The Lost Cabin

By : leinad

The Lost Cabin is the start of childrenâ s novel about three young children Mandy, Melissa, and Austin beginning their summer vacation on their familyâ s new farm. The children plan to explore their new farm and their first adventure is to find the lost cabin that is supposed to be somewhere deep in the woods. Along the way the children experience areas of the farm they've not seen and eventually end up in a surprising event that will change their lives forever.

Published on
Booksie

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THE LOST CABIN

Daniel Warner

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CHAPTER 1

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Mandy felt a warm breeze on her face and slowly opened her eyes.ï¿½ Through, the open bedroom window a soft warm breeze slowly drifted in gently swaying the curtains pushing them out exposing a clear sunny morning.ï¿½ï¿½ A sweet fragrant smell of lilac that grew just outside her bedroom window rode in with the wind.ï¿½ She smiled as she lay in bed enjoying the bright sunshine and fragrant soft breeze and she thanked God for what looked to be the start of a beautiful summer.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ School was out and there would be no more homework, no rules, no crowed bus, or having to get up super early, nothing but fun and relaxation for the next three months. And more importantly this was the beginning of her first summer vacation on the family's new farm.ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Mandy along with her Mom, Dad and little brother Austin had moved here late last fall and all winter she had been looking forward to summer and having time to explore everything around the farm. For as long as Mandy could remember she had dreamed of living on a real farm.ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ It was a dream she and her parent's shared, although she wasn't sure about her little brother.ï¿½ All he wants to do is play and get into trouble, but mostly bug her. She was convinced Austin's whole goal in life was to be the biggest pain to her as he could. She couldn't imagine having any more brothers or sisters like her Mom and Dad had talked about the night before.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ ï¿½Mandy jumped out of bed and tore through her closet. She found just the right outfit to put on and then turned her attention to making her bed as fast as she could.ï¿½ She was in a hurry because today her best friend Melissa was coming over and they were

going exploring.ï¿½ Melissa was Mandy's best friend and all winter they had planned on how to explore the fields and woods of the farm.ï¿½ The two of them had spent many cold winter night's together making notes and drawing a map of special areas around the farm.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Mandy couldn't believe that this day had finally arrived.ï¿½ Melissa and her were going to start their first exploring adventure and would begin with the hunt for the lost cabin.ï¿½ Dad had helped Melissa and her draw the map showing them the general location of the cabin, but even he wasn't even exactly sure of its location, since he had only heard about the cabin from the previous owners.ï¿½ He told them it was deep in the woods, so he drew the landmarks he was aware of on the map, which showed the creek and paths to follow.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Mandy's thoughts drifted to Melissa and she silently counted the years they had known each other and it was hard to believe it had been 10 years already.ï¿½ They met in preschool when they were 3 years old.ï¿½ Mandy at the time was an only child and Melissa was one of triplets.ï¿½ Melissa had two brothers born at the same time, but she was proud to announce she was the oldest even if it was only by a minute or two.ï¿½ Melissa would later have two other brothers and Mandy would have her brother Austin.ï¿½ Mandy loves Melissa and they act more like sisters then best friends.ï¿½ As most sisters they love to play together and share many interest and generally just like being around each other, but each still are very different and sometimes those differences get in the way of their friendship. ï¿½ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Mandy loves pretty thing like jewelry, flowers and pretty clothes.ï¿½ She wears bows and dresses and likes her jet black hair long with ï¿½bangs in the front, ï¿½but ï¿½she's not afraid to get dirty and likes to help her Dad in his work shop; Melissa on the other hand, is into sports baseball, football, and soccer and never likes or wants to wear a dress and keeps her light blond hair cut short and easily manageable.ï¿½Mandy likes sports and practiced figure skating and plays baseball and soccer, but it's not all she likes to do.ï¿½ Melissa lives to play sports and Mandy feels there are a lot of other things she would like to try.ï¿½ Mandy thought how different she and Melissa are but how much they still love each other and doing things together, but at the same time it was good to have time alone and not have to share everything even her room.

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ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Mandy bounded down the hall and stopped at her little brother's room and looked in and saw him on his bed playing with his tractor.ï¿½ "Come on little buddy breakfast time.ï¿½ Ok, I'm coming," he replied as he tossed his tractor to one side.ï¿½ "Race Ya!" Yelled Mandy. "Hey no fair you got a head start!" Screamed Austin, as he rounded the corner of his bedroom door slipping in his stocking feet and falling on the hardwood floor.ï¿½ "No running up there! Way to go twinkle toes Mom wouldn't have known if you hadn't dusted the floor with your backside," touted Mandy.ï¿½ "By the way I won.ï¿½ Girls rule Boy s drool.ï¿½ "Yea well you cheated," complained Austin as he sat down at the breakfast table.ï¿½ "Ok that's enough you two sit down and eat your breakfast before it gets cold," warned Mom as she sat down at the table next Mandy to drink her cup of tea.ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ "What are you two up to today? I don't know what Austin's doing, but after I finish my chores Melissa and I are going exploring.ï¿½ Mmm...that's fine but what about your brother? What about him?" blurted Mandy even though she knew what her Mom was thinking?ï¿½ "I...I wamp go to!" mumbled Austin as he tried to keep the cheerios from falling out his mouth.ï¿½ "Gross Austin," complained Mandy.ï¿½ "You know Mandy it's not fair if you don't take your brother with you.ï¿½ After all he lives here two and should know how to get around the farm

without getting lost. Aw Mom do I have to take him?"ï¿½ Moaned Mandy.ï¿½ "Well, you could always stay home and work around the house," suggested Mom.ï¿½ "I'm sure Austin well be happy to join us," blurted Mandy.ï¿½ "I thought so too," agreed Mom.ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ "Mom where's Dad working today?" Asked Austin.ï¿½ "He's working in the lower hay field today raking the hay he cut yesterday.ï¿½ He wants to have that field baled by this afternoon and I'll be out there helping him get it done.ï¿½ That means you kids are on your own today and have stay out of trouble.ï¿½ That means no arguing!" warned Mom. "Now you two finish your breakfast and get your morning chores done."

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Mandy and Austin quickly finished their breakfast and stacked their dirty dishes in the sink.ï¿½ Austin reached the back door first stepped outside and yelled, "Hey Mandy race ya!ï¿½ Hey no fair!" She yelled back as she ran through the door trying to catch up to her brother.ï¿½ Austin reached the chicken house first and was jumping up and down yelling, "I won, I won, boys rule girls drool! Yea, well you cheated," mumbled Mandy as she stepped into the chicken house.ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ The two of them hurried through checking the nesting boxes for eggs filling two wire baskets with a mixture of white and brown eggs.ï¿½ "Why do you think some of the chickens lay brown eggs Mandy? Because those chickens eat dirt and it makes the eggs dirty," she replied.ï¿½ "No it's not!ï¿½ Is it?ï¿½ Sure it is just ask Dad tonight at dinner," snickered Mandy.ï¿½ Austin filled the water bottles for the chickens with fresh water while Mandy filled the feeders and with the eggs safely stored away in the cooler the two of them washed their hands and started back to the house.ï¿½ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Mrs. Wells, Melissa's mom pulled into the drive just as Mandy reached the back door of the house.ï¿½ She turned and ran to meet Melissa, who was jumping out of the car barely before it had time to stop.ï¿½ Melissa jumped in the air giving Mandy a high five one to each side and one down low a special greeting the two girls had made up for just for the two of them.ï¿½ï¿½ "Hello Mandy," said Mrs. Wells.ï¿½ "Hi Mrs. Wells.ï¿½ How are you today?ï¿½ Fine thanks for asking.ï¿½ Is your Mom inside?ï¿½ Yea she's in the kitchen," replied Mandy.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ As Mrs. Wells disappeared into the house the two girls went and sat in the shade under a massive oak tree in the back yard.ï¿½ Mandy likes sitting under the old tree, its huge limbs spread across the back lawn providing a cool spot to hang out.ï¿½ The trunk from the tree is so large that Melissa and her could hide behind it and not be seen.ï¿½ Mandy really wished the tree was hollow so her and Melissa could have a club house inside of the tree, but for now they had to live with just having the area to themselves and maybe one day a tree house up among the huge tree limbs.

