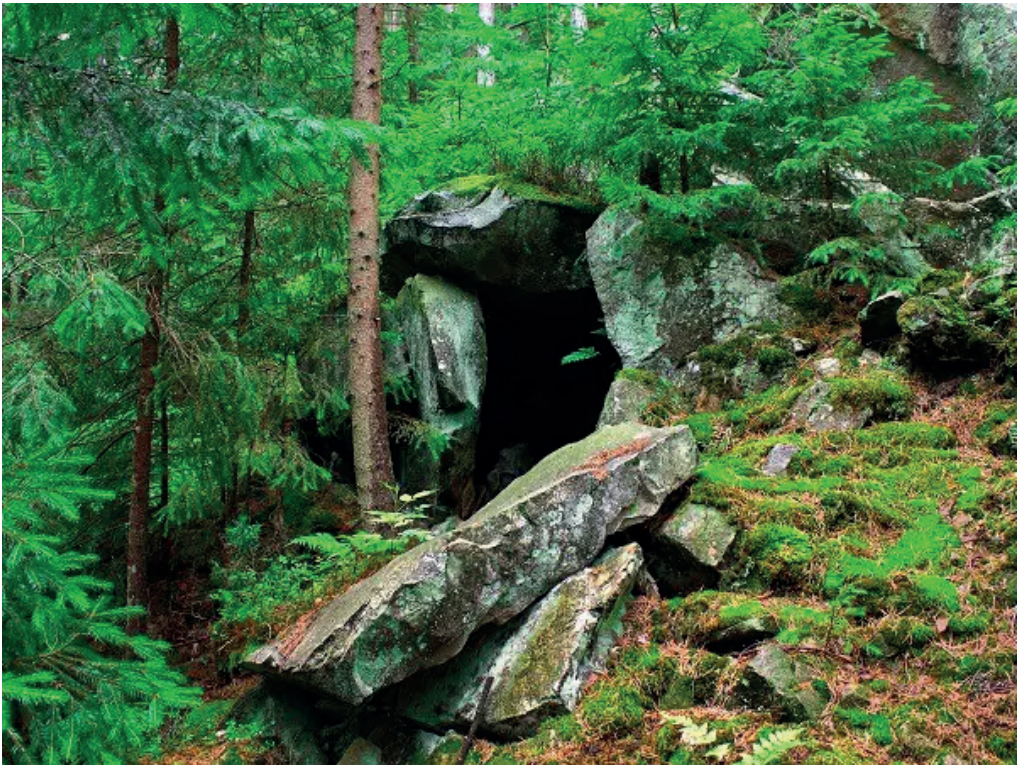


My Parents Have Gone Mad!



Written by Andrew Moore

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My Parents Have Gone Mad

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The Bible quotation is from the Gospel of Matthew, 13:44
Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE
NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

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Chapter 1
Where the Madness All Started

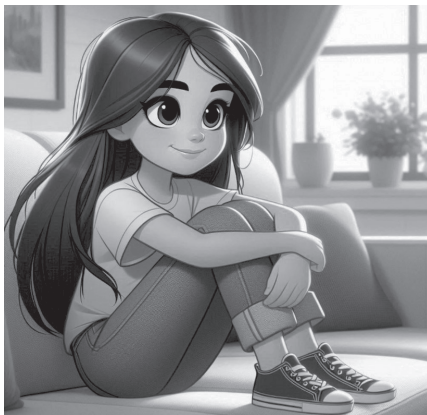


Dad's in trouble!!! He came crashing into the house, babbling about something that made no sense, not even stopping to take off his muddy boots. He trod mud in everywhere. Not only had he traipsed mud all over the kitchen floor, **and** the hall carpet, **and** the lounge carpet, but he had brought his equipment into the house, that usually lives in the shed. This included his metal detector and his spade, and his satchel, all of which were adding to the mud which was rapidly spreading throughout the house. Even his 2 hats, one he wears all the time, and the other just for rain, and his coat were also muddy, and were now lying on the sofa where Dad had discarded them. Mum hit the roof!! An argument followed. Well, when I say argument, it was very one sided, with Mum ranting about how she had cleaned the whole house today, and now it looked like a World War One battle field, and how on earth does he expect her to get that mud off of the new sofa.

Between you and me, she does tend to exaggerate a bit, well, quite a lot actually. I hate to admit it, but she had a point. She had come home from working as a part time receptionist, and then cleaned all of the downstairs, and within a few minutes, Dad had not only undone most of her efforts, but had made it fifty times worse.

