I don’t know what I am going to do, but I don’t see how I can be close friends with someone who steals.”

With that she took two steps backwards and turned like she was going to walk away.

But Kayla had forgotten that she was on the river side of the rock. She stumbled back a step, her eyes got big and a confused and panicked look came over her face. And suddenly she was gone.

Nick was watching her one moment and the next he was looking at the sky where she used to be standing. He heard a quick gasp when she stumbled, but he heard nothing else.

Quickly, but carefully, Nick moved to the edge of Outlook Rock. Kayla lay in the river below him. There was blood on a rock where it

looked like she had hit. She was laying in the river beside the rock. Although she was near the shore, the water was deep enough that she was totally submerged in the water. Her left arm was twisted around her body in an awkward position. The water around her head was a reddish-black.

Nick quickly scampered down the side of Outlook Rock and to the river bank. He splashed into the river not even taking off his sandals. He reached down and grabbed Kayla and pulled her head above the top of the water.

Very quickly she coughed and sputtered and spit out water. But her eyes remained shut. There was blood flowing from a large cut on the side of her head. Her cherry red hair was turning beet red and matted from water and blood.

“Kayla, Kayla, are you OK,” cried Nick, panting to hold her head above water.

Kayla did not respond. Her eyes remained shut.

Nick took some of the cold river water & splashed it on her face, trying to get some of the blood off of her face, and hoping that the water would wake her up. While it cleaned off some of the blood, she did not awaken.

He had to get help. Even if she woke up, she probably was not in good enough shape to walk to her house. There wasn’t a hospital in Bayshore.

In wet clothes and not able to help, she was a fairly heavy weight. She was too heavy a weight for him even to carry to shore. But he couldn’t leave her here to get help. If he let her go, her head would sink back under the water level and she would drown. If he could drag her onto the rock that she had hit, she could lay there. But there was too big a chance that she would slide or roll off the rock back into the water and she would drown before he could return with help.

Her cell phone, he thought. She always has her cell phone with her in the summer in case she needed to call her parents. He reached inside the pocket of her shorts and pulled it out. The cell phone was there, but one look told him it would be no good. Having been immersed in the water, it was dead. The water had shorted it out.

“Kayla, Kayla,” he kept saying her name. “You’ve got to wake up. You’re one of my only friends. You’ve got to wake up.

He began to cry. “God, you’ve got to help my friend Kayla. Please God.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Nick in the water holding up Kayla's head minute after minute. It seemed like hours, but he knew it was probably only 10 minutes.

"Help! Help!" he had cried out a few times. But one thing that they liked about Outlook Rock was that it was away from everything else. The tourists didn't come here when there were so many other things at the beach and in town. There were no houses nearby and very few people just "happened" to come by the Rock.

"Help! Help!" He watched as blood continued to flow out of the gash on the side of her head.

"God, you've got to help my friend Kayla. She loves you. She doesn't deserve to die."

Kayla's parents wouldn't miss her until they came home late that night after closing the store. They knew that she was with him. They trusted him. They knew she was safe as long as the two of them were together.

It had been such a good day. Why had everything gone wrong? He had broken his skateboard, his brother had stolen his money, he had seen the opportunity to stick the truck in Pooja’s backpack. Pooja...he had even been mean to her, calling her names. She still trusted him to hold her backpack while she learned to move on a skateboard. If he had not made her mad, she would still be here and she could run for help. If he had only pulled the truck out of the pack before they left the store. Kayla had given him “the look.” He knew she knew. He knew she would not approve.

She wasn’t quoting scripture all the time like Pooja seemed to do, but she lived out what it meant to be a Christian every bit as Pooja did.

As he held her from slipping off of the rock, he remembered when her grandmother had died. Kayla had been very close to her “granny” as she called her.

There were lots of tears, but Kayla remained fairly level. She talked about her granny being in heaven. Not the “I sure hope there-is-a-heaven-for-those-I-love” type of talk, but a confidence in God’s promise that since her granny was in Christ, she was in heaven with Him.

In fact, Nick remembered, Kayla seemed to have confidence in all areas of life. It wasn’t a bragging kind of confidence. It wasn’t a “look at me and how brave or strong I am” sort of confidence.

It was a confidence in God. A confidence that no matter what comes, God still loves her and will make things work out for her best.