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ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ "Hey Mandy did you hear about stuff getting stolen around town?ï¿½ No, what are you talking about?ï¿½ I heard Mom talking to one of the neighbors about it.ï¿½ Someone is breaking into homes and stealing stuff.ï¿½ What kind of stuff? Mom said stuff like cans of food and stuff out of freezers," replied Melissa.ï¿½ "Our neighbor said the police are scratching their heads on this one trying to figure it out. Gee Whiz, I thought we left all that bad stuff behind us at our old house," stated Mandy.ï¿½ "You haven't had anything stolen have you?" Asked Melissa.ï¿½ "No I don't think so, but we'll have to keep a look out for the crooks just in case they get any ideas of coming around here. ï¿½By the way have you seen Austin?"ï¿½ Asked Mandy.ï¿½ "Yea, he ran into the house with my mom."ï¿½ Mandy remembered seeing him running into the house, with a determined look on his face.ï¿½ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Austin came running out of the house a few minutes later letting the screen door slam the side of the house as he jumped off the back step. He quickly joined the girls under the oak tree wearing a cowboy hat and a water pistol, which He had stuck down in his pants along side of the toy hatchet hanging from his pants belt.ï¿½"Austin!" Exclaimed Mandy.ï¿½ "We're not playing Cowboys and Indians. We're going exploring.ï¿½ I know, but what if we run into some Indians or a bear or something," explained Austin.ï¿½ "At least we'll be prepared," he continued.ï¿½ "Mandy he does look kind of cute all dressed up like that," stated Melissa. "Oh, I don't care, you can wear ï¿½the stupid stuff if you want, but if you get hot and tired I'm not going to carry all that stuff and I get to tell you I told you so," replied Mandy.ï¿½ Melissa smiled at Austin she thought he was cute and liked his show of bravery, even if his choice of weapons were nothing but toys.ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Mandy ran into the house and returned with two backpacks.ï¿½ "Mom made all of us lunch and she said you're to eat your sandwich this time Austin not just the cookies.ï¿½ Ah, come on did you tell Mom I gave my sandwich to Jake yesterday?ï¿½ No," replied Mandy, "Mom saw you give it to Jake and told me to tell you not to feed him your food again because he's the size of two dogs now and he doesn't need to get any bigger.ï¿½ But, He was hungry," explained Austin.ï¿½ "Jakes always hungry.ï¿½ I think He'd eat the pizza delivery boy if we let him," replied Mandy. "Besides, he can't even fit through the dog door anymore he's so big.ï¿½ï¿½ He's not fat it just his hair is thick and he got stuck one time and now he's afraid of the door," argued Austin.ï¿½ "He's fat!" Chimed Mandy and Melissa at the same time.ï¿½ "Ok, ok, maybe a little, but who can say no to those sad little brown eyes and that big wet nose and the way he drools when he sees food," defended Austin.ï¿½ "Alright already, enough I agree Jake is a big fat loveable black bear of a dog and it's hard to say no to him, but Mom said it's for his own sake, besides we gotta get going daylights burn'en," replied Mandy as she swung the backpack over her shoulder. The three explorers yelled good by to their Mom's and headed down the main drive, which lead past the old barn and then on to the great unknown.

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CHAPTER TWO

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ The children traveled out beyond the house and passed the huge old white barn. Mandy looked up at the massive structure and her attention was drawn to the multicolored slate covering the roof of the barn.ï¿½ She remembered earlier that spring her Dad repairing the roof and showing her the slate that covered the roof.ï¿½ Mandy was surprised to learn that the slate was a stone that was mined and cut out of rooks. Slate was used because it was very strong and would last over 100 years.ï¿½ï¿½ Her Dad had given her some of the broken slate to paint pictures on. He said that slate was probably close to 100 years old. ï¿½She tried painting on the slate, but didn't think it turned out to well, but her Mom loved it and hung it up for everyone to see. ï¿½ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Mandy's ï¿½gaze was then drawn to the twin towering silo's each of them rising high in the sky looking like two rocket ships ready to blast off to the space. They both looked similar to the rockets used on the Shuttle when it launched into space, but they're really used to hold corn and silage feed for the farm animals. ï¿½She wished she could climb to the top of one, but her father told her never to climb them.ï¿½ In fact he made her and Austin both promise never to play on or inside any silo.ï¿½ Still Mandy knew the silos were high and she wondered how far she could see from the top. Someday she thought when I'm older I'll be allowed to climb a silo and check it out.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ The road soon led the three explorers between two fenced pastures and in one pasture was the herd of milking cows and the other was empty or so it seemed.ï¿½ "You don't want to go in that pasture over there Melissa," warned Austin.ï¿½ "Why's that little buddy?ï¿½ I don't see anything over there, besides all the cows are on the other side," replied Melissa.ï¿½ "Not all of'em," cautioned Austin his little eyes wide open in mocking horror.ï¿½ï¿½ "Over in that field is the biggest, meanest, and ugliest bull you ever laid eyes on. Really, what's so bad about a little'ol bull?" Teased Melissa.ï¿½ "Take our word for it Melissa that old bull don't like nobody but cows," replied Mandy.ï¿½ "Yea, He's got horns and everything.ï¿½ Dad doesn't even like him.ï¿½ He throws a big blanket over his horns when they have to work on him," warned Austin. "What's his name?" Asked Melissa. "Bull," replied Austin. "No really what's his name? Bull I told you," groaned Austin. "Why Bull? Because Dad said anything that big and mean doesn't need any other name than what God intended," laughed Austin.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ "What about those cows over there?" Asked Melissa.ï¿½ï¿½ "Them's the girls," replied Austin, as he stood up straight and pointed his thumb over his shoulder smiling.ï¿½ "They won't hurt you none they're just a bunch of sissy's.ï¿½ Hey! Watch it buddy just because they're a herd of girls don't make um a bunch of sissy's," complained Mandy.ï¿½ "Them sissy's as you put it can trample and kick holes through wood stalls and mess you up pretty bad," she warned.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Most of the cows lay under a huge maple tree some were napping in the sun, but most of them laid in the ample shade of the tree and chewed and chewed while swishing away flies with their tales.ï¿½ "Those cows look like there chewing gum," remarked Melissa.ï¿½ "That's because cows chew their cud," answered Mandy.ï¿½ "Cud! What in the world is cud?" Exclaimed Melissa.ï¿½ "Cud is grass that the cows have eaten already and spit back up to chew it some more," answered Mandy.ï¿½ "Yuck that's gross!" Replied Melissa sticking her tongue out.ï¿½ "Cows have three stomachs and they bring the grass out that they ate earlier and re-chew it to break it up more," explained Mandy.ï¿½ "Yea sort a like ABC gum," laughed Austin, "but instead it's ABCC already been chewed cud.ï¿½ You're sick Austin," complained Melissa and the three of them laughed as they resumed walking down the road.ï¿½

