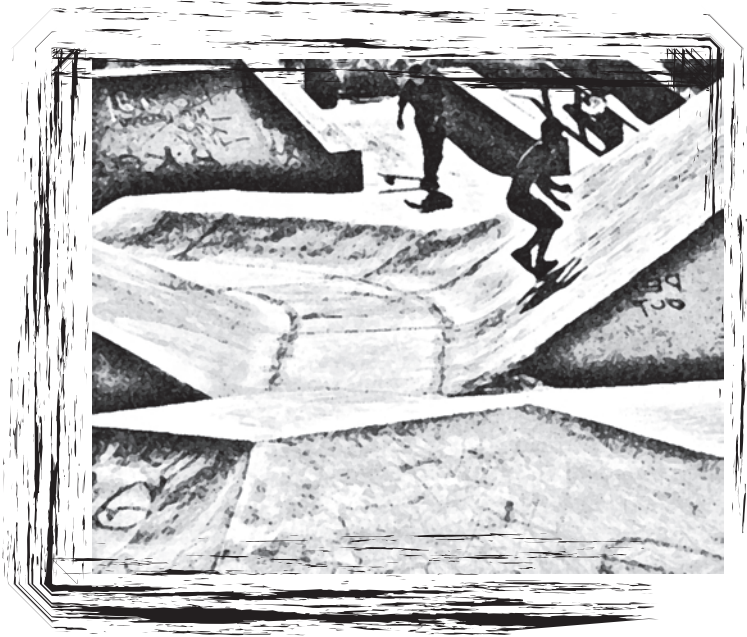


THE CHALLENGE

THE TYCQUET TWINS: SUMMER HOLIDAY



It was two, dreary-eyed teens that met Aunt Madge for breakfast on Thursday morning. Neither Tylan nor Trina had slept well, their thoughts and dreams being about their parents.

“I spent my whole night on my skateboard chasing spies,” said Tylan spreading peanut butter on a slice of toast. “Every time I’d get close enough to grab Mom and Dad’s laptop from the spies, my skateboard would do a flip and they’d be chasing me.”

“I dreamt I was huddled in a closet. I could see Mom and Dad rattling the door of a rat-infested jail cell.”

“Whoa, you two have sure let your imaginations run away with you,” chuckled Aunt Madge.

“What else are we supposed to think?” asked Tylan, his voice sharp. “Mom and Dad have only been gone a few days and already we’re getting scary messages.”

“Not really scary,” reminded Aunt Madge. “Just confusing ones. I’ve been watching the news for any signs of further trouble around the Caspian Sea. Last month rebels tried to close down the off-shore rigs but the government stepped in and smoothed that over.”

Trina scooped a spoonful of corn flakes into her mouth. “That’s why Dad didn’t go at Easter time. The company waited until the government gave them permission to run tests on the water and ecology and stuff like that.”

“So, I’m sure the Canadian embassy and your dad’s company will ensure their safety.”

“But why take away their computer?” Tylan asked. “It’s pretty harmless.”

Aunt Madge’s smile was reassuring, “Who knows. Maybe they just wanted to monitor what your dad sends in and out of their country.”

“Who’s they?” asked Trina.

Tylan spat out a reply, “Probably rebels who don’t want the exploration in their waters.”

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“I think it’s more complicated than that,” said Trina. “Remember Mom and Dad talking about different countries and cities bordering on that sea? Maybe they’ll be caught in some war or something!” Her high-pitched tone showed her fear.

“Hey, you two!” Aunt Madge cried. “Don’t make mountains out of mole hills. Isn’t your dad’s company D & R Instrumentations? The company is known all over the world. It will do everything it can to ensure your parents’ safety. Now let’s get going. A little work will keep your imaginations from galloping away.”

Tylan and Trina glared at each other as if to say, *Work, is that all we do?* However, both of them realized Aunt Madge had been fair with her work schedules so far. Work in the morning; play in the afternoon.

After breakfast, they headed for the garden. Aunt Madge had assigned them to weed the carrots and then Tylan was to water the garden. After giving him the key to unlock the shed, she said, “The sprinklers will catch the orchard as well if you open both of the valves. Do you remember how to shut off the pasture line and open the other two lines?”

He nodded.

She continued, “Let the water run for a couple of hours, then turn the pump off. The shed key can go back in this top drawer.”

By 8:30, Tylan and Trina were kneeling in the garden. “Why can’t we just hoe?” Tylan asked. “This is so stupid.” He pulled a tiny ragweed and flicked it away.

“Don’t just throw it!” Trina snipped at him from two rows over. “They’ll grow back. Put the weeds in the can.”

“Put the weeds in the can,” Tylan sneered, mimicking his sister. “Put the weeds in the can.” He pulled a weed and daintily put it in the tin pail he was sharing with Trina. She had set it between the rows.

“Don’t be sarcastic!” she snapped. “Why are you in such a bad mood?”

“I feel like it,” Tylan replied. “I’d rather hoe the weeds.”

“I’m not going to comment, Tylan. You know why we can’t hoe.”