

Yosemite Fortune

C. R. Fulton

THE CAMPGROUND KIDS

www.bakkenbooks.com

Yosemite Fortune by C. R. Fulton

First Edition

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*To every treasure hunter,
may you find the most important treasure of all.
Do you love treasure hunting? Ask your mom or
dad to look up the Forrest Fenn treasure!*

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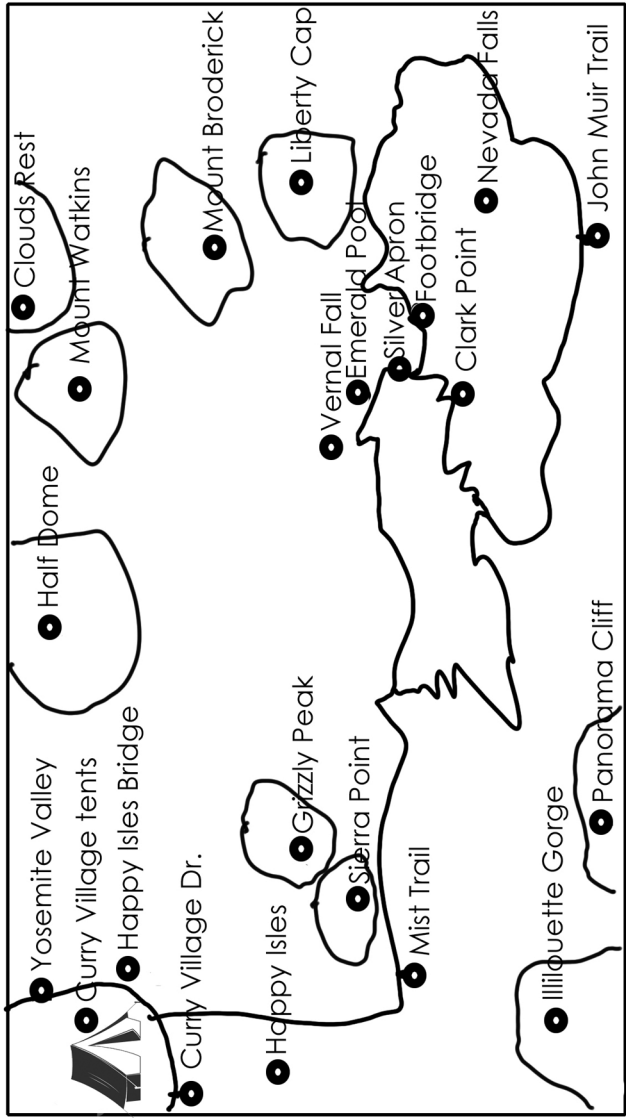
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LITTLE YOSEMITE VALLEY



- 1 -

The attic ladder feels rough under my hands, almost like climbing a tree. Mom only lets me up here once in a blue moon, so I scurry up like a squirrel.

“Hurry!” my ten-year-old sister Sadie urges.

The unique scent of the attic envelops me with its mixture of stale air, dust, and...*discovery*. I balance on the rafters until I reach the small area with a solid floor where Dad stores our Christmas decorations.

“Don’t make dust,” I warn Sadie as she reaches for the poofy gray insulation surrounding our small floor. The ceiling isn’t high enough for me to stand up straight, so I hunch over.

Sadie just smiles and sinks both hands slowly into the fluff. “Remember when I grabbed the pink insulation that you’re not supposed to touch?”

“I’d rather not,” I say, turning to scan the random piles of boxes.

Kneeling is easier, so I crawl toward the farthest corner and click on the flashlight I have clamped between my teeth. The first box I open is full of old baby clothes. I push it aside and reach for another, my fingertips tingling. *I’ve just got to find the treasure up here.*

The next box contains a wooden model of a car. I pick it up reverently and blow off the dust; it must have been Dad’s when he was little.

“Just another minute!” Mom’s muffled voice echoes through the small opening.