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ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ At the top of a small hill the children stopped and looked down on a rolling field of fresh cut hay neatly fluffed up into long rows.ï¿½ Mandy and Austin's Dad was in the field on his tractor raking the hay into the neat rows, with a machine called a hay rake.ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Yesterday, their Dad had started working the field of grass with a machine that cuts the grass and rolls it flat and lays it into a neat row, so the rake can pick up the grass left behind and fluff it up so it will dry and not mold when it's baled.ï¿½ Hay when its baled is packed into very tight rectangles or rolls and it has to have all the moisture removed so it won't mold.ï¿½ Mold can make animals sick and also create heat that could cause a bale to catch on fire something Mandy's Dad called spontaneous combustion.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ The smell from the fresh cut hay was strong and sweet and the dark green rows glistened in the sun from the morning dew.ï¿½ Mandy's Dad Mr. Phile gave the children a hearty wave as he bought his huge green tractor to a stop next to them.ï¿½ "Hey kids!ï¿½ What are you up to this morning?" He asked while climbing down from his tractor. ï¿½He jumped off the last step of his machine and reached out with his huge arms and sucked both his children to him and hugged them.ï¿½ Releasing the two children he rubbed the top of Melissa's head and smiled at

her.ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ "You kids look all bright eyed and bushy tailed today.ï¿½ Wow, and it looks like you're setting out for an adventure? We are!" Chimed all three children.ï¿½ "We're going to look for the lost cabin today," explained Mandy. ï¿½"Well that sounds like quite the under taking!ï¿½ You have your map, food and water?" Asked Mr. Phile.ï¿½ "Yes Dad.ï¿½ Mom packed us lunches and plenty of water and we have everything we need and some stuff we don't," replied Mandy, as she looked at her little brother.ï¿½ "Ah..I see, Austin's bought stuff to protect you girls," agreed Mr. Phile.ï¿½ "What, why's everybody looking at me?"ï¿½ Declared Austin.ï¿½ "No reason," laughed Melissa.ï¿½ "I don't see what so funny. It's ok son a man can't be too careful out here in the wilderness."ï¿½ Austin snapped to attention and beamed a large smile at his Dad.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½"Well I have to get back to work, your Mom's due out here soon with the baler and I'd best be ready for her." Mr. Phile waved and said goodbye as he climbed up the steps of his tractor, but not before he reminded the explorers to always stay together, remain on the trails and don't do anything foolish or risky.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ A short while after the three travelers had left Mr. Phile the road started heading down hill and they were nearing a thick dark wooded area.ï¿½ "Let's stop here and check the map," stated Mandy.ï¿½ The two girls stood next to each other and opened the map to check out their location, but Austin tired of walking spotted a rock by the fence.ï¿½ He thought it would make a great place to sit, while the girls tried to figure out where they were.ï¿½ He didn't care much where they were he just wanted to rest, after all its hard work carrying all these weapons. Besides, he would never admit to his sister that his weapons were getting heavy already and the cowboy was hot.ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Austin plopped down on the rock and suddenly a small brown snake wiggled out from under the rocks shade startling Austin. ï¿½"Snake!" Yelled Austin as he tried to jump off the rock, but fell backwards over the rock on to his backside.ï¿½ When, he slid backwards he got wedged between the rock and a fence pole. ï¿½The girls looked up when Austin yelled and watched in shock as he fell backwards and then they started laughing when his legs started waving frantically in the air.ï¿½ "Help," moaned Austin, "I'm stuck."ï¿½ The girls stepped up to help Austin and they saw a seemingly terrified Gardner snake trying desperately to escape before someone else sat on him.ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ Mandy calmly reached down and gently picked up the frightened snake all the while talking to it and trying to assure it that she meant it no harm and walked to the other side of the road and released the snake.ï¿½ She then turned to her brother, who was finally sitting upright thanks to Melissa's help and said, "Gee whiz Austin it was only a little baby snake.ï¿½ I know," stammered Austin embarrassed that he had screamed in front of the girls and then fell to boot.ï¿½ "I didn't expect to see a snake,ï¿½ besides it scared meï¿½a little.ï¿½ Boy, you sure looked funny stuck there, with your feet waving in the air," laughed Mandy.ï¿½ "I'm glad you thought it funny I didn't," complained Austin.ï¿½ "You have to admit if it was one of us you'd think it was funny," stated Melissa.ï¿½ "I guess so," and with that the three friends looked at one another and started laughing. "Why don't we take a break I'm thirsty and then we'll get on our way," stated Mandy. The others agreed and sat together on Austin's now famous rock.

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Chapter 3

CHAPTER THREE

After a short break and a drink of water and a quick check of the map the three explorers were on their way down the path heading for the dark opening in a very large stand of trees. The opening sent chills down Mandy's back. At the entrance to the woods Austin who was leading stopped. "Whoa... it's dark in there. It's like night in there," he stammered. "We gotta go in there?" Asked Melissa. "Yea," said Mandy a little skeptical. "It's the only way to get to the Cabin." Mandy knew finding this Cabin was her idea and she also knew it was up to her to lead this expedition, so she swallowed hard and stepped to the front and said, "come on we can do this."

"Man, what is this place? I've never seen so many big trees before," stated Melissa. "Dad says it's an old sugar bush," replied Mandy. "Yum, you mean there are bushes with sugar growing on-um in here?" Asked Austin, who suddenly thought maybe it's not that scary of a place after all. Especially, if there are bushes covered with tiny square sugar cubes like the ones in the sugar bowl at home. At least out here he thought mom couldn't scold him for eating too much sugar. "No silly," replied Mandy, "A sugar bush is what they call a woods that is mostly full of maple trees used for collecting sap that once boiled becomes maple syrup. And I think the building that is used to boil the sap is called a Sugar House as well," explained Mandy. "A Sugar House! I suppose you're going to tell me it's not made out of sugar either," complained Austin. "Nope, sorry just a nickname," explained Mandy. "Figures," moaned Austin.

"Why do they call it sugar then if it's maple syrup?" Asked Melissa. "The pioneer children probably named the maple syrup sugar because it was the only thing they had back then to sweeten their food, so they called it sugar. The Indians showed the pioneers how to collect the sap from the maple trees and then boil it into syrup," explained Mandy. "What happens when you boil the sap?" Asked Austin. "Oh, I know this one!" exclaimed Melissa. "The sap thickens while it's boiling because the water evaporates out and soon turns thick and golden brown. And sweet," added Austin. "How much sap does it take to make syrup?" Asked Austin. "It takes 50 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup," replied Mandy. "Yum, I love maple syrup," stated Austin as he rubbed his tummy. "Why do you think Mom and Dad bought this farm, they couldn't afford to keep buying you maple syrup, so they bought our own sugar bush," teased Mandy. "No it's not!" Replied Austin. "Is it?" No," replied Mandy, "But it's a funny story. Well excuse me if I don't laugh," grumbled Austin.

"By the way Melissa have you ever tasted sap?" Inquired Austin. "I did," she replied. "I was at the Maple Festival last year at the stand that sells maple syrup candy they had sap that could be tasted. It was like drinking water that smelled like wet wood and it tasted like it too. Yuk," replied Mandy. "Double Yuk from me," agreed Austin.

The children continued walking down the path and Mandy noted the trees were very old and tall and full of leaves, which blocked the sunlight from reaching the floor of the woods. The darkness made the woods smell damp and musty and they each walked in silence, seemingly lost in their own thoughts. Shadows crept in from behind the trees only to be lost again as they continued down the path. Every once in a while a rustling sound would come from a nearby bush or from high above, but the culprit would elude their sight.

Red squirrels high up on the tree branches stopped what they were doing and begin chattering very loudly warning the other animals and scolding the strangers for intruding. Suddenly a giant bird came swopping down from the trees flying just above their heads. The bird screeched just as it flew over and

they all ducked covering their heads. The sound sent chills down each child's spine, as bird flew off and disappeared in the trees.

"Mandy what was that?" Yelled Austin. "It was an owl," she replied. "Will it come back and get us?" Asked Austin. "No, the owl was just upset because we came into its hunting area," replied Mandy. "It was showing us we didn't belong and this is his home.

Mandy, how much farther?" Whispered Melissa. "I'm not sure," she replied. "It shouldn't be too much farther. I don't know about the two of you, but I'm starting to feel like the lion from The Wizard of OZ. I'm shaking so hard I'm afraid my pants are going to fall down," whispered a trembling Austin.

"Look!" Pointed Melissa. Hidden in amongst the multitude of trees and dark shadows loomed an old unpainted rectangular building. A large stone chimney took up almost one whole side and vines grew in and around the rest of the building covering most of the siding creating a mixture of green and gray walls. The children slowly picked their way through the brush towards the dark opening that looked to be the entrance.

The forest was dead quite as if waiting to see what the intruders were going to do next. Every step the children took echoed in the damp stillness. Mandy thought her heart was going to beat right out of her chest. Certainly the others must hear her heart beating it sounded like a huge base drum, but nobody spoke. Mandy had never been this scared in all her life, but was afraid to say anything. She looked down at Austin and he was trembling. Mandy reached down and took his hand and he squeezed hers so hard she thought she might scream, but held back for his sake.

