

Chapter 1

Legends and Treasure

Luka

Saturday, 3:17 p.m.

Yes! The perfect case! Luka Fallon pumped his fist, then slammed his skateboard to the pavement. With his dog's leash in hand, he pushed off the ground and hopped on the board. "Gadget, let's find Ember."

Luka and Gadget zoomed through the neighborhood and zipped up the driveway to detective headquarters.

Gadget bounded across the garage straight for Luka's cousin Ember Fallon.

Luka slingshot past him. "Look out!" He swerved to avoid her. His Powell Peralta skateboard flipped and crash-landed as Luka smashed into a stack of storage boxes.

Back flat on the cool garage floor, Luka opened his

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eyes. He sucked in a few breaths as his cousin and fellow detective knelt beside him.

“You good?” She wiggled her nose to adjust her specs.

He gave a thumbs-up, then unbuckled his helmet.

Ember rubbed the Lab’s head. “Did Gadget walk you, or did you walk Gadget?”

“Half running . . . half skateboarding . . . with Gadget pulling for . . . optimal speed . . . don’t . . . recommend.” The breeze swirled his loose papers like a mini tornado.

Gadget licked his face. Luka unhooked the corded leash, and the former police dog hurried to the CCZ—the Canine Chill Zone—and his full water bowl.

Luka’s partner in solving crime gripped his hand and pulled him to his feet. The two of them were like trees and tire swings. Totally different, but better together. Even as fifth graders, in the small town of Kingswell Falls, they had a big reputation for asking smart questions. Today, they launched into the world as the official Kingswell Kid Detectives.

“Good work setting up HQ.” Luka snapped a mental surveillance picture, just like Dad had taught him. He covered his eyes. “Test me.”

Ember used her favorite police chief voice. “Attention, Officer Kid Detective. Are. You. Ready?”

Luka laughed. “Sir, yes, sir!”

“On my mark . . . GO!”

Luka zeroed in on his brain cam footage. “Mini

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basketball hoop in back-left corner. Bean bag chairs. Two. Olive green. Corkboard with map of Kingswell Falls.”

“Hand-drawn,” Ember added, still in police mode.

“Affirmative.” Luka matched her tone. “Then Command Central, aka square folding table. And our covert lockbox for detective fees and high-value evidence.” Luka dropped his hand from his eyes. “And best of all, detective chairs that swivel and creak just like Dad’s at the police station.”

Ember grabbed Luka’s wrist and flung his arm in the air, almost wrenching it out of its socket. “We have a champion!” Suspicious red paint smudged her elbows.

“Okay, what’d I miss?”

“Take a sec to celebrate, cuz.” She spun in front of Command Central. “You forgot your massive stack of library books, my art supply shelf, and this.” Ember propped a plywood sign against the garage entrance.

Bold red letters shouted:

KINGSWELL KID DETECTIVES

“Epic. For real. But the C is backward.”

“Oh noooo.” She puffed spiky red hair from her eyes. “I wanted to be ready for our first real case.”

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“We *are* ready!” Luka pulled a folded rectangle from his pocket and tossed it to her.

Paper crinkled as she unfolded, and unfolded, and unfolded. “Origami?”

He pointed to his shorts. “Lots of pockets, but no big ones. Detectives improvise.” Luka scooped up the pages he’d dropped.

Gadget spit several more at his feet, slobber clinging to the pages.

“Thanks, boy.” Luka rubbed Gadget’s ears. “While I was hanging our detective agency flyers, I spied that one.”

Ember scanned the wrinkled notice. “Founder’s Day.” She put a hand on one hip. “They’ve only been doing this longer than airplanes existed.”

“One huge difference.” He pointed to the bottom of the page. “Find the missing waterfalls of Kingswell Falls! Solve our oldest mystery! Win special recognition!” Luka stuck the flyer to the empty case board. “Plus, the Kingswell family promised a cash prize for the team who finds the hidden treasure. Everyone’s stoked.”

Ember froze at the garage sink, dirty brushes in hand. “Treasure?”

