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Treasure Hunt

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In the town of Great Bear Heart, there's an old story that goes like this:

Sometime in the 1920's, three men robbed a bank in Detroit. To get away from the police, who were in hot pursuit, they hopped a train and rode it all the way to our little town on the shores of Puckett Lake. They hid out in a tunnel in the ground below the old railroad depot—what is now the Great Bear Heat Library.

They were soon discovered by the local police, but the robbers were killed, but the stolen loot—which happened to be a bag of silver dollars—was never found.

Ever since, there's been a lot of

speculation as to what happened to the money. Some say that the robbers buried it in the forest. Still other people that it was found by someone shortly after the robbers died, and whoever found the stolen loot didn't turn it in to the police.

Club member Dylan Bunker found an old silver dollar—a 'Peace Dollar'— in the tunnel one day. Peace Dollars were made shortly after World War One, and they were made of pure silver. On one side of the coin is the liberty head, and on the other is an eagle holding a laurel wreath. Today, each coin, in good condition, is worth about twenty dollars.

Were certain that the coin Dylan found must be part of the bank robber's loot. The six of us in the Adventure Club—Shane Mitchell, Holly O'Mara,, Lyle Haywood, Tony Gritter,, Dylan Bunker and myself—searched and searched, but we didn't find any more silver dollars.

All of that changed one rainy Saturday morning.

Holly O'Mara and I were supposed to go for a bike ride, but the rain postponed our plans. Instead, we decided to play checkers over at her house.

I put on my raincoat and boots and began

the short walk to Holly's house. The morning was gray, and rain fell straight down in a heavy drizzle. Rivers of water slithered over the paved road. I watched a leaf float by like a tiny sailboat. It spun and swirled as it bobbed along, swept by the speeding current of the small rivulet. It had been raining for nearly two days straight, but it was supposed to end by late afternoon.

I was only a block from Holly's house when I caught a movement of something small out of the corner of my eye. I turned to see a kitten, its gray fur completely soaked, staring back at me from the open door of an abandoned shed.

I stopped walking. "*Hey Buddy,*" I called out to the tiny creature. I took a step toward it, and the animal immediately disappeared into the shed.

Poor thing, I thought. Stuck out in the rain like that. Hope he has a home.

When I got to Holly's house and told her about the kitten I had spotted, her eyes got huge.

"We have to help him!" she exclaimed.

"I tried to get close, but it ran and hid, I replied.

"We have to find him," Holly said urgently. "We have to find him and help him!"

When Holly makes up her mind about something, there's not much use in trying to change it. And when it comes to animals, she has a soft spot the size of a basketball. She can't stand to see an animal in trouble.

Holly didn't have a raincoat, but she had a big umbrella that was big enough for both of us. The rain was coming down heavier now, and it beat the umbrella like a drum as we hustled down the rain-gorged street.

"Where did you see him?" Holly asked.

"Right over there," I pointed. "He was sitting in the doorway of that old shed."

"What kind of cat was it?" she asked.

I shrugged. "I don't know," I replied. "It was a gray cat. And it was soaked."

"It's probably starving," Holly said.

We cut across the wet grass and walked over to the shed. My eyes darted around, searching for the drenched kitten.

Which of course, we would find.

But it wasn't the only thing we would discover in the shed. What we were about to find in the shed was going to send Holly and me—and everyone else in the Adventure Club—on one of the wildest goose chases of the summer.

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We were almost to the open doorway. Through the downpour, we could see piles of old boxes and broken chairs inside. Suddenly, Holly spotted the tiny creature huddled at the back of the shed. Her hand shot out, pointing.

“There he is!”

The kitten was sitting on a piece of wood. The creature was completely soaked, like it had been swimming. Its fur was matted together, heavy with water. Huge, fearful eyes stared back at us. The tiny animal trembled, perhaps because it was cold, or maybe because it was afraid of the two figures that suddenly appeared in the doorway of the shed.