Melissa broke the silence whispering. "Is this a sugar house? I think so" replied Mandy, "That's where maple syrup comes from?" Whispered Austin. "I thought maple syrup came from a factory, not some creepy looking run down shack hidden in the middle of some scary woods?" Asked Austin. "This must be why Dad didn't make any maple syrup this spring. He couldn't have cleaned this place up in time," stated Mandy as the three of them stopped next to the entrance.

"Who's going in first?" Asked Austin. "Not me," blurted Melissa. "Me neither," agreed Austin. "Oh, you two are a big help," complained Mandy. "I thought we were going to locate the mysterious cabin?" Asked Melissa. "We are, but shouldn't we start with this place?" Asked Mandy as she leaned around to try and see inside the sugar house. "Come on, I got my flash light lets at least step inside and look around," pleaded Mandy. Suddenly just as Mandy was about to step inside with her flashlight there was a loud crash from inside the house. All three children screamed at the same time and jumped back stumbling over each other. All three ran as fast as they could back to the main path and didn't stop until they were well out of sight of the ghostly house.

"Who do you think those kids were Lizzy? I don't know Tommy, but I sure thought they were going to see us. That sure was smart thinking you pushing that crate to the floor. I didn't do it on purpose Liz, when I thought for sure that girl with the flashlight was going to see us I tried to duck down and hit the crate knocking it to the floor. Well its ok, it sure sent those kids running with their tails between their legs." replied Lizzy. "What do you suppose them kids were up to snooping around here like that? You don't think they were running away from home do you?" Asked Tommy. "Naw, I don't think so Tommy, because they were dressed in some fine looking clothes and ain't none of them dirty. Did you see they had back packs on and that tall girl with the black hair was talking about finding some lost cabin or something," replied Tommy. "That's right she did say that. You know what we should follow them and see where they go and maybe snatch one of those backpacks. There could be food and clothes in one of those packs. But it's stealing. I'm getting nervous about all the stuff we're stealing Lizzy. I know don't look at me that way it's not stealing its survival, besides God knows our needs and maybe

this is his way of providing for us," explained Lizzy.

"What was that?" Panted Melissa as the three children stopped to catch their breath. "Better yet, who was that?" Added Mandy. "What do you mean who was that?" Asked Austin. "You never said anything about being attacked or scared by something this morning," moaned Austin. "It's alright little buddy I'm just wondering, besides it was probably some animal we started," replied Mandy. "Yea, I agree with Mandy, the beam from the flash light must have scared an animal or something," stated Melissa picking up on Mandy's attempt to calm Austin. "We'll tell Dad tonight what happened and He'll come out and check out the sugar house," explained Mandy.

"Mandy, do you know where we are? All of that running we did to get away from that sugar house I'm worried that we got turned around. Can we check the map?" Asked Melissa. "I know we'll find the Cabin. Look it's all right here on the map," explained Mandy as she unfolded the map. "Here's the sugar house and the main trail. We must be right about here," she said pointing to a spot on the map. "We just have to follow this trail to a fast running creek at the bottom of a steep hill." The children each examined the map and once satisfied that they weren't lost continued their adventure down the winding sugar bush road.

Chapter 4

CHAPTER FOUR

The brave explorers continued walking deeper into the woods the trees seemed taller with massive branches reaching wide and high into the sky. The leaves of the trees were so high they appeared to form a canopy high above them. The upper levels were alive and the branches were full of birds flying around and squirrels chasing one another. Below along the trail chipmunks scurried along fallen trees and noisily ran through old dry leaves, it was like another world as if the children had been accepted and deemed safe.

Rounding a bend in the road it began to rise up a steep hill. The travelers had to work very hard as they climbed the steep hill. Large gnarled roots protruded above the soil and stretched across the lane, they reminded Mandy of ugly witch's fingers with the grotesque knots looking like knuckles, but all twisted. It made her feel as though at any moment a root would reach up and grab one of them. Fortunately, the roots did provide a natural step and hand holds to aid in the climbing, but Mandy still couldn't shake the chill that ran down her back every time she'd reach down to grab one of those ugly roots.

Sometimes the road was so steep the children used the roots to hold on to too keep from falling backwards. Austin the smallest and quickest was in the lead climbing and he looked back and yelled, "I don't think Dad's tractor could get up this hill." The girls too exhausted to try and talk just nodded their heads in reply. Austin reached the top of the hill first and began to dance around singing, "boys rule, girls drool." Mandy glared at her brother but was too tired to pursue any retribution. Suddenly, Austin pointed and yelled, "Look! Look it's the creek. We're almost there!" One at a time the girls reached the summit and there was no mistaking they had found the right creek for even as far down as it was the explorers could see the fast running water.

The creek was ten or fifteen feet wide and was shallow where the road crossed. Mr. Phile had told the children where the road crossed the creek it's called a ford, which means a shallow place to walk across.

"Race Ya!" Yelled Austin as he bounded down the hill towards the creek. "Wait!" Yelled the two girls as they tried to catch up to Austin. They had to be careful because there were still a lot of tree roots crossing the path, but none the less it was a lot easier going down than up. Austin reached the creek first and fell down in the cool grass shaded by a nearby tree. Mandy and Melissa made it to the creek at the same time and stopped, they were trying to catch their breath. "Let's take a break here," suggested Mandy. "Good idea Mandy I'm tired, thirsty and a little hungry," said Melissa.

The girls found a rock next to the creek that was flat on top and large enough that the two of them could sit and eat a snack. At the bottom of the hill the trees had thinned and they could finally see more sky than leaves. Far above the girls an eagle gently floated in a giant circle intrigued, but not fearful of the strange new visitors below. Without hesitation the eagle let out its mournful cry to the intruders far below, but its warning was lost to a sea of green meadows and trees. The three weary travelers far too busy chatting too ever hear the warning given by the sentinel far above.

Austin busy walking along the banks of the creek was intent on finding a crayfish or lizard, or for that matter anything slimy that might scare the girls. Suddenly, he spots an unusual small gray rock under the water in a calm section near the bank of the creek. He removes the rock to examine it and realized that if it is a rock, it's an odd shaped rock, because of its triangle and sharp edges.

"Hey Mandy, Melissa come here. Look what I found," called Austin. The two girls jumped down from their perch and ran to see what Austin had found. Austin opened his hand to reveal his treasure. Mandy gasped. "That's an Indian arrow head. Are you sure?" Asked Melissa. "I'm pretty sure, at least it looks like the one I saw in a picture in one of my Dads books," replied Mandy. "The Indian's chipped the arrow heads from stone that's why the surface is rough with dimples. The ideal stone they liked to use is flint because it chips easier and has a sharp edge," stated Mandy. "Dad explained how the Indians made the arrows and he said that Indians use to live around here hundreds of years ago.

"Do you suppose there's any Indians liven around here now?" Gulped Austin as he looked over his shoulder. "No silly," replied Melissa. "Ok, if you say so, but if it's all the same to you guys I'm going to keep a close eye out," warned Austin as he stuffed his new found treasure deep inside his pants pocket. "I can't wait to show Dad what I found. It is pretty cool," agreed Melissa. "Do you think there are any more?" Asked Melissa. "Probably, but we'll have to look some other time if we're going to find that Cabin today," replied Mandy.

The children followed the path along the creek, sometimes jumping from rock to rock to avoid stepping into mud. A large tree struck down by lighting or a windstorm lay across the path and they had to climb over the tree to continue down the path. All the while the water in the stream was unrelenting quickly flowing by cascading over rocks and logs looking cool and inviting to the weary explorers.

Not only was the look of the water flowing pristine. The sound of the water had a lulling effect and all three children were deep in their own thoughts, when all of sudden there came a load crashing noise from a thick grove of underbrush. "Indians!" Screamed Austin. Melissa and Mandy froze in place not knowing where to run, while Austin dove behind a tree just as a frightened deer dashed out of the brush and leaped over the creek bolting past the two paralyzed girls. Both girls snapped their head in the direction the deer ran and watched as the white underside of the deer's tail waved back and forth.

