

BEN COOY'S  
TREASURE

ILLUSTRATION

QUICKREADS

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**T**oby Polansky wadded up a sheet of notepaper and threw it at an overflowing wastebasket. “Okay, that’s it!” she shouted. “I give up! I quit. My life is ruined. It’s all over for me”

Her brother Leo grinned as he closed the book he’d been reading. “Your life is *over*?” he said. “Does that mean I get first dibs on the bathroom in the morning? Does it mean I get all the ice cream? At last I won’t have to share!”

Toby leaned back in her chair and groaned. “You are so cruel, Leo. I can’t write this stupid history paper by myself. You have to help me!”

Leo gazed at her as if weighing his options. “What’s in it for me?”

“Oh, anything!” Toby snapped. “I’ll make your lunch for a week. I’ll—”

“Stop!” Leo begged. “Don’t cook for me—*please*, Toby! You can’t even boil water! Before I agree, tell me about your assignment.”

Toby brightened up. She and her brother were only a year apart. Leo—the oldest—was by far the more serious student. Right now he was a sophomore at Lakewood Community College. Someday he hoped to teach history at the high school level.

Toby—the dramatic one—dreamed of becoming an actress. That is, if she was able to survive her freshman year at LCC! At the moment, there seemed to be some question about that.

“I have to write a paper on something to do with the history of Lakewood,” Toby said. “If I don’t get a good grade on this assignment, I won’t pass the class. And if I have to take the history class over, I won’t get that drama class I need. And if I can’t

take the drama class, I won't get a part in the spring play. ”

“So?”

Toby looked as if she was about to cry. “*Everyone* in Lakewood comes to see that play, Leo. Everyone important, at least. Who knows, maybe a talent scout from Hollywood will—”

Toby saw Leo rolling his eyes and sighed. “Okay, okay,” she grumbled. “Maybe the Hollywood scout is too much to hope for, but—”

Toby's face fell as Leo burst out laughing. The loud guffaws went on and on. Finally, he stood up and stretched. “All right, I'll help you,” he said.

“Oh, Leo, you *will*?” In a flash, Toby's expression changed from utter despair to sheer delight.

“History is a great subject,” Leo said. “I don't understand why you aren't having *fun* with this paper!”

Toby shuddered. “Get real, Leo!” she groaned. “History is a drag. It's all about

memorizing meaningless dates. What happened in 1903 or 1847 isn't exactly hot news. What does it matter *now*?" Toby jumped to her feet and began to pace. "History is about learning the names of people who are dead and gone," she went on. "What's the point? Dead people can't help my career!"

Shaking his head, Leo gazed in stunned disbelief at his sister.

Toby was on a roll. "You know what I always say," she went on. "If something happened before last week, it's not worth remembering. I consider myself a here-and-now person. What's important is today. After all, we can't do anything about yesterday, now can we?"

"What if I could change your mind?" Leo said. "What if I could show you that history can be downright fascinating?"

Toby crossed her arms in an "I dare you to show me" way.

Leo gazed at her thoughtfully. "Last year I took the same history class that you're

taking now—remember?” he said. “I did a lot of research into Lakewood’s past. And I can promise you, Toby, that the history of this town is *anything* but boring!”

“Oh, come on,” Toby shook her head. “Lakewood started out as a farming community. Who cares about cows? Who cares about the price of chicken feed? Who cares about—”

“Ah! So I guess you don’t know anything about that old-time judge who mysteriously disappeared,” Leo said.

Toby looked startled. “Judge? Disappeared?”

“—Or the strange blue lights that were seen one night over a farmer’s field outside of town,” Leo went on.

His sister’s jaw dropped. “UFOs? Spotted over *Lakewood*?”

“And those things are just *part* of Lakewood’s history. But I guess nothing like that would interest you.”

“Yes, it would.” Toby grabbed her note-book and pencil. “So tell me—were

the strange blue lights *really* UFOs?”

“You’ll never know if you don’t do your research,” Leo said cheerfully.

“But I don’t know where to start,” his sister wailed.

“The best place is the library,” Leo told her. “You can check out books and read old copies of the newspaper there—”

“Old, *old* copies?” Toby asked. “They’re at the library?”

Leo groaned. “Have you ever done any research anywhere?”

“Not if I could help it,” Toby admitted. “I figure it’s like a contagious disease. You try to stay away from it.”

Leo groaned. “You’re impossible! Come on, I’ll show you how it’s done. Who knows—maybe you’ll learn to like it.”



**A**n hour later, Leo and Toby were at the library, scanning back issues of the *Lakewood News & Sun*. The old issues of the newspaper had been put on microfilm. Toby

scrolled through back issues until she was dizzy. Finally, she stopped to rest her eyes. She glanced over at Leo, who was sitting next to her, reading. “Have you found the story about the blue lights?” she asked.

Leo shook his head. “Not yet. But I can tell you who won the pie-eating contest at the county fair in—” He gasped. “Hello! What’s *this*?”

“What’s what?” Toby asked. She came to stand behind his chair and peered over his shoulder.

“Buried treasure,” Leo said. He let out a low whistle. “Listen to this! *It has been reported that Lakewood bank robber Ben Cody died last night in the state prison hospital. The doctor there stated that he had died of an apparent heart attack. Cody was due to be released from prison in three weeks.*”

“I thought you said it was a story about buried treasure,” Toby said.

“Wait, there’s more,” Leo said as he quickly scanned the rest of the story. “It says here that Ben Cody got away with a whole



lot of money when he robbed the Lakewood Bank. But the loot was never found. *That's* the buried treasure.”

“When did this happen?” Toby asked.

Leo checked the date. “Well, this is a pretty old issue. Actually, Cody died about seventy years ago.”

Toby groaned. “You dweeb! I thought this was something *recent*.”

Leo was excited. “This will be fun!” he said. “Let’s get all the information we can about the robbery. Maybe we can find the money ourselves!”

Toby’s jaw dropped. She gazed at her brother blankly. “Leo, are you nuts? I have a term paper to write, remember? We don’t have time to go ripping around the countryside like a couple of pirates chasing lost treasure.”

Leo looked disappointed. “Think about it, sis. At the time, there was a reward offered for the money. Maybe we can collect it ourselves.” Now Leo’s voice was rising excitedly. “Plus, you’ll have a term paper

guaranteed to get an A. And you'll pass that history class with flying colors. And you'll—"

*"Shhh!"*

Leo and Toby turned to see the librarian standing near them. Leo gave the man an embarrassed smile and dropped his voice to a whisper. "With an A in history, you can take the drama class and be in the play. Maybe you'll wind up in Hollywood after all."

Toby's eyes narrowed as she thought about it. "I don't know, Leo. I only have one week to finish—"

"I'll even help you write the paper."

How could she resist? Toby sighed and nodded. "You'd better be right about all this. Okay, bro—where do we start?"

"First, we need to dig up as much information as we can on Ben Cody and the robbery. Let's get to work!"



**L**ater, over lunch at Hannah's Hamburger Haven, Toby and Leo shared their notes. Hannah's was a local favorite. They'd