

The Double Cousins

and the Mystery of the Rushmore Treasure

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THE DOUBLE COUSINS AND THE MYSTERY OF THE RUSHMORE TREASURE

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This book is dedicated to my siblings Cheryl Eggers, Clark Jones, and Vonda Jones. You are part of my worst, best, and earliest memories. I love you and am so thankful God didn't make me an only child! I wouldn't have nearly as many things to write about!

Acknowledgments

Thank-you to my older sister, Cheryl who first helped me rough out an idea for a book based on Mr. Crosby and the neighborhood store we remembered from our childhood. There are many other family members and friends including my husband and my parents who helped me “talk through” the plot several times in order to make this story come alive!

Special thanks to the 2012-2013 fifth grade class at Upper Bucks Christian School in Sellersville, PA and their teacher Miss Dana Clark for giving me the accountability of a deadline for the rough draft. In addition they were the ones who insisted a certain plot element “wasn’t too scary.”

A huge thank-you to all who participated in creating online resources for those researching the flood. Also, the Rapid City Public Library site was invaluable to my research. Thank you to Grandma Hazel and Grandma Helen, my neighbors when I lived in Rapid City. They told me stories about that night that were so helpful I wanted to honor them, so I’ve included their names as two of my characters.

I hope through this story you might gain a new interest in Rapid City and the surrounding area. I still call it home even though I now live in North Carolina.

Author's Note

On June 9, 1972, a flood tore through Rapid City, SD and 238 people lost their lives. My first memory of the 1972 flood was when my daddy got up in church one Sunday and asked the people to pray for a Pastor Onstott and the people of Rapid City. I was ten. He explained that there had been a bad flood in Rapid City, and many people died. At the time, we lived in Nebraska and I had never been to South Dakota. Little did I know that two years later Pastor Onstott would become my step-grandpa and our lives would be forever connected with Rapid City.

Over the years my family has migrated to the Rapid City area, and I lived there for ten years. During all of those years I heard many times of the “Flood of 72.” The park system that runs through town is a constant reminder of that day. Every year it is remembered and in 2012 they had many special events memorializing the lives that were lost. I had seen news clips, first person accounts, and even read part of a book. But, when I began doing research for this book I gained a new appreciation—or maybe horror would be a better word—for the events of that night in June of 1972.

The events I wrote about in my book are true in their generality. People did find themselves clinging to trees. Some rescuers died. Entire families perished. Five bodies were never recovered. However, the characters I created are just figments of my imagination based on stories I read and saw in videos. None of the characters in this story are meant to portray any real person, or groups of people.

Two other places in the Rapid City area are near and dear to my heart. They are Mount Rushmore—of course—and Storybook Island in Rapid City. I have included them in my book also.

It is known that Gutzon Borglum, the man who created and carved Mount Rushmore drew on a tablecloth at a restaurant to show his financiers what he was planning. Other than the similarity to that fact, the rest of my story regarding the Rushmore Treasure is nothing but a figment of my imagination.

Generations of my family have enjoyed Storybook Island, a children's park with wonderful photo-ops for dotting aunts! It continues to be a favorite visiting spot when I am there. The best part is that it is free, although they happily take donations.

The name Crosby comes from our landlord, neighbor, friend, and my mother's boss when we lived in North Platte, Nebraska, during the 1960's and 70's. He was a gentle, hospitable man who loved every child in the neighborhood and had an amazing open door policy which included a dish of hard candy. I can't eat a hard butterscotch candy without thinking of Mr. Crosby. We loved him and he lives vividly in my memory!

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Chapter One

A Dark and Stormy Night

June 9, 1972

Rapid City, SD

“It was a dark and stormy night.” Sixteen-year-old Lee Crosby Hughes grinned at his best friend, Joe Howard, then peered out the upstairs bedroom window. He couldn’t see anything. The wall of water completely obscured the view.

“It’s like trying to see through Niagara Falls,” Lee said.