"Austin!" Yelled Mandy. "Are your all right?" SheepishlyAustin stepped out from behind his hiding place. "Are you all right," asked Mandy. "Yea I'm ok. Good night that scared me," stated Austin. Me too," sighed Melissa. "All I know, Austin you gotta stop thinking about Indians you nearly scared Melissa out of her pants," snapped Mandy as she tried to hide her own fear. Melissa looked up at Mandy and said, "I wasn't scared. Well, I wasn't either," agreed Mandy. "Me neither," chimed Austin. The three children looked at one another and broke out into a chorus of laughter quickly forgetting their fear. "Come on you guys we have to keep moving," chided Mandy.

Chapter 5

CHAPTER FIVE

"Tommy! Tommy!" Hissed Lizzy, "Whata ya doin scaren up that deer like that? Sorry Lizzy I must of stepped into its hiding spot or something. I was just trying to stay up with the kids so's not loose um and that ole deer come running out of the woods making more noise than a freight train. It scared me half to death too," whispered Tommy.

"It's no wonder that little boy screamed so loud, that deer nearly ran right over him and all," stated Lizzy. "Now we gotta chase after them kids even further to get them packs.

All come on Lizzy I'm getting tired of chasing them kids," moaned Tommy. "You wanta eat don't ya?" snapped Lizzy. Tears started running down Tommy's cheeks and he bit his lip and turned away from Lizzy so she wouldn't see him crying.

Tommy was getting really tired of running and it seemed like they had been running for months ever since their mom died and that grumpy old lady from the child services told Lizzy they would each be going to a different foster homes.

Lizzy had decided the moment the old lady told them to go and pack some clothes that they had to run away in order to stay together, so when the lady went upstairs to Tommy and Lizzy's room to help get their bags Lizzy grabbed Tommy and took off running through the back alleys.

Tommy could hear the lady yelling for them to stop but Lizzy squeezed his hand tighter and they kept on running never looking back and they'd been running ever since; finding empty homes and buildings to sleep and hide in, rummaging through garbage dumpsters looking for food.

They stopped at a home once and asked the lady living there for some food, but when they were sitting at the table eating they overheard the lady talking to the police. Lizzy stuffed as much of the food as she could in her pockets and grabbed Tommy's hand and they ran out the back door, again hearing the yelling behind them to stop.

It was at that point that Lizzy decided it was too dangerous for them to go up to people and ask or expect any help and they would have to find other ways to find food. It was that night they snuck into someone's garage and found a pantry area loaded with canned foods.

Lizzy took canned food from the back of the pantry a trick she remember reading in a mystery story, where the man on the run took food and cans from the back so no one could tell stuff had been stolen. After finding a can opener in the garage Lizzy had managed to find a way to provide the two of them food, just as long as they didn't get caught.

Lizzy felt bad for snapping at Tommy about finding food to eat. She stepped up to him and put her arms around him bringing him out of his deep thoughts. At that Tommy couldn't hold back the tears any longer and started crying quietly and turned around and put his head on Lizzy's shoulder. Lizzy's hug felt warm and comforting to Tommy, she reminded him of their mom.

As hard as Tommy tried to hold back the tears he couldn't stop them once Lizzy put her arms around him. All the fear, pain, and hardship came rushing out of him and for several minutes the two children held each other sobbing. "I miss Mommy Liz. Why did she have to leave us? I don't know Tommy, I

miss her too," whispered Lizzy. "It was her time to go, but I know sure as we're hear together she's hear watching over us doing all she can to help us stay safe and together,"

It was several minutes before Tommy was able to stop crying and he then stepped back from Lizzy feeling a little better wiping the tears from his cheeks and snuffing his nose.

His gaze on Lizzy became more serious, "Lizzy, what are we gonna do, we can't keep running like this forever we have to find someone to help us?" Whispered Tommy. "You want to stay together don't you?" Warned Lizzy. "Yea, but not like this, this is hard. We're stealing and we're hungry all the time, we're cold when it rains, its dark and scary at night with rats and other animals running around while we try to sleep, and it's not going to stay summer forever in a few months it will be winter again. We can't keep running and have you smelled yourself lately we ain't had a decent bath in weeks. Shoot, I never thought I'd ever say that in my life, but I've been wearing the same clothes now for weeks and we stink!" complained Tommy.

"Something will come up Tommy I'm sure of it, but it may take some time. We have to keep looking for the right place that no one can find and come and take us away. We have to stay together. I couldn't live if I lost another person I love Tommy. first Dad in Afganistan and now Mom to Cancer. We have to stay together we just have too we've been through too much. We need each other. I need you."

"I get it Lizzy, but we don't have any clothes, barely any food, and where are going to find a place for the winter?" Replied Tommy. "And I don't want to live in some foster home either, especially without you," continued Tommy. "But if we get caught aren't we going to go to jail and be separated anyway? That's just it! We can't get caught," stated Lizzy.

The more Lizzy talked the more Tommy realized how she was so much like their mom. Their mom was kind and quite especially more since dad had died in the war, but when it came to Lizzy or him their mom wouldn't back down to anyone. Lizzy was like that now, not only did she look like mom, but she was beginning to act like her.

It seemed like ages ago when their mom asked the two of them to sit with her in the living room and she told them about her having cancer and that there wasn't anything the Doctors could do to help. Mom tried to explain to us what would happen to us since we didn't have any living relatives to go live with, but Lizzy got real upset when mom said we may not grow up together. Lizzy stormed out the room yelling and crying at the same time. Mom took my hand and whispered it would be ok, she'll come around and then mom hugged me hanging on to me for a long time.

Why was God doing this to us he wondered? Wasn't it enough that their dad died serving our country and now God needed to take our mom away too? And now here they are in a strange place, running and hiding from everyone, stealing food, dirty, cold, and scared.

"Come on let's go before we lose the trail of those kids," replied Lizzy as she shook Tommy. Tommy noted she seemed even more resolved than ever to see this through and find a place the two of them could live together without having to worry someone would split them apart, or worse send them to jail.

Chapter 6

CHAPTER SIX

Mandy lead the way along the creek and Austin and Melissa followed behind, "Slow up Mandy!" Yelled Melissa. Mandy looked behind her and saw that Melissa and Austin had fallen behind quite a distance so she set her backpack down and sat on the ground to wait for them to catch up. While Mandy waited she noted that Melissa was walking very close the bank of the stream, when suddenly Melissa lost her footing and screamed as she slipped off the bank of the creek. A loud splashing sound followed instantly.

Mandy jumped up and ran down to help Melissa hoping she was not hurt. At the stream Mandy found Melisa sitting in the cold stream trying to get up. Austin hung over the bank trying to reach Melissa without falling in the water himself, but his arms were too short. Mandy reached out and grabbed Melissa pulling her back up onto the bank.

"You all right?" She asked. "Yea, I slipped on that loose rock there," replied Melissa scowling at the rock as if it knew better. "Anything feel broke or bleeding?" Questioned Mandy. "No, I'm ok just bruised and wet," sighed Melissa as she wiped the mud off her pants.

"Well we can rest here until you're feeling better. Can I get you anything? Asked Mandy. "Some dry clothes." Replied Melisa with a smirk.

"I'm glad you're not hurt. If you're feeling better we should get going and maybe we should close up the gap between us a little," ordered Mandy. "I mean we should stay close together like Dad said just in case something does happen," stated Mandy trying not to sound like she was being bossy.

The three of them started up the path, "Hey!" Yelled Mandy. "My packs gone! I know I left it here.

Are you sure, or did you leave it back at the rock?" Asked Melissa. "No I'm sure I had it with me I set it down on the ground to wait for you two."

"We have to find the pack it has the map and Austin's and my lunch in it," moaned Mandy. The three of them looked all around where Mandy thought she left the pack when she jumped up to help Melissa and they couldn't find it anywhere. "You don't think it fell in the creek and floated down stream do you?" Asked Austin.

"I don't know, maybe, but it couldn't of just grown legs and walked out of here," replied Mandy. "Maybe in the excitement you knocked it in the creek with your feet and we'll find it on the way home stuck on a rock or tree trunk in the stream?" Stated Melissa.

"I don't know we might find it downstream, but Mom is sure going to be upset if I lose that pack, even though it's an old one she doesn't like it when we lose stuff," replied Mandy.

