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1

As I gazed out over the choppy sea, emotions swept over me like the waves churning before my eyes. I was nervous, and I'm not a bit ashamed to admit I was a little afraid. After all: what we were about to do was risky and dangerous.

But it had to be done. We had to succeed. If we didn't, the ocean would face a terrible environmental disaster.

There were two of us that would play an important role in the mission: me and my younger sister, Shannon. She was seated next to me on the boat as it bobbed up and down in the sea. Above, the sun

glowed like a lemon drop in the blue sky. Below, glittering diamonds reflected off the choppy sea. The only sounds were the wind in my ears and the water lapping at the side of the *Sea Falcon*, the big research boat we were on. Several other vessels were moored nearby.

“How long, Jacob?” Shannon asked.

“I don’t know,” I replied. “But I’m sure we’ll be suiting up soon.”

On the deck in front of us, our gear was in two piles: wetsuits, vests, air tanks, and various tools we would need to complete our mission. We didn’t want to suit up until we were ready to dive, as being in a wetsuit in the hot sun would cause us to bake. We were waiting for word from the mission specialists that the dive was a go.

Finally, one of the scientists came up from below and told us it was time. We suited up in silence with the help of two laboratory technicians. They were very professional and knew what they were doing. And they treated us like adults, not kids. I liked that. What we were doing was important, and if it could have been done by adults, it would have been.

But it couldn’t. The mission required small

people—kids—to perform the dangerous tasks at the bottom of the ocean. Sound crazy? That's what I thought . . . at first.

After we'd donned our wetsuits, checked our air tanks, and performed other necessary tests, we were ready.

And I really thought we would succeed. I thought we would be heroes.

But as Shannon and I slipped backward off the boat and into the crystal blue water, I had no idea of the horrors waiting for us in the murky depths of the Pacific Ocean.

2

For you to understand what's going on, I need to go back to where everything began. On May ninth of this year, I was a pretty typical kid leading a pretty typical life. I went to school, did my homework (most of the time), played pranks on my sister, and played basketball with my friends.

But that night, I saw something that was soon to change my life and lead to a series of adventures most kids my age don't get to have.

My sister, my mom, and I live in Portland, a city

in the very northern region of the state of Oregon, bordering Washington. In fact, we live so close to Washington that I can ride my bicycle there. Not many other kids in the country could say they do that.

Where we live is really cool. Portland is the biggest city in the state. Summers are great; it's sunny and warm. In the winter, we get a lot of rain, but hardly any snow, because it doesn't stay cold long enough. And Portland is the home of the Portland Trail Blazers, my favorite basketball team. That used to be my favorite sport—basketball. But not anymore. You see, I've since discovered a new sport. A sport I love more than basketball or any other sport: scuba diving.

I'd already known what scuba diving was, as I'd seen shows on television showing men and women dressed in wetsuits and special gear, staying under water for long periods of time, breathing air through a mouthpiece called a regulator that connected to a hose that was affixed to a tank on their backs. I thought it was pretty cool, but I never imagined myself ever doing anything like that. After all: I was just a kid, and I'd never seen kids scuba diving on television before, and figured there was some sort of age limit.

I was surfing through the channels on TV when

my sister, Shannon, came into the room. Shannon is eleven—one year younger than me. We get along pretty well, but I play pranks on her sometimes and she gets mad at me. Once, I put a plastic spider under the covers in her bed. When she found it later that night, she totally freaked out. She thought it was real and screamed her head off. Mom ran into the room, worried. And I got in trouble! I was grounded for a week and couldn't go out of the house, except when I went to school.

“What are you watching?” Shannon said as she sat on the other end of the couch.

“Nothing yet,” I replied.

I scanned the channels, searching for something fun to watch.

Finally, something interesting appeared on the screen: a man scuba diving. All around him, a school of fish hung in the blue-green water, swirling like colorful clouds. The fish weren't scared of him at all. They swarmed around him, more curious than frightened. It was mesmerizing to watch the man move in slow motion in the water, with shiny bubbles of air emerging from his mouthpiece and rising to the surface.