That intel had grabbed his cousin’s attention.

She paused, then shook her head. “Hidden treasure is just a town story. Plus, the deadline’s less than a month away. We’ve got school.”

“Twenty-one days.” Luka drummed on Command

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Central. “Think about it, Ember. It wouldn’t be our first case. We found Raj’s missing mountain bike. Caught the community garden bandit. That clever raccoon.” Luka flexed his tingling fingers. “*This* is a *real* mystery. Unsolved for over a hundred years. Could put our agency on the map. What’s the worst that could happen?”

“Failure. Become the biggest joke at Ellen Ochoa Intermediate.” Ember’s hands waved as she paced.

“But if we solve it, we’ll get even more cases. We’ll prove we’re legit.” He paused. *This’ll get her.* “We’ll help tons more people.”

“I like helping.” Ember dried her hands on her jeans. “But we know nothing about the missing waterfalls or the treasure.”

“We know more than you think. Dad’s got a team.” Luka grinned. “He’s getting me a contest packet. Part of my detective training.”

“Wait. Uncle Ben entered the contest? With a team of police officers? Now I know you’re crazy.” Ember sank into her detective chair, feet tapping the cement. “We’re junior detectives. You expect us to compete with the pros?”

“Not just compete. Win. Raj’s dad thought we should open our own agency, and he works for the police department.” He saved the best for last. “We might even get an official police endorsement.”

Ember’s eyes sparkled like firecrackers. “I could make a new sign for HQ. ‘Kingswell Kid Detectives, endorsed by the KFPD.’”

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This time Luka pulled Ember to her feet. “Let’s crack this case!”

“Okay, I’m in. But we’d better use our secret weapon.”

Chapter 2

The Secret Weapon

Luka

Saturday, 3:47 p.m.

Secret weapon? Sometimes Luka found his cousin impossible to follow. “I don’t copy.”

“An advantage no one will think about.” She relaxed back into her chair with a confident smile. “Prayer.”

Luka rolled his eyes. “You’re kidding. When I think ‘secret weapon,’ I think rocket launchers or laser guns, *not* prayer.”

Ember and God talked all the time—or at least, Ember acted like they did. She’d even volunteer to pray out loud. *Yikes*. They both loved God and went to church. But Ember was a preacher’s kid, so maybe prayer came easier for her. Luka was only a preacher’s nephew. As a cop’s kid, he found facts, details, and procedure helped build his relationship with God.

“Got a better idea?” Ember swiveled her chair. “God was there when the falls disappeared. He’s the only one left to ask.”

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Hmm, can't argue with logic. "Why would God help us?"

"Why wouldn't he?"

Hurricanes. Fires. Rescuing the world. Luka snagged a basketball from the garage floor, took a shot, and hit the rim. The clang echoed through the garage, sharp and disappointing. "I think God's got more important things to do."

"More important than talking to one of his kids? Nope." Ember rebounded. "God's always there."

"Duh, cuz. God's *omnipresent*. But that's not what I meant."

"Omni-what?"

"Present. Everywhere at once." *I actually know something about God that she doesn't?* Swish. "But why would he help us find a random missing waterfall?"

"Duh, cuz." Ember splayed her hands. "Because what's important to us *is* important to him."

That's a lot for God to juggle. Luka shot. The ball hit the backboard. He rebounded and dribbled, lost in thought. Until Gadget went for the ball. *Foul.* "If that's true, how will we know it's God?" Luka's voice cracked. "Not just our thoughts?"

"When you talk with someone a lot, you get to know their voice," Ember said. "That happens with God too. You just know."

Luka spiked the ball. "*I don't* just know. I need evidence, not a feeling."

"So, we'll ask for evidence."

"Seriously? Like what?"

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“Clear answers. Like, if he wants us to take this case, he’ll share stuff we couldn’t find on our own.” Ember snapped her fingers—as if prayer were that easy.

“You can do that? And *God* will do that?” Luka swiped at his forehead. Was he sweating?

“Sure. But what’s with all the questions? Worried he won’t show up for you?”