"Are we gonna have to stop and go home now Mandy?" Asked Austin. "Naw, little buddy I don't think so I have most of the map memorized and there's nothing else in that old pack except our lunches, besides Melissa's got stuff in her pack we can eat and you probably wouldn't have eaten your sandwich anyway," stated Mandy. "You're probably right," replied Austin then he suddenly blurted. "But Melissa's got cookies in her pack doesn't she? Yes Austin," she replied smiling and taking his hand to lead the way.

"Lizzy we hit the jack pot. Look what she got in this ole pack." Lizzy looked down at Tommy digging through the pack and her tummy growled. She saw two sandwiches in plastic bags with thick slices of ham and cheese between two slices of golden brown wheat bread. Tommy pulled out a bag with a half a dozen Oreo cookies and he squealed like a little piglet getting ready to eat a hardy meal. Also in the pack were two silver foiled fruit drinks.

Lizzy put her head down and started praying out loud. Tommy quickly swallowed his cookie bowed his head and closed his eyes and listened to Lizzy pray. "God, were sorry we stole from them kids, but we thank you for providing them and their lunch. Please help Tommy and I to stay together and find a new home with people that love us like our real Mom and Dad did. Amen. Me too God Amen," chimed Tommy.

Hungrily, the children feasted in silence both savoring the long lost taste of real home food, the type their Mom used to make for them, so long ago. Lizzy ate one cookie but insisted Tommy eat the rest telling him that she was full, but really wanting him to have the extra treat for himself.

She thought to herself that it had been three days since they had eaten something as filling as this meal and she worried about tomorrow and the tomorrow after that. *What am I going to do?* She thought. *We can't just keep wandering like this eating out of garbage cans and looking for handouts or worse stealing. What have I done? What kind of sister am I? Maybe, we should have stayed at the house and waited to see what happened when Children Services arrived, but everyone said they would split us up and the Social Worker said herself. I couldn't bear to leave Tommy,* she thought, t*here has to be a way for us to stay together. Oh God help us. Help me to find something for Tommy before something goes wrong.*

Lizzy's concentration was broken when she realized Tommy was shaking her by the shoulder. "Lizzy, Lizzy what ya thinken about? Nothing," she replied. "Tommy ya know them kids said they were heading for a Cabin some place. We better hurry up and try to catch up to them. That cabin may come in handy we need a dry place to sleep and hide out. Come on pick up that trash and put it in the pack and let's go.

Should I bring the pack with us?" Asked Tommy. "Yea, you never know when we might need something to put food in or something. Never throw nothing out Tommy ya never know when you might need something. I remember Mom telling me that enough times."

"Mandy, how much farther is it to the Cabin?" Moaned Austin. "Not too much fartherâ ¦I think," murmured Mandy. The path was steadily climbing and the creek seemed to be flowing faster a low humming or roaring sound was coming from in front of the explorers. The sound was low and seemed to grow louder with each step they took forward.

Soon, Melissa came up behind Mandy and said. "Mandy, what's that noise we're hearing? I think it's the water fall Dad told us about," she replied. As the three children stepped out around an old thick Hemlock tree they looked up and saw the source of the roaring sound.

Grayish white water rushed and spilled over the top of a cliff cascading off the rocks that jolted out as it fell some thirty feet down into a cloud of mist partially hiding the dark pool of churning misty water. Piles of dirty foam drifted down stream forever lost in the fast flowing current.

"Wow!" Stated Mandy. "You can say that again," replied Melissa. "Wow!" Chimed Austin. "It's fantastic," exclaimed Mandy. "Did you know it was this big?" Asked Melissa. "No," replied Mandy.

"Look, you guys! There's a opening in the corner where the two walls meet," yelled Austin as he raced past the girls to get a better look. "Austin!" Yelled Mandy. Austin slid to a stop and looked a Mandy with a puzzled look on his face. "What?"

"The shore line look it's all covered with moss, you can't run up to the banks like that and not watch what you're doing. If you fall in that pool there isn't anyone that can get you out." But what do you suppose that opening is?" Asked Austin.

"It sort of looks like a cave," replied Melissa. "Cool, I wonder if there is a way to get down into it." quizzed Austin. The cave opening was down in the lower corner of the falls and was just large enough to let a single person enter. The opening was completely surrounded by water and couldn't be accessed without going swimming in the dark cold swirling water far below.

"Are you nuts Austin? We don't know what's down there and if the opening even leads anywhere," chided Mandy. "It could lead to a deep hole that you could fall into and never get out."

"Gee, thanks for the nice scary visual Mandy," murmured Austin. "I bet Dad doesn't even know this opening is here," sated Mandy "and I'm sure he wouldn't want us nosing around without him being here either."

"Yea, I know," replied Austin "But, it sure would be neat to check it out though. There could be Indian stuff in there, maybe even some bones or something," he continued.

"Now I'm getting the creeps, this place is scary enough with it being so dark and the noise from the water fall you can't hear anything but the rushing water. Let alone talking about an Indian burial grounds," complained Melissa.

"Cool you think there's an Indian burial ground here too?" Asked Austin. "No! It's just you said there might be Indians bones or something in that cave and where there's Indians bones there's an Indian burial grounds," replied Melissa. "Yea, and spooky stuff," remarked Mandy. "Umm, Mandy maybe we should get back to looking for that cabin after all, you agree?" Asked Austin.

Mandy smiled and pointed towards a path leading up around some huge gray boulders. The path wound its way up through the rocks to the top of the waterfall. "Come on," she yelled trying to be heard over the noise of the falls. "Let's go this way and see where the path leads."

The other two explorers fell in behind Mandy who lead the way around the huge boulders left there from an ancient ice age. "Whew!" exclaimed Melissa. "This is a long climb up." The other two weary travelers just nodded their heads in agreement they were too exhausted to speak.

Soon the three of them reached the top of the falls and were amazed at the view. "You can see for miles up here," stated Mandy. "Look!" Yelled Austin as he pointed to the sky above them.

A single large Eagle soared in a large circle high above the children, the eagle let out a loud single screech. "What do you suppose he's trying to say from up there?" Asked Austin. "He's probably saying to get out of here your scaring away my dinner," remarked Melissa.

The Eagle remained high in the sky circling and calling out from time to time as if searching or warning something. "That is so cool to see an Eagle. I've never seen one in the wild like this," explained Melissa.

"You'll see a lot of animals you don't normally see around here," replied Austin. "Yea it's like a virtual zoo around here," agreed Mandy.

The three children happy about seeing such a rare large bird looked out and from the top of the falls they could see rolling hills and other farms dotting the hill sides miles away. Also, from their vantage point they could see the dark woods they had just come out of, it looked like a patchwork green Quilt thrown out to cover the pale green hay and young wheat fields. It was cooling seeing the tops of the trees never seen by the explorers before.

"Look!" Exclaimed Austin. "You can see Dad on his tractor way out in the far right field." The tractor looked like one of Austin's toy tractors because it looked so small from such a distance.

Seeing and knowing her Dad was not too far away made Mandy feel better and a little safer. "This is awesome," exclaimed Austin. "You can see for miles." Then, Austin's attention was quickly caught by something on the ground. He bent down to look at it and noted it wasn't anything loose like the arrowhead he'd found earlier that day, but rather it was some kind of carving in the stone they were standing on.

Austin traced the carving with his fingers whispering to himself each letter as his finger followed it. CARROLL. Carroll he mumbled to himself. "CARROLL, what kind of Indian name is that," he yelled.

Startled by Austin's remarks the girls jerked back. "Austin! What are you doing yelling like that?" Screamed Mandy. "Look," he yelled from down on the ground. "There's writing carved in the stone."

Both girls got down on their knees beside Austin and looked at the faded carvings. The carvings were so worn from years of wind and rain it was difficult to make out each letter.

"Your right Austin it does say Carroll," agreed Melissa. "Let's see if there are any more around here, but be careful not to get to close the edge of the water and the falls," warned Mandy.

Melissa found the next name it was George. Then they found the name Amy and Seth. "Who do you think put these names here?" Asked Austin. "Better yet when did they put them here?" Chimed Melissa.