“Hey, that’s cool,” Shannon said. “Leave it on that channel.”

I put the remote on the armrest and sat back to watch. The scuba diver hung in the water, motionless, watching fish of all sizes swirl around him.

“I’d like to do that,” Shannon said.

Me, too, I thought. But I knew it would never happen. You see, I’m very small for my age. Shannon is, too. When I play basketball, I’m not very good at shooting or getting rebounds, because I’m so short. But I have one great advantage: because I’m small, I can move very, very fast . . . much faster than anyone else in my grade. When I play basketball with my friends, everyone wants me on their team because I’m so quick. I’m also pretty good at dodgeball, soccer, and other sports where you have to move fast.

But I was certain that when it came to scuba diving, I wouldn’t be able to do it until I got bigger. I figured the air tank alone probably weighed more than I did, and I’d never be able to carry it on my back.

It will be years before I’ll be able to take a course and learn to scuba dive, I thought. *In fact, I will probably—*

And that’s when my thought was interrupted by

a horrific sound of crashing metal and breaking glass
on the street in front of our house.

3

Shannon and I leapt from the couch and turned, looking out the big window facing our front yard. In the street, two cars had collided, and both front ends were a mangled mess. The vehicle on the left was a white car. Its hood was crinkled like an accordion, and gray smoke boiled up from the engine.

The other vehicle was a van. The front of it was smashed in, and the windshield had shattered. Tiny particles of glass were sprinkled on the road.

“Call nine-one-one!” I shouted to Shannon. She

raced to grab the phone while I ran out of the living room, through the front door, and across the yard.

What if someone is hurt? I wondered. My thoughts were frantic, my mind anxious. *If someone is hurt badly, I don't know what to do.*

Thankfully, a woman was getting out of the white car. It appeared she was the only one inside, and it didn't seem like she was hurt.

But the man in the van had a bloody nose. As he opened the door, I could see that the vehicle's air bag had deployed. Now it was deflated, and it crumpled over the hood like a battered circus balloon.

"Are you all right?" I asked as I approached. Which was kind of a silly question, being that I could see blood running from his nose, over his mouth, and onto his chin.

"I think I'm fine," the man said, "except for this." And with that, he placed his thumb and forefinger to his nose, closing his nostrils to stem the flow of blood. "When the air bag went off, it knocked my fist into my face. I gave myself a bloody nose."

"I'll get you a towel!" I said, and I spun and ran into the house. In the living room, Shannon was on the phone talking to the emergency operator, giving the

person details about the accident. I ran past her, turned, and went down the hall and into the bathroom.

A cold, wet towel, I thought. That would probably help.

Without thinking, I grabbed one of Mom's good towels—the ones we aren't supposed to use—that was hanging from the rack. She says they match the curtains, and they're only for decoration . . . which is kind of silly, if you ask me. After all: what good is a towel hanging on the rack if you can't use it?

I ran the cold water for a moment, then soaked the towel and wrung it out. I ran down the hall and through the living room, where Shannon had just ended her phone call.

"The lady said she was sending someone right away," she said. "Is that guy hurt bad?"

"I think it's just a bloody nose," I said as I darted out the front door. Shannon followed as I sprinted across the lawn.

The woman that had been driving the white car was near the curb, talking on a small phone. The man was sitting on the sidewalk, still holding his nose, when I approached. Other neighbors, alerted by the

crash, were coming out of their houses.

“Here,” I said to the man, and I held out the cold, wet towel.

“Thanks,” he said. He balled the towel around his nose and tipped his head back. “I haven’t had a bloody nose in years,” he said. “Once, I fell forward in a boat and couldn’t catch myself. Smacked myself a good one and broke my nose.”

In the distance, I heard a siren.

“Help is coming,” Shannon said. “I just called nine-one-one.”

