

## Heavy as Sin

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Day was creepin' around somewheres above the fog that hung over the cove that morning. If it'd been a school day both Maddy and me woulda had to be in school. We're both in the elementary over behind the hill, but next year I'll be goin' up to seventh.

Maddy, she's two years younger'n me but I kinda look out for her a lot. Mom either has to work or she's got to party, she don't spend a lot of time with us.

But anyhow me and Maddy was headed out early looking for opportunity or adventure or both.

Ma rents the old houseboat on slip two-a? It's right next to the overnight moorage? And anyway Maddy and me was dropping stones into the water to see how far we could watch the ripples and a little gust cleared the way for a boat heading into the overnight slip.

It was moving slowly, hardly any headway at all, making

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almost less ripple than the stones we was dropping into the water.

It looked all charred like it'd been burnt and gave me the chivers. Even Maddy said “Ugh” and wriggled uncomfortable like.

The dock kinda shook a little when it made contact and we skittered over behind the hedge to one of our really good hiding places.

“Shh”, I told Maddy and she told me “shh yourself” back. She's a girl, she's like that.

We could hear the footsteps as the man came off the boat and walked to shore. He wore a long black overcoat and tall black boots in wool pants. We couldn't see his face due to the fog and the branches above us. I think he had a beard.

Just as he hopped the little wet spot between the pier and the path a gull shrieked overhead. Maddy and me both jumped at the sound and huddled closer. Somethin' dropped out of his seabag and thunked loud into the scrub grass at the edge of the lawn just as the gull screamed.

I swear it got colder as he walked by, but it wasn't a breeze, it was inside me. Maddy shivered too, but we hung

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onto each other tight as he hesitated right in front of our bush. Oh please God, don't let him pee on us, I thought and then he moved on.

Phew, thanks God, sometimes you help.

His footsteps faded and Maddy and I snuck out, checking low to see that he wasn't waiting round the corner of the dock office to catch us. He wasn't.

When I looked back, Maddy was already at the spot the thing had dropped. She was just bent over looking at it. As I walked over she looked closer, hesitated then stuck her hand out once then pulled back. Now I saw it was a little bag like a tobacco pouch. Something shiny in it, gleamed but there wasn't no sun.

She reached out again and snatched a coin from the bag, then she squeaked and flung it up in the air. It came down right in front of me and lit flat on the dirt path with a quiet thunk. It never bounced.

It was a gold coin.

Now I'm not stupid. I might not get the best grades but I don't get the worst ones neither. I know people really like gold and that it's treasure on all the pirate movies and its

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worth a lot of real money, but its a little odd to come across a sack full of gold coins just dropped off a duffel bag.

I bent over to pick it up then I knew why Maddy tossed it. It was heavy, but it was ugly too. It sat heavy in my hand like a sin that hasn't happened yet. It didn't look gold in my hand, it looked kind of ugly black and had a greasy feel to it.

I carried it back toward Maddy and started thinking of all the neat stuff we could buy with it, like new shoes or maybe even a bike. Maddy didn't want anything to do with it. She stepped back away from me and almost fell into the water.

I slid the coin back into the little bag, cinched the tie on it and wiped my hand on the grass. The times we had any money Ma usually drank too much. Then sometimes the men she came home with made me nervous. Usually I woke Maddy up and we got out of the house mornings after, like today. If we get over to the bait bar early Mike, the cook, usually slips us each a piece of crisp bacon fresh off the grill.

The little bag only had five or six coins in it but it was heavy like a bowling ball. I picked it up with some effort and lugged it back down the dock to the black boat. It

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wasn't a huge boat, but it was wrong. It should of been white but it looked like it'd been burnt with a torch all over, a charry, greasy kinda black.

I didn't want to go on board but it was too far for me to throw that heavy sack of coins. I stepped up over the hull where the long coat man had left the deck line open between stanchions and almost lost my balance. I half sat on the hull with one foot on the dock and one on the boat, then hoisted the bag over onto its deck and let it drop.

It chlopped down like a cow pie and stayed as still as the fog. It had no bounce, no life, no coiny ring in it. And when I stepped back to the dock I felt just as free as when I first get out of the house in the morning. I hadn't noticed my spirit being weighted down by the bag, but it had been. I just didn't know it until I let it go.

Footsteps vibrated up the planks of the dock and I didn't want long coat man to see us so Maddy and I scurried out to old Skip Hanson's fishing dory. We jumped aboard and ducked under its tarp. I peeped out from under the tarp to see who was coming.

But it wasn't long-coat man, it was Henry Larsen. Henry

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did odd jobs around the marina and hung around Ma as much as she'd let him. I didn't like him much and neither did Maddy.

“He's goin' on board.” Maddy whispered over my shoulder.

“Wanna bet he'll take that bag of coins?” she asked.

“No bet,” I whispered back.

We were just a little too far away to see exactly what he was doing, but sure enough, he came back off that boat shortly and hurried away up the dock like a man being chased by his own conscience.

“Wanna go up to the arcade?” I asked Maddy.

“Sure. Maybe Billy Gordon will be there.”

She has this thing for Billy Gordon, he's in fifth, right between us in school. I don't know Billy, but his older sister is startin' to look more like a grown woman and that did interest me. Sometimes they hung out together.

“Did you kids hear about Henry Larsen?” Ma said at breakfast the next morning.

When she's with us she's the best mom ever. It's just that

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most of the time we have a lot more freedom than other kids our age.

After her “guests” leave we usually relax for a day or two. It's not a perfect situation, but it ain't as bad as Carmichael Foster's. He's supposed to be rich, but can't go anywhere without his mom or his chauffeur picking him up and dropping him off and there's always somebody around telling him what he can't do.

“No,” I said, “What happened to Henry?”

Maddy put on her California girl voice: “Oh, like I could care about Henry Larson?”

Ma looked at Maddy kinda irritated for a second. She doesn't like it when Maddy acts that way.

“They found Henry's body floating out in the cove,” she slapped the newspaper, “How could someone be burnt up out in the cove?”

I looked at Maddy, but she wasn't paying attention. I thought I might have an idea how that could happen, but I didn't wanna say nothin. Didn't want to jinx myself.

Long coat man must've come back while we was at the arcade yesterday. The burnt boat had sailed before the fog

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lifted. It wasn't there when Maddy and me came home. There wasn't anything to say it was ever there either, 'cept maybe a few dark greasy char marks on the dock fenders.

I didn't say nothin' though. Just silently thanked God for giving me and Maddy a hand yesterday... ...again.