So Mum ranted on like a professional, and Dad, well, Dad just looked excited. I don't think I have ever seen Dad looking happier. There is nothing worse in the history of the world, than someone wanting to have a good argument and the other person not upholding their side of the bargain. I mean, it's just rude, isn't it? And worse is where you are giving it your all, and the other person just stands there and smiles at you. Hello! I'm making some good points here, and you are just . . . just . . . Arghh! The worst!

Anyway, that is what Dad was doing. Mum was ranting about the dirt and about how thoughtless he had been, and Dad just agreed with her. He even said sorry. How lame is that? He then went on to say that it didn't matter. Oh, that did it! Mum was starting to calm down a bit, I mean, it is hard to keep on ranting when someone just agrees with everything you are saying, and then goes on to say sorry. How are you supposed to stay angry at that? But then he said that the mud didn't matter. The fact that he had undone all her hard work cleaning was one thing, but to say that it didn't matter was like a red rag to a bull. Off she went again with fresh vigour. 'So what I do in the home doesn't matter, does it?' was one line I picked up on, just before Daniel and I were told, in no uncertain terms, to go to our rooms. I saw mum's face. I wasn't going to argue with her, even though I did want to watch the TV.



Hi! My name's Chloe and I, well, I was just sitting there, enjoying the entertainment. Sunday night's TV is rubbish anyway and this was great! I'm 11 years old and I live with my mum and dad, now heading rapidly towards divorce it would seem, and my younger brother, Daniel, who's 8. I also have an older brother, Mark. He went away to university 6 years ago, and I haven't seen or heard from him since. I feel like I don't even know him now.

Daniel is very much here though, and is a pain in the butt, as most younger brothers are, I think. How am I supposed to look good in front of my friends when I have him embarrassing me every day at school. There should be a rule where siblings have to go to a different school than you do. At least I will be rid of the little oik next year, when I start secondary school. I can't wait for that.

Actually, I'm really dreading going to secondary school. At the moment I'm one of the oldest kids in school, and although most of the younger kids are repugnant, my brother included, at least I can tell them to get lost and most of them do, even my little brother does after a while. Next year *I'm* going to be one of the little oiks that get picked on by the older kids. School is tolerable at the moment. I'm not one of the popular kids, but I'm also not one of the kids that gets picked on. Me and my few friends just try to keep our heads down and avoid any trouble that's kicking off. Most of the time we succeed. I'm not even going to be with my best friend next year as she's going to a different school. She passed the entrance exam, and I didn't.

My thoughts were interrupted by the sound of my door creaking open. It was my brother.

"What do you want, slime?" I almost spat out at him.

"It's gone very quiet," he replied.

"Yes, and you're ruining it! Go away!"

"No, I mean downstairs," he said doubtfully.

I was just about to tell him to get back to his cesspit of a room, when I paused and actually looked at his face; he looked genuinely worried. Then I listened. It had gone **very** quiet downstairs. Maybe Mum had got so mad that she had killed Dad, maybe with his own spade. That would be great, wouldn't it? Life is hard enough at school but now I'd become known as the 'Killer Mum's Kid!' I can hear the taunting now, going on and on! What am I supposed to do about that? It will be awful for me.

Actually, that would be **really** awful. I quite like my mum and dad, although I would never tell them that. Some of my friends have only

got one parent, and they find it really hard not having both a mum and a dad to talk to, and they don't have a lot of things either. My mum and dad have both got good jobs, so we do actually have most of the things we've asked for. And I'd lose both parents at the same time, Dad would be dead and Mum would go to prison. Oh great! What will I do then?

"Go and check on them," Daniel said, snapping me out of my spiralling thoughts. I stared at him.

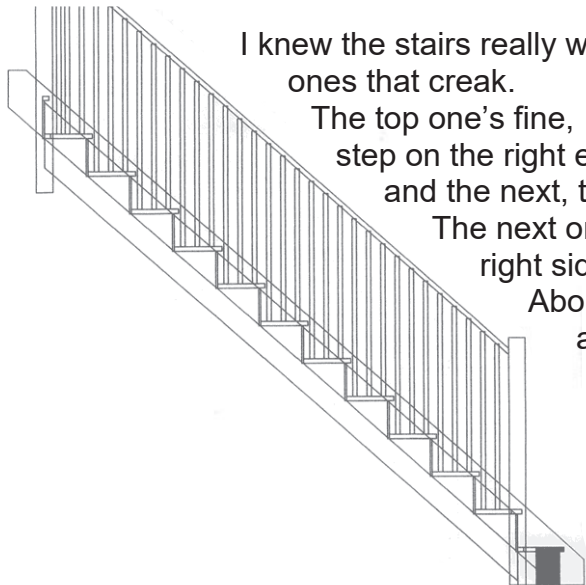
"Why don't you?" I said, actually worrying about what I might find.