“But there’s no wind.” Joe shrugged. “It’s weird there isn’t any wind. I bet it’s raining a couple inches an hour or more.”

“The creek will flood if this keeps up.” Lee’s stomach lurched. Joe lived right next to Rapid Creek on Jackson Boulevard and if it flooded . . . He shook his head. “Let’s go look.”

“Be quiet.” Joe held a finger to his mouth. “Mom and Dad have to work in the morning, storm or no storm. If we wake them up, I’ll be grounded for a month.” The boys crept down the stairs. “Yikes!” Joe stopped and lifted his foot. It was dripping wet. “There’s water down here!”

Two things happened simultaneously: Joe hollered for his parents, and the house lurched. A horrible crashing noise descended on them like a train.

The house shifted from its foundation and slowly spun around. Lee grabbed the banister and held on. It tipped, and he lost his grip. He

grabbed for something to hang on to, but the ice cold water paralyzed him. Everything exploded.

To Carly, Crosby's Corner looked like it had been there forever. On this chilly October evening, ten-year-old double cousins Max and Carly stood in front of the store, at the corner of Cottonwood and Eighth Avenue. Carly crammed her hands in her pockets, her head tucked into her jacket hood, and peered through the dusk at the red brick building standing staunchly where it had for decades. The bricks were faded where years of weather had worn them away. The large window, cluttered with multicolored flyers, shouted a variety of advertisements to all who passed on the sidewalk. Smack in the middle—like the bull's eye on a target—Mr. Crosby placed what was known in the Rapid City, South Dakota neighborhood as "The Child of the Day." Each morning he cut a different photo from the Missing Children's poster, enlarged it on his old copier, and displayed it below a huge neon green arrow with the word "LOOK" on it. The eyelashes drawn on the two "o's" captured the attention of even the youngest passer-by.

"It hasn't changed much." Carly followed Max up the steps to the door.

"The roof leaks." Max held the screen door for Carly. "Mr. Crosby has been saving money for months. He hopes the roof will last until he has enough."

When Max opened the door, the little bell suspended above announced their arrival with a bright *ting-a-ling*. To the right of the door, smack dab in front of the window, stood the counter, cluttered with jars holding stick candy and bubble gum along with the ancient cash register that Mr. Crosby called the Rushmore Register, like it was a person with a name. Even though the register didn't work anymore, he refused to replace it. Instead he kept a simple adding machine to calculate the amount of each order. The register was only used to keep the money.

“Hi, Mr. Crosby.” Max pushed back his hood. He dropped his voice as low as it would go and intoned, “It was a dark and stormy night.” His hair stuck straight up with static electricity and Carly and Mr. Crosby both laughed. Carly pushed her hood off, too, but her dark, heavy pony tail didn’t have the same effect as Max’s hair.

Max looked in the glass countertop and tried to mash his hair with his hands. When it popped back up, he shrugged. “I brought you a visitor.” He opened the lid on the peppermint stick jar and took a deep breath before screwing it back on. “Mom said to run over before supper in case you need any help.”

The gray-haired, round-faced man slid off his high-backed stool, revealing his small size. Mr. Crosby’s version of why he was not quite five feet tall went something like this: “When God handed out inches, I thought he said finches. Since I didn’t have a birdcage, I said, ‘No, thanks.’” Then laughter would erupt from him in jerky bursts, shaking his chubby form.

“How’s my favorite oldest Nebraska Johnson girl?” Mr. Crosby patted Carly’s shoulder. “I hear your parents have gone on a mission trip.”

Carly nodded. “They leave Tuesday. That’s why we get to stay with Max. We’re going to spend a week out in Nemo, in the Black Hills, with Grandpa and Grandma Rawson, too. We’ll be here for three whole weeks.”

“It’s been a few months since you’ve been here.” He straightened his neon-yellow suspenders. “Although, from what I’ve heard from Max, you kids kept pretty busy solving mysteries this summer. I suppose you’re bored to tears with real life.”

