

"You can't have a well that deep on an island," said Stefanie.

"You can't have a trunk with a hole in the bottom and a ladder going down it either, but you're staring at one."

"That's besides the point."

"Do you have a better idea?" Daniel quizzed her.

"Yes." Stefanie ran into the kitchen, grabbed a flashlight off of Mrs. McNemish's countertop, and handed it to Daniel. "Go down and look."

"I'm not going down there!"

"Chicken." She offered the flashlight to Billy.

"No, thanks. I've had enough excitement this week."

"Why don't you go down?" suggested Daniel.

"I can't. I'm too sick. See? Cough, cough."

"Well, I'm not climbing down any ladder that may or may not hold me and might plunk me into a hole that may or may not be full of water. Besides," Daniel added. "My ankle and shoulder still hurt from last night."

"All y'all are such wimps. I bet the treasure's down there," she enticed the boys. "First one down there gets dibs on the really good stuff." She grabbed Mark by his coat sleeve. "Come on, Mark. We'll go down."

"Ooh! I knew you'd do that!" Daniel snatched the flashlight out of her hand and aimed it down the ladder. "I still can't see anything."

"That's because it's so deep. You have to go down and look."

Billy took a deep breath and let out a long, loud sigh. "I know I'm going to regret this. Come on. I'll go with you." He stepped over the side of the trunk and gingerly tested the steps. "It feels okay."

"I'm coming with you," said Stefanie.

"No way," said Daniel. "You and Mark stay up here."

"I agree." The deep, harsh voice came from the doorway. Zeek Beacon entered the shack and slammed the door behind him. "I'm proud of you, Daniel. It's nice to know there's still chivalry in the world." He walked over to the trunk, casting a glance at the items strewn across the widow's bedspread and those laid out on the floor. He whistled approval at the assortment of antiques and other artifacts. "Well, well, well! Looks like somebody found the birthday prize." He pushed Daniel to one side and glanced down the gaping hole. "I've gotta hand it to the old lady. She was full of surprises. Get out of the trunk, Billy."

"What do you want, Zeek?"

"A little respect from you, for one thing," he told Daniel. Before he perused the trunk, he snatched the leather bag out of Mark's hand. A quick peek revealed a handful of white seeds. "She tried to pawn those things off on me, too," he said, tossing the bag back to the kid. He noticed Mark's eyes drift toward the kitchen floor and followed the path. "Whoa! Nice map."

"Hey! That's ours!" Stefanie told him.

"Shut up, mouth." Beacon lifted the flaking piece of parchment off the floor and laid it open on the kitchen table. He examined the unique map closely while keeping one eye peeled on the children. He caught Billy inching toward the back door.

"Freeze, termite!" He pulled a gun out of his belt and aimed it at all four children. "No one moves."

"Or what?" Daniel challenged him. "You going to shoot us?"