"I don't know," replied Mandy "But, you can tell it wasn't Indians by the names here. Maybe it was Pioneers traveling west and they stopped here to camp or maybe they had problems with their wagon and had to stay here while they fixed it. Better yet, maybe the pioneers got attacked by a wild band of Indians and had to fight to the death and carved their names in here so they would be remembered," explained Austin.

"Geez's Austin, you've been reading to many westerns," chided Mandy. "Well, they could of," stated Austin. "More than likely they lived here and carved their names in the rocks to make someone wonder where they came from," explained Mandy. "Maybe, it wasn't anything more than a big joke, or they're like us exploring and wanted to leave something to let folks know they were hear." she added.

"I know! We can look up the deed records at the county court house and find out who lived in this house since it's been built." Explained Melissa. "That's a great idea," remarked Mandy.

"Maybe we can do it later this week. I know Mom wanted us to go to the library this week. I bet she'll let us go to the court house if we asked," said Austin. "Yea she might even count it as a book report or something," agreed Mandy. "This is going to be the coolest summer," chimed Austin.

"Hey! We better get a move on if we're going to find that cabin today," stated Mandy. The three explorers were so lost in the search for names carved in the rocks by the falls they had forgotten their quest to find the missing cabin. Mandy jumped from rock to rock to cross over the stream, while the others followed. According to her Dad there was supposed to be a small path leading from the falls through a meadow following the creek. She thought to herself and wondered if her Dad knew about the carvings. He must not have known or he would have told me. Who do those names belong too and how long have they been there?

Chapter 7

CHAPTER 7

"Stay back here behind this rock Tommy," whispered Lizzy. "We'll wait here a while and see which way they're going before we start following them again. What do you think they were looking at this time?" Asked Tommy. "Shucks I don't know. They have got to be the nosiest bunch of kids I'd ever seen. I don't know it they were looking at the cracks in the rock they were standing on or studying bugs," replied Lizzy.

"It sure is funny the way they dropped down to their knees and started clamoring around the rocks. Too bad this here waterfall is so noisy we couldn't hear what they was saying," remarked Tommy. "Well, maybe after they get out of sight a little we can sneak over there and see what all the fuss was about," replied Lizzy.

"You think we'll be able to sleep in that cabin tonight if them kids find it Lizzy? I hope so Tommy, it'll sure beat sleeping out here in the cold damp night. Come on I think we can sneak up to the rocks now and see what all the excitement was about,"

Mandy lead the way as the other two explorers followed her. The path was lined on both sides with tall grass that came up past their waste and it wound around reminding Mandy of the Corn Maze her and Austin had played in at Sage's Apple Farm last fall. The only good thing she thought was that the grass wasn't as high as the corn and she could see around the meadow fairly well.

A movement caught Mandy's eye suddenly, while she was looking back behind them. She looked again and didn't see anything. A slow chill climbed up the back of her spine. *I know I saw something, she thought, but what was it, a deer, maybe a hawk swooping down after a quick meal? Should I ask Melissa and Austin? No, they weren't looking back like I was. No sense in scaring them, besides they'd think I was just trying to scare them.*

A sharp loud call came from high above the children. Mandy looked up to see the Eagle still circling above them. A chill went down her spine again. *Why's he following us? What's he trying to tell us wondered Mandy?* She made a mental note to look back behind them once and while just to be on the safe side.

The path was nearing the other side of the meadow and approaching another dark wood line of large trees. Mandy put her hand up and the other two children stopped. "What's wrong Mandy? Asked Austin. "Nothing I think were near the cabin, that's all and I wanted to stop to think and get my bearings," replied Mandy. It was more difficult to remember the map than she thought and Mandy wished she had it now. Also she also wanted some time to study their back trail. Something her Dad had told her to always do.

Mandy and Austin's Dad had said many an explorer had gotten lost on the return trip because they forgot to study the trail they had just come up. Landmarks such as trees and rocks don't always look the same when coming from a different direction.

Mandy's hair on the back of her neck felt funny also and she wondered if the thought of seeing something earlier was still bothering her, or made her jumpy. *It must be she thought if I'm thinking*

about it. It's nothing, she thought. We're safe on our farm far away from any danger, but still she knew she must pay more attention to what's around them.

"How much farther Mandy?" Asked Melissa. "I think the cabin is just over there in the trees," pointed Mandy as she replied to Melissa.

With Mandy leading the three adventurers headed for the dark grove of trees. "We have to go in there Mandy?" Asked Austin. "It's alright it's no different than the last bunch of trees we came through before the waterfall," Mandy replied. The path lead towards the woods and climbed up hill and just as they were nearing the wood line a roof began to take shape just above the grass line. "Look!" Cried Mandy as she started running to the crest of the hill. Melissa and Austin joined her seconds later at the top of the hill and there in front of them stood the lost cabin partitially hidden by the trees.

It truly indeed was the lost cabin and it was magnificent, albeit in need of major repair, but still very cool. The roof was dark gray and looked to be slate, which more than likely attributed to the fact that the cabin still existed after all these years. The walls were bleached light gray and made from round trees perfectly cut and linked together forming a small rectangular building. There was a porch across the front with a single door in the middle with two windows on either side.

The cabin sort of reminded her of a human skull the way the two black window openings stared back at them like haunted eyes. The door opening looked like a mouth because it hung open at an angle due to the top hinge being broken. The door lightly swung in the wind creaking adding to the already eerie feeling. "Mandy, are we going in there?" Asked Melissa. "Yea, Mandy," remarked Austin. "This was your idea to find this place after all you know.

Well we didn't come all this way to just look at the cabin," reminded Mandy. "Yea, but you didn't say anything about it looking haunted either," replied Austin. "Come on you two don't chicken out on me now," moaned Mandy. "We have to go in and check it out.

Ok, but you lead the way," stated Austin. "What happened to boys rule girls drool?" Asked Mandy. "You're older," replied Austin satisfied he'd protected his honor.

Mandy lead the way up to the front porch of the cabin and all three explorers stopped and stood next to each other staring into the dark opening beyond the door. Three spit logs served as steps leading up to the porch. The glass in the two front windows was missing broken out by wind storms or rocks thrown from who knows who. The door still swung slowly back in forth in the breeze on one remaining rusted hinge screeching with each movement.

"Ready on the count of three we all step up on the porch and walk through the door," ordered Mandy.

"One, two. Wait, wait a minute Mandy," yelled Austin. " Do we go on three or after three?" She thought for a second then said, "on three."

"One, two, three!" All three hand in hand started up the steps. The old wood porch groaned with each step taken. At the door opening the other two children's hands broke loose from Mandy's hands and before she realized she had stepped over the door threshold. Just then a huge brown object flew out screeching, just clearing the top of her head as it flew out into the forest.

Mandy screamed and ducked, so did Melissa, but Austin in his attempt to run backwards fell head over heals off the front porch onto the ground below and landed with his face in the dirt.

"Good Night! What was that thing? Is it gone?" Yelled Austin in a muffled voice as he lay on the ground with his face covered.

"It's ok Austin, it was just an Owl." replied Mandy. "You know, I'm getting tired of being the last one to see stuff and falling in the dirt," complained Austin as he rolled over and sat up on the ground.

"You sure did look funny sprawled out on the ground like that Austin," laughed Melissa. "Are you hurt anywhere?" She asked. "My head and backside hurt a little," replied Austin as he tried to rub each one at the same time with minimal luck.

"You know Austin I was sort of upset when Mom said you had to come along, but I'm glad you did because we would of missed all this fun of seeing you stumble and fall all the time," laughed Mandy.

"I'm glad you're enjoying the side show Sis, but you looked pretty silly a couple of times yourself ya know," taunted Austin. "Yea, your right this has been fun up until now that is," agreed Mandy.

"We still have to go inside this cabin and check it out," said Mandy. "Do we have to Mandy?" Asked Austin. "Who knows what else inside that thing," he continued.

"What do you think Melissa?" Asked Mandy. "Well, we've traveled all this way and came through some pretty scary places. We've spooked up a bird at the sugar bush a deer in the woods and now a monster owl screams at us and tries to take our heads off. We've lost our map and backpack. I think we've been through a lot and we owe it to ourselves to prove to ourselves and our parents we're not afraid to complete what we came out here to do and check out this cabin."