Nick thought, *That is very different from me. When I do well on a trick I am super happy. When my dad had been home for a few days and drinking, I am very angry and grouchy. My moods depend on what is happening around me.*

But Kayla was different. She accepted Nick when others wouldn’t. She seemed to believe that God was working in Nick’s life. She didn’t leave him immediately when he stole the truck. After she wakes us, if she wakes up, she might have decided he was too bad an influence and have to leave now, but he knew she still cared about him.

The water was so cold Nick’s arms & legs were beginning to grow numb. Kayla, while still unconscious, was beginning to shake. Maybe she was cold, maybe it was shock. He took all his might and moved her up against the rock that she had fallen upon. She groaned when her twisted arm dug against the rough rock.

Hopefully this is good, he thought. Hopefully she still felt pain. Maybe that meant she will wake up.

Using all his might, he half carried and half-dragged her up on top of the rock. He could sit with her without holding her head above water. He took off his shirt and wadded it up into a pillow and put it under her head. But he dare not leave. One wrong move and she

could easily slide back into the water. Without being awake, her head would stay under the water until she drowned.

Nick had never really prayed. Oh, he often bowed his head when he ate meals with Kayla’s parents, but it was only out of respect. He didn’t think he knew how to pray. Kayla’s dad sounded so dignified, and yet spoke to God as one might to a friend.

But, now, even though he had never prayed before, Nick called out to God now.

God, I don’t know if you are there, but if you are...don’t let Kayla die. None of this was her fault. I should not have asked her to come over to my house. I know her parents are afraid of my brother and dad...that they will hurt her. But I insisted. God she wouldn’t be in this mess if I hadn’t stolen the truck. God, please help her. Don’t do it for me...but do it for her. Please. Amen. Thank you.

He wasn’t sure what Amen meant, but he knew that he should at least thank God for listening.

After they had sat there about fifteen minutes, Nick heard a noise. It was talking. Talking on the river. Maybe fishermen were on the river! As he looked, he saw a raft drift around the corner. Someone could help him!!! God had answered his prayer!!

As the raft drew closer, he recognized it. It was Caleb Eller’s raft. Caleb was a friend of his brother Cade. Caleb got in trouble at school a lot, and had even gotten kicked out of school, it was said, for having beer in his locker. Cade had said that Caleb’s older

brother bought some for him and other times he stole alcohol from his parents.

As the raft came close, he saw three people on the raft... Caleb, another boy...and Cade!! His brother Cade was on the raft.

“Cade!” he yelled.

“Help! I need help! Kayla fell & hurt her head!! Call help!! Cade!! I’m over here.”

As they drifted closer, he saw that the boys were drinking beer on the raft and smoking those same cigarettes that Cade had been smoking on the porch when Kayla had come over. One boy looked asleep. The other two were out of it.

“Cade! Cade!” Nick yelled. “Help us!”

It looked like Cade lifted his head a little and looked around and then he laid back and took another drink of his beer.

The raft drifted on by .

“Cade! Cade! Cade!” Nick yelled, but his brother was too drunk or stoned to be of any help.

God, why didn't you send help? Why did you have to send them? They are no use to anybody. God, I know that I could end up like Cade, but I don't want to. I want to be like Kayla. Even Pooja. God, I don't want to hurt others and get myself and others in trouble. God, please help my friend Kayla.

Something, or rather, someone caught the corner of Nick’s eye. There was someone standing downstream! If he looked over the bank he could just see them. They were watching him. He looked. It was a girl, dark skin, black longish hair! It was Pooja!

“Pooja! Come here!” She could see his head over the bank, but she couldn’t see Kayla laying on the rock in the river.

“Kayla’s hurt. She’s hurt bad. She needs help.”

Nick watched as Pooja just stood and looked at him.

“Pooja! Come here!” he yelled. *Why didn’t she respond? Maybe she couldn’t hear me.*

“Pooja!” I need your help!” he yelled louder.

He watched in confusion Pooja shook her head back and forth. No.

NO? Kayla needs help.

What is she thinking. If she knew this was Kayla, surely she would do something. Maybe she is still angry with me. Nick thought. Maybe she doesn’t trust me. Maybe I’m like the boy who cried wolf. I have lied to her and hurt her and she won’t listen to anything else I say. God please change her mind. Help her to see I genuinely need help!”

CHAPTER FIVE

Suddenly Nick heard sirens. They were far away, but they were definitely sirens.

"Please let them be for us! Please let them be for Kayla. God, please let the sirens be for Kayla."