“I was bored this morning.” Max leaned on the counter. “I read two books while I waited for Carly to get here.”

Mr. Crosby glanced up at the big, black-rimmed clock on the back wall, close to the ceiling. “It’s only five. You read fast. What did you read?”

“Mysteries. If we can’t have a real one, I can at least read them.” Max leaned against the counter. “One of these days you’re going to have to meet Slim.”

“I’d like that very much.” Mr. Crosby peered over the top of his glasses. “It sounds like you kids did a good thing, discovering his identity and convincing him to go home.”

“My dad says he’s made the most remarkable turnaround of anyone he’s ever met,” said Carly. “He said most guys who have been moving from one place to another their whole lives don’t ever change.”

Mr. Crosby looked thoughtful. “I know God can change a person overnight, but I would guess your cousin Slim may still have challenges over the next few months. We always reap what we sow, and sometimes old thinking patterns come back at the most unfortunate times.”

While Mr. Crosby talked, Max’s eyes drifted around the room. The three aisles of shelves with food, first aid supplies, small toys, school supplies, and the various other items in demand in the neighborhood store were as neat and well-stocked as usual.

On the left wall beside the front door stood the copier. The neon pink sign above it declared “10 CENTS PER COPY. PLEASE ask for help if you need it.”

Three rows of postcards circled the room like a never ending wall-paper border, the oldest held up with thumbtacks and newer ones attached with bright push pins. They started behind the front door and ended with the most recent ones just to the left of the back doorway. Through this door you could reach the bathroom, the rear entrance, the stairs down to the basement storerooms, and the staircase up to Mr. Crosby’s apartment above the store.

The first post card, a picture of Mount Rushmore, was dated 1955, the year Mr. Crosby bought the store. The postcard from Mr. Sneed, the former owner, stated simply “Good Luck.” Mr. Sneed had never been one to waste words. When Mr. Crosby received the post card, he pinned it to the wall, starting the tradition. Often when customers went on vacation, they sent Mr. Crosby a card. He would place it on the wall, adding to his collection. Sometimes customers stopped by just to see the latest cards.

"You have a new post card." Max looked at it. "Do you want me to hang it up?" He turned the card over and smiled. "It's from Grandma Helen." He held it out for Carly to see. "You remember her. She's the lady over on Fourth Avenue."

"Sure." Mr. Crosby handed a push pin to Max. "Go ahead and put it up." He rested his chin in his hand and stared at the back wall, a faraway look in his eyes. "Someday, I don't know when . . ."

Max darted a look at Carly. Her eyes twinkled, and their non-verbal communication radar buzzed. They had heard this before, so they headed to the back while Mr. Crosby continued his often repeated plan.

"Someday I'm going to take a vacation. I won't tell anyone—I'll just go. I'll visit all of those places, and when I'm done, I'll come back."

Max rolled his eyes at Carly, and then looked at Mr. Crosby. "I told Dad you're going to take a vacation someday. Do you know what he said?"

"What?" The man leaned over the counter.

"He said, 'The day that happens the world will come to an end.'" Max pressed the red push pin into the card and made sure it held. "You want me to sweep today?"

"Yes, I do." Mr. Crosby waved his hand at Max. "I get no respect around here." He shook his head in mock dismay.

Carly grinned. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"As a matter of fact, there is. I bought too many containers of yogurt. It's hard to judge how many people will buy, and it seems to go in spurts. I have some dated the day after tomorrow, so I need to organize them in a display by themselves. I'll charge half-price. Then they'll sell." While he talked, he hurried to the back where the cooler hummed. He showed Carly where he wanted the sale items, then went back to the front. "When you get done sorting, you can make a sign, too."

The door bell tinkled and Max glanced up. A tall, slender woman with salt and pepper hair stepped through the entrance, a little girl about six clinging to her hand. Mr. Crosby beamed at the two visitors. "Good afternoon," he said. "How can I help you today?"