“Already?” Sadie asks.

“We’ve got to pick up Ethan in 20 minutes; then we’re off to catch our flight to Yosemite!”

Mom’s words send a thrill down to my toes, but I don’t waste even one second. I lean down to

search the bottom of the box. I lose my balance, shifting the boxes, and I gasp.

“What’s this?” My subdued whisper, dampened by the heavy air, draws Sadie to my side.

“What’s what?” Her long brown hair tickles my neck as I lean forward. One flap of a box protrudes from deep under the insulation. A slow-moving cloud of fine dust rises as I shift the hidden box closer. I hold my breath as I struggle with its weight. *A camouflage canteen is sitting on top!*

“Give me a little room,” I mutter as I nearly plunk the mysterious box on Sadie’s toes. She pulls mounds of soft insulation from the open top of the box, revealing several notebooks stacked unevenly. The first one has messy handwriting that says *Twice Buried, Once Found*. Sadie picks up the canteen, and I pull out a thick hunk of bronze metal.

“It’s so heavy,” I whisper in awe.

“Time to go!” Mom’s muted voice from below barely registers in my ears.

“What are you?” I ask the heavy item that looks

like a thicker-than-normal metal hockey puck. I flip it over to see a clouded glass face. I suck in a long breath; mesmerized, I rub my thumb over it.

“Coming!” Sadie returns the canteen to the box and crawls toward the exit.

I linger, scowling at the device. A faint line reveals the possibility of a lid of some sort—if I could only figure out how to open it.

“Isaiah!” Sadie’s sharp tone tells me she’d been calling for a while.

“Okay, I’m coming.” The dusty cover of a small book in the box catches my eye. I snatch it as I turn to follow Sadie. I barely manage to get the device jammed into my pocket, and now I have to hold up my pants as they sag from its weight. By the time I’m back down the ladder, I can’t contain the questions running through my mind.

“Mom, whose box was this in?” I struggle to pull the brass item from my pocket.

She scowls at it. “I’ve never seen that before.”

“Can I have it?”

“It’s not mine. You’ll have to ask your dad.”

“DAD!” I shout, but Sadie interrupts.

“He’s not home yet. What’s this?” She takes the book from my hand and wipes off the cover and reads *Real War Heroes, Stories for Boys*. She wrinkles up her nose and hands it back. “I call the window seat!”

“Ugh,” I groan. Our 14-year-old cousin Ethan always gets the other window seat in the new truck.

“When will Dad be here? I thought we had to leave.”

“We do. Hopefully, he’ll be here in a minute or two. Isaiah, hurry and grab some gum to help with the pain of ears popping when we’re flying.”

I offer a crisp salute and take off for the kitchen. I can’t wait to fly to Yosemite National Park! I run past the golden picture frame in the hall. Mom and Dad had planned our next five national park trips with one picture for each. I think I have been looking forward to Yosemite most of all. I careen through the living room and notice the television

is still on. *Odd...we almost never watch it. Mom must've been checking the weather for our flight.* In midstride I see Dad's face flash on the screen.

Bewildered, time seems to slow as I stare at his gray stubble. *Wait! Dad's hair isn't gray!* I skid to a halt, my mouth hanging open as I stare at a man who is a perfect picture of what my dad will look like in 20 years. I see the same wide jaw; bright, blue eyes; and eyebrows that I never want to see lowered when he is upset at me.

"Um, Mom...why is Dad on TV?" The entire world has seemingly stopped spinning.

"What do you mean?" she asks as she and Sadie enter the room, carrying packed bags. They assume the same open-mouth stare that I can't wipe off my face.

"Elliot Elkland leads treasure hunters on a merry chase." She slowly reads the caption below the picture like she's in a dream. "Why is that name familiar?" The scene changes to a poem called "Twice Buried, Once Found."

“Hold on a minute!” I snap my fingers. “I’ve seen that phrase somewhere...”