"Pleeeeeease?" he asked, drawing out the word so he was almost pleading. I couldn't think of the last time he had said a normal please to me, let alone this.

"Don't look so worried. It'll be fine," I said, trying to reassure him, but not really believing it myself. I actually quite like him, but only in small doses, and don't you ever, ever tell him I said that!

I started towards the stairs, and noticed Daniel following me.

"You stay here while I go and check," I said firmly. I thought, it's better that only one of us ends up needing therapy for the rest of their lives, following the horrors that might await us downstairs.



I knew the stairs really well and how to avoid the ones that creak.

The top one's fine,
step on the right edge of the next one,
and the next, then switch to the left.

The next one is fine, then go to the
right side of the next one.

About half way down there is
a step that creaks no
matter where you stand.

Big step over that one,
and then keep to
the left the rest of
the way to the
bottom.

Eventually I got down to the bottom of the stairs and into the hall. I stopped, straining my ears to hear anything. There was a scraping sound coming from the lounge. My mind went crazy. Mum was cleaning up the blood after killing Dad. What will I do? I walked slowly to the open, lounge door, and could see Mum kneeling next to the sofa.

"Mum?" I said quietly, too quietly it would seem as she didn't answer.

"Mum." I said a little firmer, and this time she lifted her head.

"Hello, darling. Are you all right?" she chirped.

"I'm alright, but what about you?"

"I'm fine, sweetheart, just doing some cleaning."

You're fine? I thought. How could you be so calm after murdering your husband? And then, just cleaning up the evidence.

"How can you be fine after . . . earlier?" I said, slowly walking into the room, fully expecting to see blood all over the floor and sofa.

"I'm fine," she asserted, but I wasn't listening. I was preoccupied with the sight of what greeted my eyes behind her as I walked further into the room, the floor, covered in . . .



“Mud!” I gasped in amazement.

“Yes. Your father brought in a lot of mud after going ‘detectoring’ this afternoon. He got a bit carried away.”

“But where is he?” My crazy mind not accepting that I could have been **so** wrong.

“He’s in the kitchen, cleaning the floor, I hope, although,” and she raised her voice, “it is rather quiet in there!”

“I’m working hard, dear. Nearly finished.” Dad called back.

As he spoke I looked back towards the lounge door, towards where the voice was coming from, and saw Daniel on the stairs. I rushed back towards the lounge door.

“See! I told you it would be fine. Fancy letting your fears get the better of you.” I said to him, reassuringly, but I’m not sure if I was trying to reassure him or me. My thoughts were still running rampant. I turned back to Mum.

“But, you sounded so mad at dad, I . . .” I didn’t know what to say next.

“Yes, you’re right. I was cross, but we have made up.” She looked up and met my gaze. “What do you think might have happened then?”

“So, you’re not getting divorced then?” I said, dodging the question of me thinking that she might’ve murdered him.

“No! Of course not! Why on earth would you think that?” she asked.

“Oh, I . . .”

“Just because we argue doesn’t mean we are going to separate. Couples can have arguments and still love each other and, just because parents argue, doesn’t mean they are going to get divorced.” she said reassuringly, coming over to me and putting her arm around my shoulder.

Try saying that to Rachel. She’s my best friend at school. Her parents

used to argue all the time, and they got divorced.

I looked up at mum’s face. She was actually smiling. What seemed like only a few minutes ago, she looked like she was going to do unspeakably, awful things to my father, truly, we didn’t ought to talk about them, and now she was, smiling.

“Why was Dad so happy when he came home?” Great question I thought, let’s change the subject completely.

“He has what he thinks is good news, and he got carried away.” she explained. “I got carried away too, thinking about the cleaning I had done earlier after work today.”

“So what is his good news then?” I asked.

“He thinks he has found a bit of land he would like to buy.” Mum said with a shrug, heading back to her cleaning.

“I don’t understand. Why did that make him so happy?” Another good question I thought.

“I can’t say any more at the moment, but it could be very good news for all of us,” she responded, unsatisfactorily.