The sirens kept getting louder and louder until Nick knew definitely they were coming here. Soon they were right above them. Pooja stood and pointed to where they were in the river. The EMT's from the ambulance slowly worked their way down to Nick and Kayla on the rock.

"Are you OK, young man? one of them asked Nick.

Nick spoke with his words running over one another, "Yes, sir, but my friend is not. Kayla is hurt. She fell off of the rock and has been bleeding. I held her head out of the water & then pulled her up onto the rock. Nobody would come and I prayed and my brother came, but he was too drunk and still nobody would come and I saw Pooja and she was down the river, but she wouldn't come either

because she didn’t trust me because I hurt her and I don’t want anything bad to happen to Kayla...”

The EMT smiled. “Slow down, son...we’ll do our best. Right now let’s get you out of the river.”

Another EMT helped Nick out of the water and wrapped him in a blanket. Nick then watched from the bank as they worked on Kayla on the rock.

Pooja was waiting at the river bank when Nick was brought to shore.

Kayla’s mother and father arrived soon after. They had received the phone call from the sheriff, and had asked a neighbor to watch the store while they both came to the scene of the accident.

Mrs. Harris had her head buried in Mr. Harris’ chest and bit her lip as they watched the EMT’s work on their daughter down on the river.

They took scissors and cut away part of the hair on her head to expose the skin. Then they worked at putting some bandages on her head. They wrapped her in a blanket as well. Soon a flat board was brought down to the rock and after a few minutes the EMT’s began the slow journey of carrying Kayla, strapped tight to the board, out of the river to the waiting ambulance.

“Why didn’t you come?” asked Nick to Pooja. “I called and called and you just shook your head ‘No.’”

“Because I had promised I would stay by the road. I called the sheriff and he asked me to come back out here and stand by the road so the ambulance could see where you were. They couldn’t see you on the river from the road. I was afraid that if I left my spot, the ambulance would come by while I was down here and miss you.”

“YOU called the sheriff? But how did you know?”

“I was coming back to the rock. I wanted to convince you to go with me back to the surf shop and return the skateboard truck. If you returned it and apologized, maybe it would be better than if they just found out that you had stolen it. And they WILL eventually find out. They almost always do. Maybe he WOULD let you pay part of it and part of it later. But either way, it would be better to be honest about the part, than steal AND then live a lie.”

“I was coming up to the rock and I saw you and Kayla and then I saw Kayla fall. I knew there was nothing I could do, so I ran to your house because it was closest. But your brother wasn’t home.”

Nick rolled his eyes at that.

“Kayla’s skateboard were there by the fence where she left it when you heard me scream about the seal. And so I tried to ride it to our condo. I ran more than rode, but it helped me move a little faster. But my parents were gone...I think they were going to the beach. And so I called 9-1-1 on my dad’s cell phone. Then I skated back here until the ambulance came from Lincoln City. I was afraid that if I left the side of the road, they would miss you.”

“I felt so all alone,” said Nick.

“But you weren’t.” replied Pooja.

“I know that Kayla was there, but she couldn’t be much help,” protested Nick.

“No, I don’t mean Kayla. I mean God. The Bible says, *‘Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.’*” (Josh. 1:9)

The ambulance drove away to the hospital in Lincoln City, about twenty–five miles away. Mrs. Harris rode in the ambulance with Kayla. Mr. Harris offered to drive Nick and Pooja to their homes. Pooja thanked him, but said she couldn’t accept a ride without her parents permission. Nick asked if he could go, instead, to the hospital with him.

“We should let your dad know where you are, first,” said Mr. Harris.

“My dad won’t be home off the boat for two more days. My aunt Nicole comes and spends the nights at the house, but other than that, my brother and I are alone.”

Mr. Harris looked at Nick with a concerned look. “Let’s stop by your grandparent’s house and at least let THEM know.”

Before Nick would go, however, he had to return to the top of Outlook Rock to retrieve something he had dropped when Kayla had fallen.

Mr. Harris saw Nick put a blue piece of metal in his pocket.

Pooja left to walk home and Mr. Harris took Nick by his grandparents’ house. They quickly gave permission for him to go to the hospital to see how Kayla was doing.

In Lincoln City, Nick sat with Kayla’s father in the waiting room after Kayla’s dad had filled out all the necessary paper work. Mrs. Harris was still by her daughter’s side.

As Nick explained again to Mr. Harris what had happened on Outlook Rock, he included—this time—the story of the blue skate truck. Mr. Harris was very alarmed when he heard that the truck had been stolen.