“Thank you,” the man said, still holding his head back. “I think I’m going to be okay. Looks like we were both lucky this time.”

He was right. As it turned out, the woman’s car had a broken tie rod. While I don’t really know what that is, my mom later told me it controls the car’s steering. When the tie rod broke, the woman lost control and swerved into the man’s oncoming van.

I thought Mom was going to be mad at me for using one of her good towels, but she wasn’t. She said she was glad we acted fast and did the right thing. Mom said she was proud of both Shannon and me, saying we’d done the right things when it really

mattered.

I didn't really think I'd done anything that important. I mean, all I did was get a towel for the guy. Shannon called nine-one-one. Nobody was hurt badly, and neither the woman nor the man had to be taken to the hospital. Two wreckers came, cleaned the street, and hauled away the two crippled vehicles. Mom took us out for pizza and ice cream, and we went home.

A week later, I'd forgotten all about the accident . . . until a letter addressed to Shannon and me came in the mail one afternoon.

4

I had been playing basketball with my friends at the park. The day was sunny and hot, and around five o'clock, our teams broke up. Most of us had to go home to get cleaned up and ready for dinner.

When I walked into the house, Mom was on the phone. She held her finger to her lips, indicating I should be silent.

“Yes,” she was saying, “that’s right. And if you—”

I didn’t pay any more attention to what she was

saying, because Mom picked up a letter that was on the couch, smiled, and handed it to me while she talked on the phone.

I took the letter. It was addressed to me and Shannon. In the upper-left hand corner, there was a small cartoon character—a scuba diver. Beneath it were the words *Waters of Wonder Scuba Shop*.

I frowned. *Why would Shannon and I get a letter from a scuba shop?*

Strange.

I opened the letter, not sure what to expect. It contained a handwritten letter in blue ink. I unfolded the paper and read.

Dear Jacob and Shannon:

I contacted the police department to get your names and address so I could send a letter of thanks. Last week, I was involved in a car crash on your street. You two helped out by bringing me a towel and contacting the authorities.

Although my injury was minor, I deeply appreciate both of you coming to my assistance, and I would like to repay you. I am the owner of Waters of Wonder Scuba Shop, and I would like to offer both of you free scuba diving lessons. The course begins next week

and lasts for one month. Classes will be held in the classroom and the pool at my shop, and your final test for certification will take place in the ocean.

I was trembling with excitement. I continued to read the letter.

Please let me know at your earliest convenience. There will be others taking the scuba class, and I'll need to reserve the spaces for both of you.

Again, thank you for your help. You might be happy to know that my nose is going to be fine, although it's still a little purple and swollen.

Sincerely,

Morris Lukeman

My mouth hung open as I read the letter over.

Scuba diving lessons? I thought. Free? But what about my age? What about my size? Didn't that matter?

Mr. Lukeman obviously knew how big Shannon and I were.

He must think we're big enough, I thought. Maybe it doesn't matter how big I am, after all.

Mom hung up the phone. She saw my surprised expression and smiled.

"Who's the letter from?" she asked.

"The guy we helped last week!" I blurted,

waving the letter in the air. “He wants to give me and Shannon free scuba lessons!”

I gave her the letter to read, just as Shannon strode through the front door.

“Shannon!” I said. “You’re not going to believe this, but that guy says we can take scuba lessons for free!”

“What guy?” Shannon said.

“The guy in the car accident last week! He owns a scuba diving shop, and he wants to thank us by giving us free scuba diving lessons!”

“That’s awesome!” Shannon exclaimed.

“This is very nice of him,” Mom said when she’d finished reading the letter.

“Let me see,” Shannon said, and she held out her hand and took the letter from Mom.

“Can we?” I asked.

Mom shrugged. “I don’t see why not,” she said. “It sounds like a fun adventure for the both of you.”

Oh, it would be an adventure, all right.

An adventure . . . into disaster.

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