

The History Mystery

Prologue

See actual book for prologue.

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Chapter One

It was almost dark when a large van slowly pulled into the driveway of the Nelson farmstead. The people in the van weren't looking around to see if anyone was home. They didn't have to. This was their farm and their home, and all the Nelsons were together, coming home from a shopping trip. The van was full of happy people and a contented dog.

The father of the family, Timothy, was driving, carrying on a conversation with his wife, Connie, about an upcoming township picnic. "It's going to be two weeks from today. I said I thought we could bring a big pitcher of iced tea and a dessert. Is that okay?" Timothy asked.

"Oh sure, that sounds fine with me," Connie replied, happily. "But wait, isn't that the weekend your dad's coming?" She started counting up the days on her fingers to try and figure out what day, exactly, two weeks from today would be. "Oh, honey, that *is* when your dad will be here."

From somewhere in the back of the long van, a small voice called out, "What, Mommy?"

"Nothing, Matthew," Mom called back to her youngest son. "Mommy and Daddy were just talking about a visit from Grandad."

That started a chorus of comments from the other children in the back. Andy, age eleven, reminded Matthew that Grandad's visits meant special things to do. "Like picnics!" he added with gusto.

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“And s’mores around the campfire,” said his thirteen-year-old brother, Jason.

“Don’t forget presents. Grandad always brings us a present,” called out Ben. Then looking directly at his younger brother, he continued in a slower rate of speech. “Matthew, you’re going to get a present! Something to play with! For you!” Ben always tried to explain things carefully to Matthew, since Matthew and Leah had been in America for less than a year. Six months earlier, the Nelsons had adopted Leah and Matthew from Russia. Matthew was catching on to the English language, and American customs, quite quickly. His language skills had improved dramatically in the last several weeks, so that now he was able to speak entirely in English.

The van was coming to a stop in front of the garage.

“Now you boys hurry up and get your chores done. We’re running a little late!” Mom directed the boys, who were the unloading and chores task forces. “And we still need to have Bible and unload the van. Cathy, can you please change Leah’s diaper for me and put on her nightgown? I’m going to help Matthew get ready and I need to put away a few things.” She grabbed a bag from the floor of the van that contained frozen items.

“I’ll be glad to, Mom,” her oldest daughter responded cheerfully. “Come on, Leah, honey. Come to Cathy.” Carefully Cathy took her baby sister, Leah, out of the car seat. Leah smiled at sixteen-year-old Cathy. She had enjoyed the ride on this pleasant September evening.

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“We’ll do the chores quickly,” Jason and Andy promised, running toward the barn.

“Boy, those samples of pizza at the grocery store sure were tasty!” Jason said, licking his lips.

“I’ll say,” Andy agreed. “I wonder why Mom didn’t buy some of those pizzas? Even Dad said he liked them. They were on sale, and everything.”

“Aw, come on, Andy. They were good, but you know Mom’s homemade pizza is even better,” Jason said, setting the record straight.

“You’re right,” Andy agreed. “Mom’s the best cook in the whole world! And Cathy is just about as good.”

As they neared the barn, Andy suddenly stopped. “Hey, what’s this?” he asked, stooping down to look at the soft ground. “Tire tracks. I don’t remember those from before.”

Jason took a careful look. “Say, I don’t either. But we better run. You heard what Mom said.” With that, he sprinted the remaining fifteen feet to the barn.

Andy lingered a little longer before joining his brother. Then, putting something in his pocket, he raced to the barn.

“You need help with that?” Andy asked. Jason was filling the goats’ water trough.

“No,” Jason replied. “I just need you to help clean up this mess, before I get hurt. Looks like Ben and Matthew were in here playing, and they left stuff all over the floor. Can you move this stuff to the side, so I won’t trip on it?”

Without saying anything, Andy started picking up “treasures” left scattered across the barn floor by four-year-old Matthew and seven-year-old Ben.

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Apparently Ben and Matthew had tried to make a fort or something with some old pieces of wood and baling twine.

Before long, Jason was ready to give the horses some oats. The boys enjoyed this part of chores more than any other. One large stall had a door leading to the pasture, which was kept open most of the time. The horses usually came into the stall when they saw people in the barn, hoping to receive a treat. Often Andy or Jason had an apple core or a carrot with them. And Dad had the boys give a few oats to each horse twice a day, so that the horses would be in the habit of coming inside the barn daily. It made it much easier for Dad to quickly get any horse he needed.

As they hurried down the barn aisle to the horse stalls, Andy noticed muddy boot prints on the floor. But because the boys were so intent on chores, and Jason seemed to be in a hurry, he didn't say anything about it. However, Andy did take a minute to stop and observe one closely.