A news announcer says, “Elliot Elkland released a clue last week, telling reporters that he’s hidden more than \$1 million in gold bullion, precious gems, and ancient coins. He says the finder will own the entire stash.”

“What a strange day,” Mom says, scowling at the screen as Dad’s older look-alike reappears. “We’ve got to go; I hear your dad pulling in.”

“A treasure map...” I whisper.

“A treasure poem...” Sadie corrects.

The reporter continues, “Crowds of treasure hunters have descended on Yosemite National Park, the Redwoods National Park, and other select locations in California. Activity has been intense since Mr. Elkland released this statement today, and I quote, “I’ve always loved the largest trees in the world. They are a treasure in and of themselves, and treasures are often hidden in public places.”

“Yosemite,” Sadie and I whisper together.

“Out the door. We cannot be late!” Mom calls as I hear Dad step into the house.

“I need 30 seconds, Mom!” I shout. My socks slip wildly on the hardwood floor. I leap for the thin string that will lower the attic ladder and miss it twice before it’s in my grasp.

I scurry up into the intense quiet and once again fill my lungs with that exhilarating scent. I stretch for the notebook, blowing off a thick layer of dust. It makes me cough; but sure enough, I see the words *Twice Buried, Once Found* written on the cover. Possibilities run through my mind. *What are the chances of two different people writing something with the same name? Especially when Eliot Elkland is so eerily similar in looks to my dad?*

I scramble down the ladder, colliding with Sadie as she races by with the gum I was supposed to get earlier.

“Thanks,” I say, then we run for the front door... and a most unexpected treasure hunt.

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“Elliot Elkland is my great-uncle?” I nearly shout, making Ethan, who is sitting next to me, plug his ear.

“Hold on, Uncle Greg! You’re saying that we’re related to some rich guy?” Ethan asks, running his other hand through his shaggy hair. He’s tall and thin, and his long legs are pretzel-shaped in the cramped back seat.

“Well,” Dad says, “I didn’t know he was rich. Truth is, I didn’t know he was alive.” He guides the truck into a parking spot at the airport.

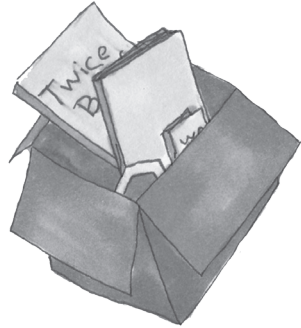
Mom hurries us all along as we lug our bags toward the terminal. She alone notices the seconds

ticking past that may result in missing our flight. Everyone else is focused on the treasure.

“My mom always told me I looked like Uncle Elliot, but I haven’t thought about him in years. I do think I have an old box of his belongings in the attic.”

I freeze. A shiver runs up from my toes. *It can’t be!*

“Was this his?” I ask, lofting the heavy brass piece I had found in the strange box in the attic.



“Ha!” Dad takes it from me as we hurry forward. “His old compass...though it never did work.”

“Oh, Isaiah,” Mom said. “I didn’t realize you brought that along. It’s too late to put it back in the truck. We’ll have to put it in your checked bags and hope the baggage screeners let it through.”

I had forgotten how picky the security guards are at the airport. “Sorry, Mom!” I say, hoping I didn’t just ruin our entire trip.

She stashes the compass in my bigger bag that will ride in the plane's belly. She smiles at me. "It will be fine—hopefully."

"I am related to a millionaire!" Ethan is slouched forward with a look of amazement etched on his face as he strides along.

We rush through the airport doors, and I clutch the notebook and war stories book to my chest as Dad hefts my big bag onto a conveyor belt.

"What happens if they don't let my bag through?" I ask, thinking of all the important camping gear I've packed.

"I don't even want to think about it," Mom replies, pointing dramatically toward the far end of the airport. "But our plane starts boarding in ten minutes! We still have to get through security and make it to the farthest gate in the building to catch our plane!"