“You are going to have to take it back, son.”

Nick paused for a minute before saying, “I know, sir. I don’t know what I was thinking. I just wanted that truck so much. I couldn’t help myself.”

They both sat in silence for a minute.

“Nick, would you like to be able to withstand temptation like that?”

Nick was silent again. Then he said quietly, “Yes, sir.”

“God can help you do that, son. If you trust your life to following after his ways.”

“Do you mean, go to church? Like Kayla and you and Pooja”

“Not really,” said Mr. Harris. “Going to church is an important thing. It helps you grow as a believer and helps you to encourage other Christians and be encouraged by them and allows you worship God as a group rather than just by yourself.”

“But going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car,” he continued.

Nick laughed at that.

“No, being a Christian means that you set your heart and mind and actions toward following after Christ and his ways. You tell him that you want HIM to be the one who is the boss of your life and helps you make your decisions.

“In return for that,” Mr. Harris continued, “God forgives you the guilt you have for the wrongs you have done, he comes to live inside you and help you make decisions and overcome temptations.”

“Like stealing the skate truck,” said Nick.

“Like stealing the truck,” agreed Mr. Harris.

“And like making fun of Pooja,” added Nick.

“Like that,” agreed Kayla’s dad. “And by involving Pooja in the theft. If you kids had been stopped by Mr. Spier, Pooja would have been the one blamed. And she did nothing wrong.”

Nick gulped, nodded and looked down at the white plastic chair he sat on. Tears welled up in his eyes.

“God can forgive you the guilt of those things. And the rest of the sins you have done.”

“But what about Pooja? Doesn’t she have to forgive me?”

“Yes, Nick, she does. But you have hurt not only her, but God as well. And so you need to ask forgiveness of both: God AND Pooja.

“But what if she won’t forgive me? Will God not forgive me?”

“No, God will still forgive you whether Pooja does or not. But if she is the type of girl you have described, I suspect that she will. Are you truly sorry you have done these things?”

“Yes sir. Very much.”

“Sorry enough to return the truck and face the consequences?” asked Mr. Harris.

At the mention of consequences, Nick didn’t answer right away. Finally he nodded.

“That willingness to undo the wrong you have committed is called repentance. You must believe that God exists and that Christ can take away the guilt of your sins; you must want to make him the leader of your life; you must repent—to seek to undo the wrong you have committed and no longer do it; you must tell others that you want Jesus to take away the guilt of your sins and you must be baptized.”

“Because you are in effect becoming a new person, Jesus told us to be dipped down into water and raised back up to depict that we are becoming a new person. With our body we are appealing to God for him to clean our hearts of the guilt of sin. It is a witness to all who see it.”

“When can I do that?” asked Nick.

“Well, we need to talk with your dad about it, but we can and we should do it very soon. We could do it this coming Sunday at church or we could do it sooner if your dad agrees.”

Nick sat silently for a while. “But Mr. Harris, will Kayla wake up? And what will happen when I take the truck back?”

CHAPTER SIX

Later that evening, a few hours after being brought into the emergency room, Kayla began to wake up. She had been admitted to a hospital room and told she would remain there for 2-3 days. Part of her head had been shaved where the gash was and there was a large white bandage wrapped around her head covering up the many stitches. In addition to injuring her head, she had broken her shoulder blade. She did not require surgery, but the doctor said that the arm would have to be in a sling for several weeks.

That night before Nick was taken home, Pooja and her parents showed up at Kayla's hospital room. After seeing Kayla for a few minutes the nurses asked them all to leave.

Nick and Pooja talked in the hallway while the Harrises and Pooja's parents went to bring them something to eat from the cafeteria.

“Pooja. I am very sorry that I included in you the shoplifting. It was very wrong for me to do it at all, but to include you was even worse. I apologize for doing that.”

Pooja sat quiet for a minute. “I forgive you. But why are you doing this now? You didn’t seem very sorry when we were first on the Rock together.”

“It is because I have decided to become a Christian. I talked with Kayla’s dad and I want to become a new person. I have asked Jesus to forgive me of my sins and I want to follow after him. I am going to be baptized as soon as we can get my dad’s permission.”

Pooja smiled big and then asked, “Will he allow it?”

“Probably. He keeps telling us that his parents went to church and took him when he was a boy. But now he says he is too bad to go. God would not accept him. But I think he would let me go and be baptized.”

