

ASHES IN A TEARDROP

CHAPTER 13

Mario went over to Jerry's house Friday night with the canoe so they could prepare for the next day's adventure. The two men were very excited but Amy was worried. "I don't know what will happen to you," she said.

"Wish us luck, Amy," Jerry said. "We won't have to work for the rest of our lives if we find the treasure." He sounded as if he had changed his mind and now wanted to keep the treasure.

But after Mario left, he didn't sound so confident. "I don't know how this is going to go. We could even die!"

"Don't say that," Amy said in a soothing voice. "You'll get back just fine." Jerry pulled her close and they snuggled, taking comfort in each other.

The next thing she knew, Amy was snatching the map from Jerry's hand. "I don't want you to go on this damn trip!" she shouted.

"Amy, honey... the treasure..."

"I don't want someone's treasure."

Exhausted now and not knowing what to say, Jerry lay back on the bed and fell asleep, the map held tightly in his hand.

As he entered a deep sleep, the map dropped from his hand and fell onto the table near the bed.

When Amy heard it fall, she leaned over, put it in a dish she used for candles and set it on fire. She couldn't believe what she'd done. She gathered the ashes into a pile and stared at them in horror. *What have I done*, she thought. *Why did I do this? Jerry will kill me!*

As she looked down with tears in her eyes, she saw that the pile of ashes had turned into a dazzling diamond!

Amy's body jerked and her eyes flew open. It had all been a dream, an incredible dream. But was it an omen?

The map was right there on the table. She touched it. Yes, it *was* real.

Late that night, a small red truck passed Jerry and Amy's house. Bob looked at the house nervously as he drove by.

"Bob, why is there a canoe parked in front? Is that the right house?"

"What's wrong with you, Ralph?" he answered. "Yes, it's the right house."

"But that canoe ..."

"I don't care about the canoe. We have the key to the treasure but we don't have the map," Bob said.

"It must be in the trailer," Ralph said. "We've got to get it before that nosy couple does."

In the morning, Mario went to Jerry's house and brought Tracy and Bianca with him. Amy tried one more time to get Jerry and Mario to give up their plan, but the two were adamant.

She sank into a chair, her face in her hands. *I don't care if they don't find anything*, she thought. Neither couple was rich, but they were living comfortably on what they earned. *Just let Jerry and Mario stay safe.*

This terrible trio has disrupted our lives, she realized with a start. To her, the trailer, urn, and diary were just that, even though Jerry would call them a terrific trio.

There's no use fighting them, she thought. *Instead, I'll join them.*

"OK, what do you want us to do?" Amy asked the guys.

"Glad you've come around," Jerry said. "We've worked together on this mystery and together we can solve it. Let's focus on the treasure."

Jerry and Mario studied the map again and after some discussion, Jerry said, "This is what we will do: You three drop us at Roberts Ferry Bridge. Then we'll launch the canoe and start the treasure hunt."

"We'll give you a call to pick us up when we're done," Mario promised.

And with that, the five of them were off. It took about 40 minutes to reach the covered structure just off Highway 132.

Amy, Tracy, and Bianca left Jerry and Mario near the river with hugs all around. The plan was to pick them up at the Waterford Bridge, several miles downstream.

The women sat talking at Cathy's Coffee Shop in Waterford while Bianca sipped her apple juice. Suddenly, Amy flashed on what Andreas had said to Jerry in their garage. It had struck her so strongly at the time that she'd scribbled his words on a piece of paper, which she'd then tucked into her purse.

Now she started fumbling for the paper.

“Did you lose something?” Tracy asked.

“Tracy, our neighbor Andreas said this to Jerry: ‘Are you documenting everything you are doing? You know, if the person in that urn is famous, like Jimmy Hoffa, you can make millions selling your story.’ “

“I’m not a writer,” Amy continued, “but if you like the idea, you and I can write the story of our adventure. Who knows? It may make some money. Maybe not ‘millions,’ but something. I should have kept a diary, but the events are still fresh in our minds. The title can be Treasure in a Teardrop.”

"I like that idea," Tracy said. "Yes, we have a story."

"It's intriguing; it could even make an exciting movie. Let's keep our project a secret, a surprise," Amy said. Tracy nodded.

"Fiction or nonfiction?" she asked.

"I'm not sure, but I know it's a mystery," Amy said.

"I wish Hitchcock were alive," Tracy said. "In 'Psycho' a car sinks in quicksand. And in our story, an almost sunken trailer kicks things off," Tracy said. "I have an idea," she continued. "Let's make it a mysterious story!"

"What's that?" Amy asked.

"It's a story that combines mystical elements in the mystery — mysterious. Do you like it? I just coined the word."

"Not bad," Amy said, adding, "We should dedicate the book to Andreas, Jerry, Mario, and Bianca."

"Why Andreas first?" Tracy asked.

"He planted the idea to write the story," Amy answered. "And above all, he saved our lives."

"Let's go to the library and borrow some books on how to write a mystery," Tracy suggested. "Don't worry, Amy, our story will be good. It may not win the Nobel Prize, but we will be proud of it."

"I hope so," Amy said.

"Just keep daydreaming, girl," Tracy said. "Who knows? It might lead to some interesting plots. But let me warn you, Amy. Some writers have told me that writing can be addictive."

“So we’re going to write a book, make money and we’ve gained a trailer, too,” Amy said with a laugh.

“Yeah, we can pack it with books, and Jerry and Mario can tow it to distribute the books on weekends.”

“Not so fast, Tracy,” Amy said. “We’ve still got a lot of unsolved pieces, such as the mystery surrounding the Brewsters and McHenrys, the diary and the baby. And don’t forget Chuck, Bob and Deputy Radcliff. That will provide plenty of suspense. Of course, the biggest unknown is whether Jerry and Mario find the treasure.”

“Jerry, enjoy the water without getting wet, OK?” Mario said. “Put on your life jacket. This is your first time canoeing and you don’t know how to swim. I hope this fits you,” he continued, tossing the orange flotation device at him.

Then Mario proceeded to give Jerry a crash course on canoeing, demonstrating how to paddle. “And here are some water shoes,” Mario said.

“What are water shoes?” Jerry asked.

“You’ll understand if we have to land on a rocky shore to reach the cave. These shoes will make it easy to walk. Amy told me your size and I bought you a pair.”

“Mario, *you* are a treasure,” Jerry said as the friends broke into laughter.

“That’s not all. I’ve got wide-brimmed hats with straps to protect our heads,” Mario said. “And sunglasses, a camera and a cell phone in a waterproof bag. We’ll also need this water so we don’t get dehydrated and a bailing bucket in case the canoe capsizes.”

“Yes, boss!” Jerry shouted, shuddering a bit at the thought of ending up in the water.

Mario explained to him that the front part of the canoe was the bow and the back was the stern. He showed Jerry how to get into the canoe and move to the front. Then Mario moved to the stern and they were moving.

The Tuolumne River was full of wildlife. In a matter of moments, they saw an eagle, a hawk and some ducks.

The canoe moved past farms and gravel pits, but no sign of any cave. They were getting frustrated when they spotted a hole at the bottom of a cliff. They paddled the canoe to the shore and got out. As they neared the hole, they could see that an iron door was attached to the opening.

They were tugging on the door, hoping it would open without a key, when Bob and Radcliff appeared behind them.

“Hi buddies,” Bob shouted.