The employee takes the last of our large bags.

"Go!" Dad barks with a twinkle in his eyes. He loves a good challenge—just like me! We rush for-

ward, our carry-on bags feeling heavier with every step we take.

“We’ve got...to get...our shoes off!” Mom is bending while running until she gets one shoe in her hand.

Sadie, always the most flexible, has hers off within two steps. Ethan’s long arms promptly get tangled up in his legs, and he somersaults to a stop on the floor. I nearly drop my trusty backpack—the one with the bear-claw slashes and all my Junior Ranger badges—as I try to kick off my shoes.

Dad goes for a different theory, pulling ahead at top speed until he reaches the frowning security officer, then bends to unlace his big boots.

“Shoes in the bins, take everything out of your pockets and put it in the bin as well.” The officer’s frown deepens as one of my boots misses the bin and clangs on the conveyor belt.

“Sorry,” I pant. It sure is difficult to let go of that precious notebook. I watch the bin inch away from me on the conveyor.

“4½ minutes,” Mom whispers. I see the tense smile pasted on her face.

“Step through the metal detectors,” the guard’s voice drones out the words.

“Oh, boy...” another officer says as he stares at the screen as Ethan’s bag passes through the scanner.

“Is that like, ‘Oh, boy!’ Or ‘Oh, boy..?’” Mom’s voice dips on the last words.

“Boy,” The officer repeats slowly, and my stomach feels like it hits my toes. I elbow Ethan in the ribs after standing on tiptoe to see the screen.

“You really brought scissors on board a plane?”

He lets out a long breath with one finger in the air. “Um...there’s a story behind that.”

“We don’t have time for a story,” Mom whispers. Her fake smile grows larger as she makes this comment under her breath.

“Do we allow passengers to carry scissors on board?” The officer asks a third security guard.

“We’d better check the manual.”

A squeak escapes Mom as more officers converge on Ethan's scissors.

"Let's see..." One of them flips through a black booklet. "Says here, scissors with a blade of under four inches are allowed. Anybody got a measuring tape?" A few of them pat their pockets.

"Nope. We'll have to call down to the office."

Mom steps forward. "I believe I can easily remedy this issue."

She picks up the scissors with two fingers from the bin under the watchful gaze of five security officers. Holding the plastic handle as if it were dirty socks, she walks to a large garbage bin and drops them inside.

"There...that was easy, right?"

The frowning officer crosses his arms.

"Are we now clear to proceed?" Dad asks, pulling his boots from the bin.

"Three minutes!" Mom shouts.

"I suppose." The officer turns to stare down the next passengers.

I snatch the notebook first thing, grab everything else, then sprint for gate 40 9E.

“Wait, please, sir!” Dad cries, waving our boarding passes at an airline employee far ahead who is sliding a door shut.

It's the same door that has our plane on the other side.

The man checks his watch, half his mouth tips up in a smile. “Five, four, three!”

“Oh!” Mom cries, rushing faster.

I didn't know she could run like that!

“Two!” the airport employee shouts.

Dad slaps our tickets into the man's outstretched hand.

“Bingo! I love it when folks beat my countdown!” He inspects the papers with a smile, then pulls the door back open.

“Welcome to Flight 467 to California.”

The metal walkway to the plane feels strange under my socks. I clutch my boots to my chest, along with the books as we squeeze into the tight

corridor of the plane. Ethan, Sadie and I get three seats directly in the middle of the plane. I sit and then contort as I try to get my boots back on in the cramped area. Uncle Elliot's notebook plops off my lap and into the middle of the aisle.

The sound draws the attention of four or five other passengers. I see one of them mouth the words *Twice Buried, Once Found*. They all lean forward with intense interest in their eyes. I snatch the old notebook and hug it against my chest. The passengers' eyes remain glued on the slim volume.

At that moment, the thought occurs to me that I'm holding a million dollars in my hands. *Maybe*.