"I'm glad you're still open. I need a few things, but my car is at the shop. Besides, I heard about this store back when I was a kid, and I wanted to see if I could find it." The woman rattled on. "We just moved from Texas. This is my granddaughter Hannah, and I'm CJ Myers."

Mr. Crosby smiled down at the little girl. "Hi, Hannah; I'm Mr. Crosby. You look like you must be a great help to your grandma."

Hannah tipped her head to the side. "Did you know deciduous trees lose their leaves, but coniferous trees don't?"

Mr. Crosby raised his eyebrows and leaned toward Hannah. "You don't say! I think I learned that when I went to school, but I had forgotten it. He turned to the window, pointed at the evergreen tree on the corner, and asked, "So what kind of tree is that one?"

"A coniferous tree!"

"You have a smart young woman here." Mr. Crosby stepped behind the counter.

"Thank you. I think so." CJ nabbed one of Mr. Crosby's two half-sized grocery carts. "We better get our groceries and get home before it's completely dark."

"Grab some yogurt; the ones dated tomorrow are half-price." Mr. Crosby pointed to the cooler. "Carly's sorting them for me now.

Carly held up a yogurt and smiled.

"Yogurt—yummy!" the girl said. "Can we get some? I want peach. It's scrumpdillyicious."

Carly giggled. "I like that word. Scrumpdillyicious."

The woman pushed the small cart around the store, gathering peanut butter, bread, boxes of macaroni and cheese, and soup before heading to the back to look at the yogurt.

"Have you found a church yet?" Mr. Crosby climbed back up on his stool.

"No, sir." She stopped in the aisle and looked at him. "Where do you go?"

"I attend Bethlehem Baptist down on Murray Street. It's only ten blocks from here. That's where Max and his family go, too."

He pointed to Max standing half-way down the middle aisle, broom in hand.

“Hi, I’m Max Rawson. We live right across the street. This is my cousin Carly—actually, my double cousin.”

Mr. Crosby smacked his forehead. “I’m sorry. I completely forgot to introduce you.” He looked down at Hannah. “Where have my manners gone, young lady?”

Hannah giggled.

“Maybe we’ll come to your church tomorrow.” CJ pushed her cart to the counter. “After all, we’ll already have friends there, won’t we, Hannah?”

Mr. Crosby handed the lady a business card. “Here’s my number; call me if you need a ride in the morning. I’ll be glad to pick you up.”

“That would be great. Like I said, my car’s in the shop. I’ll let you know.”

Hannah leaned against the counter and stared at Carly. “What’s a double cousin?” She tipped her head from one side to the other, a worried look clouding her face. “I don’t know what that means.”

CJ winked at Max. “Hannah likes to understand words and phrases, but I have to admit, I was wondering that myself.”

Max grinned. “It confuses a lot of people. Double cousins happen when two sisters marry two brothers. Or—like our family—a sister and brother marry a brother and sister. Then their children are cousins twice, and that’s what makes us double cousins.”

“I still don’t understand.” Hannah frowned at Max.

“It just means that we have all the same grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins,” Carly said. “It’s fun.”

CJ laughed. “I’ve got it Hannah. I’ll explain it as we walk home.”

After paying for the food, CJ and Hannah said goodbye and walked out the door.

Mr. Crosby watched them go. “I hope she calls.”

He reached behind the counter and brought out a small sheet of neon pink poster board. “Here’s the paper for the sign, Carly. Max, there are boxes in the back to break down. Once you finish

those jobs, choose a candy bar.” Mr. Crosby picked up a pile of envelopes and tapped them on the counter to straighten them. “I still have to open the mail. I’ve been so busy today I haven’t even looked at it.”

A few minutes later, Max heard a soft groan from the front. Mr. Crosby sat slumped in his chair, head in his hands, a piece of paper on the counter in front of him.