"Hey, Andy! What are you doing?" Jason called from down the aisle. "Let's get these horses fed."

"Coming, partner," Andy shouted, jumping up and coming to the aid of his older brother. Both were intent on getting the chores done. They knew the importance of obeying quickly and completely what their parents told them.

In almost record time, the boys were finished with chores. Then they unloaded the van, taking many armfuls of bags into the house.

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“Bible time!” Dad called from the living room a little while later. But just then, the phone rang. Dad picked it up as the two older boys were entering the room.

“Uh huh,” Dad said, turning to look away from the boys as he talked on the phone. “I see. Okay. Okay. Okay. Yes, that’s fine. Okay. No, not right now.”

Dad turned to see who else had entered the living room. Now everyone was there except Mom and baby Leah.

“Sure,” Dad said into the phone. “That would be okay with me. We’ll have to talk about that. Thanks. Goodbye.” With that he hung up the phone. He looked at Mom, who was just coming into the room. The two exchanged a glance, then Dad nodded. He sat down and opened his Bible.

Every night the family gathered while Dad read the Bible and everyone practiced memorizing several Bible verses. Tonight Dad read from Daniel 6, the familiar passage about Daniel and the lions’ den.

“I just love that story,” Ben said, when Dad asked if there were any questions or comments about the passage. “I like how, just as soon as Daniel knew about the law that the king wrote, he went up into his room, opened his window, and prayed. He wasn’t afraid of that bad king. He knew God was stronger than any king could ever be!”

Dad smiled. “I like the story too. Of course, we need to keep in mind that Daniel didn’t know for sure whether God would save him or not. All he knew is that he had to worship God, not pray to the

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king. If that meant he was going to be thrown in with the lions, then he would accept that.”

“But God did save him,” Andy stated.

“Yes, He did,” Dad agreed. “And it was a really great miracle that God did – shutting the mouths of the lions. Later on we read just how hungry those lions actually were. They were apparently very, very hungry. So it was a miracle. Reading about it now, we know how it turned out, and how everything worked out well for Daniel. What I am saying is that, when Daniel opened his windows to pray, he didn’t know what might happen. There are many times in scripture where a godly, holy man was put to death or thrown in prison, even though he was doing God’s will.”

“So he was a very brave man of God,” Ben announced, realizing for the first time the strength of faith that Daniel displayed.

Dad let Ben’s comment sink in for a minute. “Yes, he was brave. He was brave because God helped him to be brave. Our job is to obey God, even when we don’t know what the outcome will be. No matter what happens, we honor and worship God when we obey what He tells us to do.”

Then, after working on a new memory verse, Matthew 7:24, the family had a time of prayer. Everyone prayed. Even little Matthew had started praying lately. Tonight he prayed for their dog, Ranger. “Help Ranger not get things from us boys. Help him not get fleas or ticks. And not get dirty. Amen!”

As Matthew was praying, Andy suddenly let out a sound from his mouth that sounded a little like

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steam coming out of a kettle. When this happened, Ben snickered a little. But when Mom coughed in a meaningful way, Andy's "steam kettle" quickly settled down, and Ben's snickering came to a halt.

"Say Jason," Andy began, as the boys started getting ready for bed. "I didn't have time to tell you before. You want to hear the clues?"

"Clues? About what?" Jason asked, yawning. If truth be told, the day of playing and shopping had totally worn Jason out.

"The tire tracks, and stuff like that," Andy said.

Jason seemed to be giving more attention to pulling his blanket up than in thinking about what Andy was saying. "Tire tracks? What tire tracks?" he finally said.

"The ones by the barn," Andy replied. "The ones that were made while we were gone."

"Oh yes. I remember them," Jason said, yawning broadly. "Tell me about them tomorrow, okay, partner? I'm pretty tired right now." With that, Jason snuggled against his pillow and wrapped the blanket around him cozily. Andy had to admit that Jason was a very good picture of the pleasures of just going to sleep.

Andy crawled into bed, but he couldn't get the tire tracks off his mind. Slowly he listed the clues in his mind. The car tracks, the muddy shoe prints in the barn, the wrapper off something. Then he started thinking of what it all might mean. Who had come to their farm while the whole family was gone? Why didn't he park up at the house instead of by the barn?

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Why didn't he leave a message when he saw that no one was home? Why did he go into the barn? What were the foil wrappers from? And was the visitor a he or a she? Lots of questions. No answers.

Andy lay on his back, looking at the ceiling. It was fun to think of mysteries. And this was an interesting one.

Then, as he was falling asleep, he had one final thought. An important thought.

I wonder what's going to be for breakfast tomorrow . . .