

Chapter 4

Kidnapped!

Father pressed a finger to his lips indicating silence then quickly placed his arms around me in a long overdue embrace. Though there was much I wanted to say, I found myself speechless. I had so many questions but before I could begin father whispered for me to retrieve Addie from her room.

Following the old man's instructions I stole to Sis' door, careful to keep our *guardians* from getting wind of the treachery as it unfolded beneath their roof. Thankfully not a sound came from their room except for the drone of the ever-playing radio—

—and in other news the dictator of San Libertad barely survived an attempt on his life today...

With the coast clear I entered Addie's room only to find her twisted torso half off the bed in a knot of blankets pillows and

dolls. When I finally found Sis's head, which was where her waist should have been, I whispered, "Addie, shush, wake up."

With no visible effect, I tried again, "Addie, shush, wake up," Her mumble-mouthed response was not the least surprising—

"Oh, yes. Pet the puppy... that's not my drogbower ufflo... hiding in the washing machloon... right Miss Penny?"

"No Sis, wake up. It's me," I pursued in an increasingly desperate but equally low tone. Clearly Sis thought I was one of the actors in her dream until at last she rubbed her eyes—

"Huh? What? Benny? Why—"

Addie, being dangerously loud as she woke, gave me the chance to do something I had so *longed* to do... I clamped my hand over her mouth, snarling, "Quiet!" Then, though still groggy, I led Sis back to my room under the strictest orders that, no matter what, she was not to make a peep.

Understandably, with the surprise of seeing father standing in the shadows, Addie did *peep*. And she was well on her way to a squeal of delight when I reapplied my hand to her mouth. Finally when Sis settled down I released her to father's waiting arms.

At a guess, our whole getaway from Bertha's took but a dozen exhilarating minutes, including packing, clambering down the ladder from my window and the mad dash to father's Rambler which he had smartly left idling out of sight.

Soon we were speeding away with Addie sandwiched between father and I. The two of them gossiped up a storm about Bertha and Ralf and how we really pulled one over on them. As for me, I was too stunned by the sudden transition to say much of anything as father drove us into the night. Where he was taking us or what crazy scheme lay in store, the old man had yet to reveal, but truthfully, it didn't matter.

Eventually the dull rhythm of the towering lights along the dark highway lulled both Sis and I into an uneasy sleep. We stayed in that foggy, half dream state until sunrise when we discovered ourselves parked in a strange land. Before us, across a muddy parking lot, was a ramshackle boat dock... a sketchy, wooden eyesore, protruding into a filthy, broad, litter-strewn creek. Father had already stepped from the car and stood leaning, with arms crossed on his open door. His dreamy gaze was aimed towards the odd collection of boats which wallowed like sleepy hogs in the muck.

“What’s this place?” Addie asked, blinking until her eyes adjusted to the light of a dull platinum dawn.

“That’s the ocean, Sis.” I answered, quite cranky from my own lack of rest.

“No, it isn’t.”

“Come on kids. Up and at ’em,” Father called poking his head back in the car. “We’ve got to keep moving if we’re

going to stay ahead of Bertha. She'll be calling the police when she see's you're not in your beds."

Sis and I, grabbing our bags of clothing, obediently slid from the front seat and joined father who by then had moved around to place his rump against the front hood of the car.

"What's the plan here, Dad? Is *this* where we're going to live?" I asked, noticing for the first time the disagreeable slum looming behind us.

I have to give Addie credit. She never used so few words to express anything so well before—

"Dada, this is a joke, right?"

"This is no joke, Addison" father answered, dropping to one knee for some deep face-to-face contact. He was quite serious but at least he wasn't wearing that glum face that always brought bad news. In fact I began to detect a twinge of the opposite. Something of a twinkle in father's eye which often foretold he was

about to reveal a grand course of action. Of course experience showed that with our old man no *ordinary* kidnapping of his children would do. No classic dying our hair, changing identities and hiding out in a small town somewhere. No holing up in a cliff-side dwelling, foraging for our meals amongst the scrub growth and wondering every day if the law would find us. The old man could never do something simple like that—

“Come on, I’ll show you,” father said, straightening his back and taking us each by the hand.

“Dada? Where we going?” There was hesitation in Addie’s voice but not enough to represent us both so I repeated her question.

“Yes, dad. Where *are* we going?” I liked my emphasis better.

“We’re kind of going on a boat ride—” father began with a wry smile as we treaded carefully down a steep, slippery wooden ramp. “More specifically,” he

added, “we’re going on a sailing voyage.”

Okay, I thought, the old man is taking us on a boat ride. Truth be told, his proposal was so bizarre that I felt the need to stall using some sort of distraction... a tactic, I didn’t realize at the time, I had learned from mother—

“Uh, Dad, considering the neighborhood shouldn’t we go back and lock up the car before we take a boat trip?”

“Not to worry, Benjamin. We don’t need it anymore.”

Sis and I exchanged glances. Our thoughts, which ran parallel between us, were just as uneasy as the wooden boards beneath our feet...

Won’t be needing the Rambler anymore? Father is taking us on a voyage from which we’ll never return? This is not good...

Addie and I slowed pace, then stopped. We were about to confer when father, who had gone ahead of us, shouted, “Come on, guys, our boat’s right here!”

Our boat? We have a boat? How on earth— and suddenly, overwhelmed with curiosity, Sis and I were standing on the dock next to father.

“Well, Addie, what do you think? Benjamin, isn’t it a beaut?”

I never thought Sis could be too dumbfounded to speak but father had accomplished the impossible. I was assembling my own response when the old man continued—

“Argh! Maties. A gen-u-ine thirty-two foot sailing yacht. There’s some kind of engine that doesn’t work, sails on that pole thing and a month’s worth of food and water in the apartment... er, cabin.”

I gazed down at the elongated floating thing. It was pointy at one end. That offered some small comfort because it seemed to go along with my knowledge of watercraft. Still, something about those tangled, moldy ropes and twisted *whatever you call its*, didn’t fill me with confidence. Addie, on the other hand, was

warming up to the big plastic sea creature.

“Dada, does our boat have a name?
Because I have an idea—”

“We’ll call her whatever you want,”
father responded with a smile.

I was hoping Sis didn’t want to name
the boat after mom. It would be a huge
disservice to her memory.

“Hmmm,” said Addie in a very
considered tone. “I dub thee *Rambler*...”

Father and I both raised our
eyebrows.

“You know,” Sis elaborated “after
our car.”

The old man and I, we still didn’t get it...

Addie, her chattiness having made a
resounding comeback, explained—

“Well, it’s because our boat here is
as dilapidated as the wagon but *she*
always got us where we were going and
so, if you really think about it—”

“Splendid, Addie!” father announced,
cutting Sis short. “*Rambler* she is. Isn’t
that right, Benjamin?”

I hated to agree with Sis so readily but her choice wasn't half-bad. And besides, we were going to need as much luck with this *sea wagon* as we had with the land one.

“Well, kids let's get aboard and get going,” the old man announced as he leapt from the dock to the waterborne monstrosity.

As you might imagine I had lots of *burning* questions such as, *where are we going in that thing?* and *how will we live?*, but there was one ultra burning question, one *fire* that I needed extinguished before all others—

“Dad?”

“Yes, son?”

“I didn't know you could sail.”

Father, having helped Addie to the deck, addressed my concerns.

“Me? I haven't a clue, but remember two summers back when your Sister did that sailing camp—?”

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