“Your dad is not too bad for God to accept him,” said Pooja. In the Bible it says, *‘But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.’* (Rom. 5:8) Not when we had no sin or when we were good enough, but while we were still sinners.”

“Maybe by your example, your dad can come to faith in Christ too and deal with the problems he has in his life. Maybe THAT is why God has put you in the family you are in. To be an example to them and to lead them to Christ.”

Nick didn’t respond. He had a lot to think about.

“I am sorry, too, about calling you names...making fun of your name Pooja.”

Pooja smiled. “Do you remember what my name means in Sanskrit?”

“Prayer, I think.”

“That’s right,” Pooja said. “Living a life that is a prayer to God. When someone makes fun of my name, I pray for them. And God usually changes their heart. I prayed for you.”

“You prayed for me?” asked Nick surprised.

“Of course. And God answers my prayers. And he will yours, too.” She paused for a minute and then asked, “What are you going to do about the truck?”

“I’ve got to take it back. I would like to just sneak it back in and put it back on the shelf. But that wouldn’t right. I need to tell Mr. Spier what I did.”

“Tell me when you are going to do it and I’ll go with you.”

“No. I need to do it alone. I am afraid that if I bring you, he will think you had a part in it. It did it alone. I need to take it back to him alone.”

“Are you sure?” asked Pooja.

“I’m VERY sure.” replied Nick.

Two days later, Nick walked alone into Sealeg Sally’s Surf Shop.

He had the blue part in his hand. He walked up to the counter. Mr. Spier had not seen the truck when Nick came through the door.

Nick placed the part on the glass counter top.

“Mr. Spier, I have something to tell you.”

“Well, hello Nick! Good to see you again. I hear your buddy Kayla took quite a spill. Is she alright?”

“She will be. But that’s not why I am here. I am here to tell you that the day she fell, I had stolen this truck from your store.”

Mr. Spier’s face was suddenly very serious.

“We had a new girl with us and she had a backpack.”

“I sort of remember her. Black hair. Pakistani or Indian maybe.”

“She is Indian, but she was born in Portland.”

“I noticed you didn’t stay as long as normal looking at skating supplies.”

“No, sir. I had put the truck in her backpack and I wanted to get out of here as fast as we could.”

“I see,” said Mr. Spier. “Did Kayla and that other girl know what you were doing?”

“Neither of them. We were arguing about whether or not I should bring it back to you when she fell off of Outlook Rock.”

“Oh dear,” Mr. Spier said concerned.

“My brother had stolen all my money and my kingpin broke on my board and I thought stealing it was the only way to get a new truck. It was wrong and I apologize.”

Mr. Spier stood quiet for a minute behind the counter.

“This is very serious, Nick. Do you know that?”

“Yes, sir. I know I could go to jail.”

“Perhaps. But you have returned it of your own accord. My first thought was to ban you from our store. You are in here a lot and I can’t afford for people to be stealing from me. But I don’t think being arrested or banned will teach you any more lessons than you have already learned. Tell you what? I have some sweeping and dusting I need done. I need my front windows washed. If you will spend a couple of hours everyday next week working on those jobs, I won’t press charges... and I will let you keep the truck.”

“Really!?” said Nick, surprised.

“In addition, if you do a good job, I might have similar jobs every week or so that you could do. That would let you see how hard it is to keep up a store and that when you steal from a store, you are stealing the hard work of others. I can either pay you a little bit of money or you can exchange it out for skateboarding supplies. How does that sound?”

“There’s Just One You”

“That sounds too good to be true.”

“Well, then let’s get you to work earning that truck today!”

CONCLUSION

So what about Kayla, Nick and Pooja?

Kayla went home after three days in the hospital. She stayed at home for several more days and was off of her skateboard for the rest of the summer. The danger of hitting her head or shoulder and re-injuring them was too high.

Nick was baptized the next Sunday. Kayla was there and Nick's dad came to watch. Cade wouldn't come even though his dad pressed him to.

Nick began to go to church with the Harrises. When Nick's dad was in town he started to take Nick to church and developing a friendship with other men in the church.

Someday, thought Nick, dad will be ready to accept Christ. He is drinking less and arguing less. I think that being around Christian people is having some good effect.

Pooja went home to Tigard at the end of her family's week of vacation. But through the school year, she e-mailed Kayla and sent e-mails to Nick through Kayla. She told him she had bought a skateboard and was learning to ride. And the next summer when her

“There’s Just One You”

family came back, the three of them spent the week exploring, skating and having even more adventures.

THE END