As the next killer question formed in my mind, I looked her in the face and, I knew that look, that, ‘*I have finished discussing the matter*’, look, and there was no point in trying to get any more information from her when she looked like that. Not fair.

Talking about killer questions, I really have to stop listening to those real crime mystery podcasts. Something like that could make someone’s thoughts get carried away, and make them think ridiculous things. Parents killing each other - ridiculous. That wouldn’t happen to me, of course, but to some people.

“Hi sweetheart,” Dad said, interrupting my thoughts as he walked into the room. I nearly jumped out of my skin. Actually, I think my feet did actually leave the floor for just a moment. I turned to see him standing in the doorway, with his arm around Daniel. He looked



very much alive, thankfully.

“What’s going on, Dad?” I blurted out, awkwardly, a bit speechless for a moment. Mum interrupted:

“I’ve told her what we agreed, that you want to buy a bit of land.”

“What’s so special about it?” I asked Dad, knowing I could get more out of him, than I could get out of Mum.

“Nothing really,” he responded, picking his words carefully, “in fact, most of it is quite ugly. It’s a big steep hill, covered with rocks and trees, and some of the rocks are quite large.”

“Is it big?” I asked, trying to get my head around the idea.

“No, not really, but I like it, and it will be worth buying,” he said, and with his final word, he put on a look that I had never seen on him before; he had Mum’s *‘I have finished discussing the matter’*, look on his face!

That’s doubly not fair! You can’t both use that look. And with that Mum turned back to cleaning the sofa, and Dad hugged me and walked back into the kitchen. Parents! I looked at Daniel, who was looking equally bemused. I shrugged at him and smiled. He managed a smile back.

But don’t think I have finished this line of questioning, I will get to the bottom of this! I said in my head, assertively. I looked at Mum and gave her one of my; *‘I’m going to find out what is going on’*, looks. At least, that’s what I’m going to call it from now on.

She just smiled.

Chapter 2

The Next Morning

After a disturbed night’s sleep, the strangeness continued the next morning. I got up as usual and, after getting washed and dressed, headed downstairs for breakfast. Dad was still at home. Dad’s a Professor of Archaeology, and works in a big museum in town. It takes him over an hour to get there, so he was **always** gone by the time I got up to go to school. He was sitting at the breakfast bar, muttering to himself and scribbling things down on a pad.



“What are you doing home, Dad?”

“Your father is taking a day off today.” Mum interjected, walking into the kitchen at that precise moment. *How did she do that?*

“Yes,” Dad repeated, “I’m taking a day off.” He didn’t sound very convincing, but Mum had that *‘I have finished discussing the matter’*, look on her face again. Not fair! I must try and get Dad on his own. I got my breakfast, but before I could sidle up to Dad at the breakfast bar and try and see what he was writing, Mum sat next to him, so there was no space.

I walked slowly into the dining room, to sit at the table in there, but when I got there, the table was covered with things.

“Mum? Dad? Why are our best things on the dining room table?”

Mum came into the dining room. "We are trying to raise some money and to do that we need to sell some of our things." she explained.

"Is this the piece of land thing again, that Dad was going on about last night?"

"Yes, it is." Mum replied.

"Why on earth does Dad want to buy a small, ugly, hill, with a few rocks and trees on it?" That is a great question, I thought, but Mum just didn't answer me. She just walked back into the kitchen without uttering a word. Well! How rude; but also a clever way to avoid my question. She is a master at avoidance.

"Well, he better not ask for any of my things," I called after her. "I don't want an ugly, rocky, little, piece of land."

After a few moments, I followed her back into the kitchen, again hoping to sit next to dad at the breakfast bar, and see what he had been writing. However, by the time I got there he had disappeared. Maybe he's finally gone to work I thought, before remembering that Mum said he was taking a day off. What is going on? Dad never takes time off work. Mum usually has to force him into taking any time off, even to go on a family holiday. He loves his job so much. I think dad would live at the museum if they'd let him. And where's he gone now? I thought, confused by all that was going on. I couldn't look for him any more as I needed to eat my breakfast and get ready to go to school.

I looked at mum. "Maybe I could take the day off school and help you both?" I looked at her with my most positive, helpful look on my face.

"Nice try, sweetheart." she replied. "Eat your breakfast and get yourself off to school." She is a master of avoidance indeed. I must get Dad on his own.