Well, yeah. Or not show up like I want him to. But Luka didn’t want to admit that.

“Ding.” Ember shot him a lopsided smile.

Luka groaned. *She does that when she thinks she’s about to make a brilliant point.*

“He showed up for Daniel.” She paused mid-spin.

Luka toweled off with his shirt sleeve. “Which Daniel? Danny Ito from school? Mr. Espinoza at church?” He hated it when Ember had answers he didn’t.

“No, Bible Daniel.”

“Oh. The lions’ den guy. Ate his vegetables. Friends with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.”

“Yeah, same one. But this time the king had a weird dream. He wanted his advisers to tell him the dream, without knowing the details, and then what it meant. If they couldn’t do it, the king would have them killed.”

She pulled her old Bible from the shelf and flipped the pages. “Daniel and his friends prayed, and God came through.” She paused to read. “Here it is. Daniel, chapter two: ‘During the night, the mystery was revealed to Daniel.’”

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“A dream sounds sus. My dreams are usually about flying. Or scoring a winning goal.” *Or clowns.* Luka shuddered. “At least God was super clear when he solved Daniel’s mystery. That’s pretty cool.” He paced around HQ. “What prayer do we use?”

“What do ya mean, ‘What prayer do we use?’” Ember leaned on one elbow. “We just talk to him.”

He stopped. “Ember, if we’re talking with God, then we better not mess this up. He’s too important to listen to our stuff.”

“God tells us to pray.”

“Yeah.” Luka picked up the mini basketball. “But he’s still *God*. We’d better do it right.” He gripped and ungripped the ball. “Let’s just say one of the prayers in the Bible.”

She raised an eyebrow. “Is there a prayer in the Bible about Kingswell Falls?”

“Ugh.” Luka dropped into a bean bag chair. It smelled like stale corn chips. “What if we get the prayer wrong?” He clenched his jaw.

“Prayer is just talking.” Ember scrunched her nose. “I don’t think you can get *that* wrong.” She flipped through the Bible. “Oh, wait. Here.” She pulled out a neon pink card:

Ask.

Seek.

Knock.

Matthew 7:7–8

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“Come on, let’s get some help.” Ember plopped down in the other bean bag chair. “I’ll start.” Before Luka could say no, she grabbed his hand and closed her eyes.

“Hey, Jesus. Luka thinks we should try to solve the mystery of the Kingswell Falls. No one knows where the falls were, but you do. So, we’re asking. You know its secrets and its treasure. Solving this mystery would really help our detective agency. Please show us if we should take the case. Will you give us clues no one else has?”

Yikes. Luka squirmed. Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, and the Lord’s Prayer wasn’t remotely how Ember talked to God. *Is it disrespectful to say “hey” to Jesus? To be so casual with the creator of the universe?*

She squeezed Luka’s hand. “Your turn.”

Luka froze. His mind went blank. His hands got sweaty. He nearly choked, and he wasn’t even eating anything. *‘Now I lay me down to sleep . . .’ No. Definitely not.*

Ember squeezed a second time. “You can do it.”

I probably should be standing, but okay. What do we say in church? Oh yeah. “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.” *I don’t know what this has to do with the falls.* “And please help us solve this mystery. Amen.” Luka wiped his slick hands on his shorts. “Now what?”

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“We asked. We sought. We knocked. Now, we wait.” Ember shrugged. “And we listen.”

“Seriously? For how long? I’m not sleeping here.”

Gadget sprang to his feet. Deep growls rumbled in his throat. The fur along his spine stood straight up.

Footsteps pounded the pavement and a girl burst into HQ.

Luka had seen her around school but never talked to her. She slammed a twenty-dollar bill onto Command Central and glared at the guy who raced up behind her. “I was here first.”

“Nah. You cheated.” The boy turned to Luka. “Hey, I want to hire you.”

“Take a number.” She moved in front. “I have money.”

“What’s the case?” Ember caught Luka’s eye.

Was God answering already? The thought gave him goose bumps.

“The mystery of Kingswell Falls!”