“Oh, the poor thing!” Holly exclaimed. She knelt down in the door of the shed and reached out her hand. “Come here,” she coaxed sweetly. “We’re not going to hurt you.”

The kitten remained where it was, sitting on the piece of wood. It wasn't going anywhere. I think it was too afraid.

"Help me move some of this stuff out of the way," Holly said. She stood up slowly, and the kitten craned its neck back, watching cautiously.

"We're going to scare him off," I warned.

"Just move slow," Holly replied. "He's really frightened."

Carefully, we lifted some of the old crates and debris out of our way. The cat really couldn't go anywhere except out the front door of the shed, so it would have to get past us first. At the moment, it didn't look too anxious to go anywhere.

We piled the stuff off to the side. Mostly, the shed was filled with old crates and wooden boxes. All of them were empty, and some of them fell apart in our hands. One box crumbled the moment I picked it up, and pieces fell to the floor. The crash spooked the kitten, and it huddled even further into the corner of the shed, trembling in fear.

"You scared him!" Holly scolded.

I shrugged in defense. "I didn't do it on purpose," I replied.

Slowly, Holly made her way closer to the cat. When she was only a few feet away, she bent down and extended her hand.

“Come on, little guy,” she urged. “Nobody is going to hurt you. Come on.”

The cat remained where it was, huddled in the corner of the shed. Thunder boomed, shaking the old structure and sending a wave of horror through the kitten.

And for whatever reason, the creature must have decided that Holly wasn't going to hurt it after all, because it cautiously stepped from the piece of wood and slunk warily to Holly's outstretched hand. It stretched its neck up until its head touched her fingers.

Holly scratched behind the kitten's ears. “There, there,” she said softly. “See? We're not going to hurt you.”

The kitten responded by arching its back and rubbing its nose on Holly's hand.

“I think he likes you,” I said.

“I wonder who he belongs to,” Holly mused. “A kitten this small shouldn't be outside alone. Not in a storm like this.”

There was another rumble of thunder overhead, and the kitten cringed and scooted next

to Holly, rubbing up against her leg. Holly scooped up the drenched animal and stood. The cat didn't protest.

"Let's take him home and get him dried off," Holly said. She stepped past me and stood by the door. The rain was coming down harder now, running off the roof in sheets.

I turned and was about to pick up the umbrella from the ground when I noticed a small, glimmering object partially buried in the damp dirt. It was in a place that had been covered over by one of the wooden boxes.

And even before I reached down to pick it up, I knew what it was.

"Wow!" I exclaimed. I bent over and snatched up the object.

Holly turned. "What is—"

She stopped speaking when I held out my palm. "Holy cow!" she suddenly exclaimed.

In my hand was an old silver dollar.

At that very moment, I knew two things for sure. Number one: I knew that this dollar was part of the loot that the robbers had stolen.

And number two: I knew that the Adventure Club was going to find the rest of it.

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Holly and I were still standing in the shed. Outside, the rain dumped so hard I thought it was going to crush the flimsy building that we were in. Thunder groaned, and the kitten in Holly's arms squirmed in fear.

"Shhhh," Holly said to the cat, holding it close. Then she spoke to me. "You found that coin right there on the ground?" she asked.

I nodded, still staring at the silver dollar. "Yeah,"

I said. "Right down there."

I knelt down again, inspecting the place where I had found the coin.

"Wow!" I shouted. I snapped my hand out, dug into the ground a bit . . . and withdrew still another silver dollar!

I have to admit, I went a little bit crazy after that. I fell to my knees and pawed at the ground, searching for more. Holly knelt down and held the wet kitten in one arm, searching the ground with the other.

“There’s got to be more!” I exclaimed.
“There’s got to be!”

Neither of us had any luck, but that didn’t bother us. We knew we were on the trail of the stolen loot, and it would only be a matter of time before we found it.

“Let’s call an emergency meeting of the Adventure Club,” I said. “The six of us might have better luck searching together!”