After I had finished my breakfast I grabbed my school bag, but before I left for school, I looked for Dad again - well I had to say goodbye to

him, didn't I? If I happened to see what he'd been scribbling as well, then, that would be a bonus. I've got to find out what's going on. Dad was in the lounge, sitting on the sofa, so it was really easy to sidle up to him and see what he had written, while I said goodbye. I didn't have much time to look, but it seemed to be a list of all the things that we owned, with approximate prices written next to each one. Not just the best things that were out on the dining room table, but a much longer list. What is happening? They seem really serious about this. All our things. . . .

"Chloe!" Mum called, snapping me out of my thoughts as she looked into the lounge, "It's time you were getting off to school."

"Daniel!" she shouted, walking back out of the room again. "It's time you were getting off to school."

-

The school morning had been just as it usually was, dull! Well I think it was, I didn't pay much attention after the events from last night and this morning. Finally it was lunch time and I could have a proper talk with Rachel. She is my best friend and we can talk about anything. After I told her all that had happened, she was convinced that my parents were getting a divorce. I told her that I'd asked them if they were getting divorced, and they'd denied it, but that convinced her all the more:

"That's just what they'd say if they were getting a divorce," she said, "that's what my parents said too."

I hope she's wrong. Life for Rachel has been hard with her parents' breakup, and they were fairly amicable about it. She spends most of her time with her Mum, but every Wednesday evening she went out with her Dad, and she went and stayed with him every other weekend. She said, at first, it was fun going out to places with Dad, but now she just hangs out with him at his flat. And now he has a girlfriend, and she says; 'that's just awful'. I would hate that to happen to my parents. I want both of them around all the time, not only seeing them on certain days, and for a certain amount of time.

It was getting towards the end of the lunch break and it suddenly hit me - Where's Daniel? Virtually every day he finds me and annoys me, either at break time or at lunch time, or both. It seems to be one of his goals in life. But I hadn't seen him since I left home this morning. Actually, I hadn't seen him at all today. I left for school before he came downstairs. I felt quite strange all of a sudden. I was actually worried about him! I went looking for him but I couldn't find him anywhere. I even made myself talk to his idiot friends. They were no help whatsoever. I couldn't understand what they were saying. They just talked gibberish. I don't think any of them managed to string a proper sentence together. Finally, I asked his class teacher. His teacher told me that Mum had phoned in this morning to say that Daniel was sick, and was not coming in today. The little snake! How did he manage to wrangle a day off school when I couldn't? Any worry and concern I had for him melted away. Just you wait till I get home.

The afternoon dragged. I was fuming and couldn't wait to get home. What had he managed to say to Mum to get a day off school when I couldn't. Once I got home I marched into the house demanding to know where he was, expecting him to be playing on the Xbox, no, ON MY XBOX! It seems Mum took the day off today as well! Everybody at home but me - how nice!

"Where's Daniel?" I demanded of Mum, "He better not be on my Xbox."

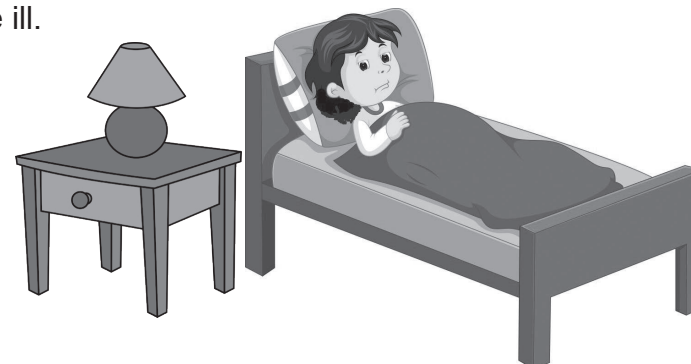
"I think you had better calm down young lady," Mum said, giving me one of her stares, one that could even rival Paddington Bear. "Daniel is upstairs, asleep in his room, where he's been for most of the day." Mum paused to drive her point home, then continued, "And when we gave you that Xbox for your birthday, you agreed that Daniel could go on it from time to time, didn't you?"

"Yes Mum," I replied slowly, all the wind taken out of my sails. "I'm sorry."

"Well he hasn't been well enough to go on your Xbox," she said,

Maybe I had got a bit carried away again - it's so unlike me! It turns out Daniel had been quite ill this morning, even throwing up. YUK!

I'm glad I wasn't here to see that. Upstairs sleeping? Wow! He must be ill.



I went upstairs to his room. It was dark with the curtains closed, the only light coming from his bedside lamp. He was awake, but he was definitely not himself.