"Nice speech," stated Mandy. "Yea well I agree with Melissa," replied Austin. "This has been hard and I admit a minute ago I was ready to cut loose and run home, but Melissa makes it sound important, like we're real explorers. I vote we go in," stated Austin raising his hand in the air and stepping up to join the girls. "Well, Melissa that leaves it up to you and me. Do we go in?" Asked Mandy. "Yea. Yea, let's roll," replied Melissa. They took each other's hands and standing side by side took a deep breath and stepped through the door into a world they had never experienced before.

Chapter 8

CHAPTER 8

The three children slowly released each other's hands and dropped them to their sides as one by one they slowly spun around studying every inch of the interior. It struck Mandy odd how cool the air is inside and the smell somewhat musty with a mix of dust and animal scant. It was obvious the neighborhood wildlife found the cabin inviting and since no one was in a hurry to evict them, they had settled in quite comfortably.

"Careful, you guys there is no telling what's living in here," warned Mandy. "Things like Raccoons, Skunks, or even Snakes," interrupted Austin.

"Yea, even Snakes," agreed Mandy. "Ewe, Snakes," whined Melissa. "Yea, they love places like this," replied Mandy.

"Ok, Ok, I take it back nobody said anything about Snakes inside the cabin. I don't need to prove anything, to nobody not even my parents," exclaimed Melissa as she slowly started backing out through the doorway.

Mandy reached down and grabbed her hand and pulled her back in and said, "It's alright Melissa we'll not disturb anything just slowly walk around and look for now. Melissa let go of Mandy's hand and quietly whispered ok.

Mandy slowly walked around the inside of the cabin and noted it was built from big round logs neatly stacked on top of one another and expertly notched at the corners creating a tight secure fit. The space between the logs were filled with mud called chinking, although many of the areas of the chinking were missing. There seemed to be a total of four windows in the house two in front on either side of the door and one on each side. The back wall of the Cabin did not have any windows that could be seen because there was a door leading to what seemed like a back room. Surprisingly the roof was in pretty good shape with only a couple areas with sunlight showing through.

"Someone must have been taking care of this place up until a few years ago," remarked Mandy. "Why?" Asked Melissa. "It's in pretty good of shape to have been left here unattended," answered Mandy.

"Boy, if this is your idea of good shape Mandy I'd hate to see someplace you thought was trashed," joked Austin.

The girls chuckled and continued exploring along with Austin each of them walking around slowly careful not to touch anything or put their hands someplace an animal may be hiding.

It was obvious many of the local birds found the upper beams in the ceiling a convenient home by the amount of mud nest clinging to the sides of the beams. The huge round timbers formed the cross beams in the attic that's open all the way to the peak of the cabin roof. Nothing lay up in the rafters except dirt, bird nest and some extra pieces of wood.

On the one sidewall was an oversized field stone fireplace blackened from countless fires having been lit for heat and cooking. A black iron bracket was mounted inside the fire pit on one side and had a hook on the end to hang a pot from over the flames. The pot was long gone but the fire pit held remnants of fires long ago lit for whatever reason.

"I wonder who used this cabin last and how long ago?" Asked Mandy. "Maybe some Cowboy wandered on this place found it empty and made himself at home," replied Austin.

"There you go again with your cowboy's," Joked Mandy. "Well, he could of," argued Austin.

The floor to the cabin was worn smooth by all the years, but in excellent condition obviously painstakingly built by craftsmen with great care taken in splitting the logs that formed the floor and the joining of the timbers. There was very little furniture in the cabin except one table built from small round pine tree trunks all lashed together with leather strips forming a crude but inviting table. The two straight back chairs next to the table were made from the same type of tree trunks lashed together. There was an old rocker sitting next to the fireplace the arms were worn smooth from years of someone's long use.

"Someone was living here not too long ago," stated Mandy. "Yea, that's what I was thinking," replied Melissa.

"But who could it have been?" Asked Austin. "Until we're sure there's no dangerous animals or snakes living in here we can't begin to search this place to find any clues," reminded Mandy.

"Yea, I'm wondering what's behind that door? Asked Austin as he walked over to grab the wood peg that served as a latch. "Austin! Wait for us," yelled Mandy.

Austin stopped just before he opened the door to the room. "Did you forget what was waiting for us when we came in through the front door?" Asked Mandy.

"Oh. yea I forgot," he replied. The two girls came over and stood next to him by the door. "Ok, we're all hear lets open the door slowly and peek inside before we all go in," stated Mandy.

Austin slowly opened the door to the room and all three explorers peered into the room straining to see if any unwanted guest were hiding and waiting to jump out. Austin pushed the door all the way open, when it appeared nothing was going to come flying out to greet them.

The room was poorly lit with the light coming from a very small window on the back wall. Surprisingly the glass was still intake dirty but not broken. A crude bed made from the same round tree trunks the furniture in the main room was up against the back wall. There was an old tattered gray plaid wool blanket on the bed crumpled as if someone had been lying on it and not bothered to straighten it out when they got up. Several hooks were on the wall opposite the bed with a split tree trunk shelf hanging above them. There didn't appear to be anything on the shelf. A small wooden trunk about the size of Mandy's cedar chest at home lay on the floor at the foot of the bed. The latch and hinges were tarnished green mixed with some rust.

"Whoa!" Exclaimed Mandy. "Look at that chest." Mandy dropped to her knees in front of the chest and pulled on the lid, it held fast. She tried to pull at the latches to get it to open but they wouldn't release.

"What do you think is in the chest?" Asked Melissa. "Who, knows," replied Austin. "Can we open it?" Asked Austin.

"Is it locked or just rusted shut?" Asked Melissa. "I'm not sure we need to carefully find something to try and pry up the latches. I don't see any where a key would be inserted, so it must not be locked."

The three children spread out and slowly searched for something like a pry bar, but still being careful not to disturb anything that might be harboring an anima

"Here I think I found something!" Shouted Melissa. Austin and Mandy joined her by the crude kitchen shelf. Melissa was digging through an old wooden tool box with several rusted tools. She pulled out an old rusted screw driver with a wooden handle and a large rusted pair of pliers.

"Let's see if one of these will do the trick," Stated Melissa. "Nice work," Stated Mandy. Slowly and carefully Melissa started wedging the screw driver under the one of the latches and pried upwards.

"Try putting the pliers between the screwdriver and trunk and pry down," directed Mandy. Melissa did as Mandy suggested and the latch slowly released its long time grip. She moved to the other latch and it came loose as well.

"Well this is it are we ready to open this thing?" asked Melissa as she turned and looked up into the other's faces. Austin looked worried, but Mandy's eyes were wide open and she was trying hard to hold back her excitement.

"Here Mandy you open the trunk this expedition has been your idea and you should be the one to find the treasure." Melissa stepped back to let Mandy open the trunk.

Mandy grabbed both latches and slowly pulled up on the lid. The top at first did not want to budge until Austin stepped up and offered his assistance in pulling. Slowly the lid started moving the hinges screeching their defiance the entire distance.

The three explorers looked down in the trunk no one spoke for several seconds then Austin broke the silence. "Old clothes? That's it all this work and the only thing we find is somebody's stinky laundry?"

"Hold on don't give up yet," replied Mandy as she reached down with the screw driver and began moving some of the folded clothes around. Gingerly she hooked each item and lifted it out of the trunk and set it on the floor. When she had nearly removed all the items she noted something lying on the bottom of the trunk.

"Look!" exclaimed Mandy as she exposed a small tattered book. The other's looked on in silence as Mandy reached for the book and gently opened the covers. The book had hand writing inside. "It must be diary or something," noted Melissa.

Mandy handed the book to Melissa and she finished searching the trunk but could not find anything more of value or interest. She began putting the clothes back in the trunk.

"This looks to be a diary, there are dates noted alongside some of the writing," remarked Melissa.

"Let's go outside where the light is better and we don't have to worry about something coming out of the woodwork to get us," stated Mandy.

"Good idea," remarked Austin as he turned towards the entrance.

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