“Yeah,” Holly agreed. “But first we have to take this little guy back to my house and get him dried off.”

At Holly’s house, I called everyone on the phone while Holly dried off the kitten. She warmed up some milk in the microwave, and soon the little cat was snuggled up on a dry towel, sleeping.

Everyone I spoke with on the phone wanted to know what the big deal was. I wouldn’t tell them.

“Just be at the clubhouse at five o’clock this afternoon,” I said. “Rain or shine. This is important.”

“It better be,” said club president Shane Mitchell. “Especially if it’s still raining like it is now.”

Five o'clock came. Thankfully, the rain had stopped. Holly and I were the first ones to arrive at our clubhouse, which is built off the ground up in a group of maple trees on the other side of McArdle's farm, just outside of town. A rope ladder dangled from above and I scurried up to the fort, climbing through a special hole in the floor. Holly had brought the kitten with her, and she was able to put the tiny creature in the pocket of her windbreaker and climb up the rope ladder.

Lyle Haywood was the next member to arrive.

"What's the big deal?" he asked. "Why are we meeting on a Saturday?"

"We'll tell you in a minute," I replied, "when everyone else gets here."

Club president Shane Mitchell showed up, and he asked the same question. I gave him the same answer I had given Lyle.

Tony Gritter arrived, and finally, Dylan Bunker. Dylan was fifteen minutes late as usual. Shane called the meeting to order as soon as Dylan's mop of red hair popped up through the floor.

"Okay Parker," he said to me. "What's up?"

I looked at Holly. She had a smug grin on her face. I grinned, too.

“We all know about the old abandoned shed on Oak street,” I began. Everyone nodded, and I continued. “Well, Holly and I were there this morning. We found something.”

When I said this, Holly reached into her pocket and pulled out the kitten. It had fallen asleep earlier, but now it was awake. Its eyes were half open and the creature was groggy.

“A cat?” Tony said in disgust. “You found a cat and you called a meeting?”

I was still smiling, and so was Holly. “Yeah, we found that kitten there,” I said. “But that’s not all. Dylan, hold out your hand.”

Dylan was seated on an overturned milk crate next to me, and he showed me his pudgy palm. Without letting anyone else in the club see what I had in my hand, I placed one of the silver dollars in his palm, then I pulled his fingers over into a fist, concealing the coin from view. Dylan himself didn’t even know what was in his hand.

“That’s what we found,” I said smartly. Everyone was curious now, and they all leaned forward to see what Dylan had in his fist.

“Now open your hand, Dylan,” I said.

As he did, you could hear a pin drop. When everyone saw the silver dollar in Dylan's palm, time seemed to stop. Nobody breathed. It was like all of the air had suddenly been sucked out of our clubhouse. Time stood still. Finally, Shane stepped forward. His eyes were gigantic.

"It's . . . it's—"

"—It's part of the stolen loot!" I said, finishing his sentence for him. "But wait."

I dug into my pocket and pulled out the other silver dollar that we found, then I flipped it up into the air. Lyle Haywood reached out and grabbed it before it fell to the floor.

"Another one?!?!?" he exclaimed. "How many did you find?"

"That's it," I said, shaking my head. "We only found those two. Holly and I looked, but those were all we found. We figured that we would get everybody together, then we might have better luck finding the rest of the stolen money."

Shane was still holding the heavy coin in his hand. His eyes were glowing, and as he gazed at the dollar, he looked like he was hypnotized.

"All in favor of searching for the treasure, raise your hand," he said. His eyes never left the

coin in his palm.

Tony walked over to the hole in the floor where the rope ladder was. He slipped through and began to climb down.

“You guys can hang out here and vote,” he smirked, “but I’m going to go find me a pile of money.”

“I second that!” Lyle replied, raising his hand. We scrambled, chattering like silly monkeys as we each took our turn climbing down the rope ladder.

The great treasure hunt was about to begin.