"You missed a really great day at school." I teased, sarcastically, but he didn't react. After a long pause, I continued, again with attitude, "Well, what's wrong with you then?"

"I don't know," he replied slowly, "I got up this morning feeling really sick. I managed to get dressed and go downstairs before throwing up all over the kitchen floor."

"Shame," I retorted, "Dad spent ages cleaning that floor last night." Daniel managed a smile; that was good. "Seriously Daniel, what is wrong?" I asked, surprising myself at the concern in my voice.

"I don't know. I am worried about what is going on with Mum and Dad. They're acting really weird. Have you seen what they are doing in the dining room?"

"Duh. No. I've been at school all day," I said sarcastically. Sometimes I just can't help myself.

"No, of course," he said, "They've been selling things all day, both of them. All the best stuff. Nanny and Grandad's silver cutlery canteen - gone, picked up this afternoon. There have been several people knocking on the door today, and they all went away with something. It's like they've gone money mad."

“Well, this has got to stop,” I said, sounding braver than I felt, “they just can’t keep putting things on the dining room table to sell.”

“No, you’re right,” Daniel replied, “they can’t. Someone took the dining room table and chairs away this afternoon too.”

It was useful to hear what had been going on today. He hadn’t been in his room all day. Dad had gone out for a few hours just after lunch. While he was out, Daniel had found Dad’s list, the one I saw this morning, although now it stretched for 4 pages of the things we owned, with approximate prices next to each item, and now it also had figures written in green, showing the price they had actually sold them for. I gasped when Daniel told me that the car was on that list. What are we going to do without the car? We go everywhere in that car! Except for school, I have to walk that distance, unfortunately.

I went downstairs as it was nearing time for dinner if, of course, there were any plates left to eat off of. Mum was in the kitchen, cooking. At least that was normal. I told her I was worried about them, but she responded in similar fashion to before;

“We’re fine. Dad wants to buy this piece of land that he has found, and we need to sell some things to raise the capital.”

“But Nanny and Grandad’s cutlery canteen? You loved that. You cried when they gave it to you,” I protested, “and you told me it helps you remember them now they are gone?”

“I did love it, and it did remind me of my mum and dad, but I still have my memories of them, and these are just things, just possessions.” she replied, a little wistfully.

“And the car?” I continued, “How are we going to survive without the car?”

“That is something for us to worry about, and not you,” she responded, urgently, looking me straight in the eyes. “You need to trust your mum and dad, that we are doing the right thing for all of us.”

“But I am worried, and so is Daniel,” I continued to protest.

“Yes,” she replied, quieter, as if drifting away with her thoughts. “I need to talk with him as well, but you both need to believe that we are okay and that we are doing the right thing for our family.” Again she looked me square in the face, “You do trust us don’t you?” She looked sternly at me, but with love in her eyes; I couldn’t miss the love in her eyes, and the rest of her face then softened to match her eyes.

“Yes Mum. I do trust you, but . . .”

“Then there is no need for buts,” she interrupted, “just trust us.” And with that, she went back to preparing the dinner.

The master had struck again. I was speechless, which was rare for me. I did feel a bit reassured by her, even though I really didn’t understand. I did trust her. Mum disappeared upstairs a little later and talked with Daniel. It seems that she managed to reassure him as well as he even came downstairs for dinner, although he didn’t eat very much.

After dinner, I did my chore of washing up the dishes *and* did Daniel’s chore of drying up - it didn’t seem fair to make Daniel do them as he was unwell. Apart from the fact that three of us had to squeeze onto the breakfast bar to eat our dinner, and Dad ate off of his lap whilst sitting on the floor, things were feeling a little bit okay again, until later that evening, when our visitors arrived.

Chapter 3

You Have *Got* to be Joking!



Washing up can be therapeutic, you know. The reward of taking a pile of dirty dishes, washing them in hot, soapy water, and then looking at them, gleaming as they come up out of the water. Even cleaning dirty saucepans and oven trays, although needing a bit more effort, can give a real sense of satisfaction. The drying up is different, not much therapy there, but it felt good doing something to help Daniel, who had gone back up to his room to lie down. Now before you think I'm going soft, I'm just trying to make you realise that, in doing the washing up (therapy) and after Mum's little talk with me (encouragement), I was feeling a little more settled.

