

*Excerpt from The Boy and the Crow® by Michelle Terrill Heath*

The trail was steeper than any of them had anticipated, and the loose rocks made the descent tricky. Will felt some misgivings as he carefully inched his way down. There wasn't much to hold onto, and so he crouched as low as he could and took small steps.

"Be careful." He called back to the others. "This is harder than I thought it would be."

About half way down there was a clear view of the cave with its small, dark entrance.

"I can see the beach now." Billy said excitedly.

"How much farther is it?" Grif grumbled from behind him.

He never got an answer because just then Billy slid on some loose rocks, lost his balance, and crashed down hard into a scrub bush that hung over the edge of the sheer cliff.

"Aaaaagh!" He cried out in surprise.

Aaron and Mindy got to him first and pulled him out of the tangle of bush.

"Jeez, you're lucky that bush was there." Aaron said when he reached him.

"Wow, Billy." Will exclaimed as they all looked down the steep edge he could have gone over. "Are you okay?"

"I think so." Billy's voice was shaky. "I can't believe I slipped off the trail like that."

"It's these loose rocks." Will pointed out. "That was a close call. maybe we should turn back."

"There's no way I'm going back." Grif said emphatically. "I want to see for myself what Tom is up to down there. Maybe he's found treasure, or maybe we'll find some of our missing stuff, but whatever is down there, I'm going to be in on it."

"What do you say, Billy?" Will asked.

"I'm all right. Just a little shaken up, I think I want to keep going too." He answered, and they continued very slowly on down the trail.

The rest of their descent went smoothly, but when they were almost to the beach, the trail ended with a six foot drop off down to the sand. They maneuvered this obstacle together and one by one took turns hanging from each other's hands until their feet were close enough to drop down.

"We made it!" Grif announced smiling. He was the last one down and had the highest drop.

"Yeah, we did," Aaron said with satisfaction.

Grif was inching towards the cave and all the kids were anxious to get in there. The entrance was dark and they were glad to have their flashlights. They could see about thirty feet in, and then it got narrower and a lot darker. Outside the cave the kids stood in dusky light that marked the end of the day.

"I wonder if it's six o'clock yet?" Mindy asked. "We should be careful not to stay too long, or they'll worry about us."

"I'll tell you what time it is when I find my watch in there." Aaron joked. "Let's go."

Everybody had to crouch down in places to avoid smacking their heads on the jagged irregular roof, and the group stuck close together as they moved slowly, shining their lights around the cave.

"The walls here are slimy." Billy spoke out. His voice sounded loud and blunt in the quiet.

"The walls are slimy because the ocean fills up most of the cave at high tide." Will explained. "Look carefully and you may see some limpets or abalone, but watch out for your hands because there can also be sharp barnacles. Tom has a bunch of abalone shells in his cabin and they're beautiful when they're dried out."

It was chilly and the kids shivered as they reached the very back of the cave.

"The walls are dry here." Grif said.

"Probably the high tide doesn't reach quite this far." Will guessed.

"Hey, look at this." Grif called out shining his light higher up the walls.

There was a ledge, high up on the cave wall that was crammed full of boxes.