Then there was a knock at the door. Dad went and answered it, letting a man and woman into the house. I heard Dad welcome them in and, once Mum had joined them, they all introduced themselves. James and Melanie Johnson were their names, apparently. Odd, I thought, that Mum and Dad welcomed them in so enthusiastically, as they obviously hadn't met them before. They were ushered into the lounge - good job we haven't sold the sofas yet. I couldn't hear much from the kitchen, but picked up the odd snippet here and there: 'a mutual friend?', 'lost everything', 'ready now?' What have they lost and what are they ready for? I thought. Then they came into the kitchen. I was

introduced, and I was polite, as I always am. They complimented me for doing the washing up. Dad was obviously showing them what we had done with the place, I thought. They nodded enthusiastically. I didn't think our kitchen was *that* nice but, there is no accounting for taste. Then Mum and Dad took them through into the dining room where they all stood around for a few minutes. It probably didn't look so impressive without the dining room table and chairs. From there they went out into the hall and upstairs. I hope they are not going into my room. By this time I had finished my washing and drying up duties, and walked through into the hall to see what else I could hear. I heard mum apologizing for the state of the house, as they were busy selling some things, and they hadn't had the opportunity to tidy before Mr and Mrs Johnson had got here.

Mum must be talking about Daniel's room as my room is **always** clean and tidy. As they started to come back down the stairs, I slipped into the lounge as I didn't want Mum and Dad to think I was listening, even though I was. They all came into the lounge. I sat looking towards the TV - Where's the TV? I can't believe they've sold the TV! And the blue ray player! At least I've still got my TV in my bedroom.

"We would like to chat with James and Melanie, Chloe, so can you go up to your room please?" Mum cut across my thoughts. Anxiety was beginning to rise a little bit again, and I was still reeling from the discovery that the TV was gone, so I didn't reply at first. "Chloe?"



“Sorry mum,” I blurted out, and walked out of the lounge towards the stairs. Daniel was sitting on the stairs.

“Who on earth are Mr and Mrs Johnson?” he asked me as I climbed the stairs towards him. I realised that Mum had followed me out of the lounge, and was standing at the bottom of the stairs, so I told Daniel that they were some friends of Mum and Dad, and ushered him upstairs before Mum could say anything. We went into Daniel’s room, as my bedroom door creaks when you open it, and his doesn’t. I wasn’t interested in watching TV any more, I had to find out what was going on. We waited for a few minutes, then I crept out of Daniel’s room. I then crept stealthily down the stairs; the top step is fine, step to the right on the next one, and the next then switch to the left. I stopped still on the next one, realising that Mum had shut the lounge door. I wouldn’t be able to hear anything even if I was right outside the door. Daniel was following me and I ushered him back upstairs, so we both crept back up to his room again. I sat on the floor in Daniel’s room, neither of us saying very much.

Then I heard voices in the hallway downstairs, the front door opened, there was a volley of goodbyes, the door shut, then there was silence. What do I do now? I thought, do I go downstairs or stay up here? My thoughts were interrupted by Mum opening Daniel’s door.

“There you are, I couldn’t find you.” she said to me, as I realised I had been told to go to *my* room, not Daniel’s. “How are you feeling Daniel? Are you up to coming downstairs for a chat? Come on.” she said, not waiting for answers to any of her questions, and with that she headed downstairs. I looked at Daniel. Was I looking as shocked as he looked? We got up and followed Mum downstairs. We sat on the sofa next to Mum, Dad was standing and he spoke first:

“You know that Mum and I would like to buy a piece of land that I have found, just outside of town. It’s called ‘Jeremiah’s Fields’, which is ironic as all of his fields have been sold off, leaving just this small piece of land which has a house on it, well, a shack, but is mostly a rocky hill and some woodland. The land is for sale, but it is still quite expensive, even though it doesn’t have much potential for building

any houses on it, or for growing any crops on it.

I visited the bank manager this afternoon, but he refused to give me a loan to buy the piece of land because we still owe the bank some money for this house, and they won’t give me a second loan, even though we need the money to buy Jeremiah’s Fields. We’ve got the money that Nanny and Grandad left us when they passed away. One of my oldest friends is an estate agent, and he has a friend who is urgently looking for a house. They were renting a house and it got flooded in the storms last month. They have lost almost all of their possessions, and are desperate to find somewhere else to live. So my estate agent friend gave them our name and number. We are going to do a private deal with them. They are going to give us the market value of the house, and also want to give us an extra £20,000 for our furniture and things, as they have lost almost all of their possessions. It’s a really good deal, and it helps both of us out.”

‘You have **got** to be joking!’ I screamed inside, trying to hold in the mass of emotion that was swirling around inside me. ‘You can’t just sell our house! I was born here!’

“But where will we live?” Daniel whispered, barely audibly.

“That’s a great question, Daniel.” mum interjected. “We will go and live with Granny and Grandpa initially. It will be a little cramped at Granny and Grandpa’s, but it will be fun to be with them.”

“There’s a cave on the land, Daniel. We could always go and live in that!” Dad joked with Daniel. Mum glared at Dad, but Daniel seemed suitably encouraged. I couldn’t hold it in any longer.

“Do you really think we can go and live in a cave, Dad?” I blurted out.

“Dad was only joking, Chloe. In poor taste, may be. Once we have bought the land we will decide what we are going to do next. Trust us!” She looked assertively straight at me.

“Okay, fine,” I said, “I trust you even though I think you have both completely lost the plot.” I got up to go upstairs. As I walked up the stairs, Daniel’s words bounced around my head, as he asked:

“Does that mean we can’t go and live in the cave, Dad?”

Dweeb!



Chapter 4

Is Madness Catching?

Over the next few days, I just tried to keep my head down. I did trust my parents, but I couldn’t get rid of the nagging worries deep inside. In the mornings, I started waiting for Daniel before walking to school together, and we would wait for each other before we walked home at the end of the day too. We even sought each other out during the lunch hour. He wasn’t so bad, and I think we both appreciated each other’s support. We went to school, came home, and we spent most of our time in our rooms, although Daniel also came into my room to play on the Xbox with me a couple of times. My room was my sanctuary away from the madness outside. As the week went on, various things were sold. The car was missing from the drive one day when we came home from school. Possessions that Mr and Mrs Johnson hadn’t bought, were sold. Mum and Dad were busy selling their clothes, keeping just the bare minimum to tide them over - I hope they’re not selling their underwear? Yuk! Even mum’s jewellery was sold, including her engagement ring and both their wedding rings. If they didn’t seem so happy, I would have thought Rachel was right; they are getting divorced.

It was Thursday evening. I was in my room playing on my Xbox, trying to escape from the madness that was now my parents’ life, and was fast becoming my life also. Then, breaking through my best efforts of ignoring them, there was a tap at my bedroom door. I walked Dad.

“Hi darling, how are you doing?” he said, sitting down next to me on my bed. I paused the game, and he gave me a big hug. Mad or not, I still loved them, and hoped everything was going to be alright. Can you refer your own parents to a psychiatrist?

“I’m fine.” I answered, nestling into Dad’s hug. We held each other for a few minutes. “How are you and Mum doing?”

“We’re doing really well at the moment.” he replied.

“How can you be, Dad? You haven’t been at work all week.” I said, trying to lay the ground work for a psychiatrist to build upon.

“Oh, work’s not important at the moment.”

What! Well, that’s proven it! Now I know he’s crackers! He loves work! How can he say that it’s not important?

“I have something I need to ask you.” Dad cut across my thoughts. I looked up at him. He didn’t look crackers, whatever someone looks like when they’re going mad.

“As you know, Mum and I have been trying to raise some money to buy Jeremiah’s Fields. We have sold virtually everything we have. Granny and Grandpa have given us all their savings too.” He paused, “but its not quite enough. We are so nearly there, but the owner of Jeremiah’s Fields won’t budge on the price.”

I looked deep into his eyes, mystified by the whole week’s events.

“Why are telling me this?” I asked, “If you haven’t got enough money, has this circus all been for nothing?”

“No darling, we are not finished yet.” he said, and paused, just looking at me. My eyes dropped to my hand that was still holding my Xbox controller.



“Would it be enough if you sold my Xbox?” I asked. “And my TV?”

Dad smiled at me, “Yes it would help tremendously. Thank you.” he said softly.

I looked down at the floor, at my trainers, my special trainers. I had worked hard to save up for a whole year to buy them. I had barely worn them and when I had, it was only indoors. I didn’t realise madness was catching, but it obviously was.

“You can take my trainers as well, if you want them?”

“Thank you, darling. I promise you, you won’t regret it.” he replied chirpily.

“And my clothes? I could put a few aside. You can’t have my underwear, but you could sell the rest. You could even have my Jacket that Nanny and Grandad gave me.”

“But you love that jacket!” Dad exclaimed.

“Yes, but I have the memories of them, and all of these things, well, they’re just things aren’t they?”

“Thank you, darling. That is so mature and grown up of you. Together with some of Daniel’s things, I think you just helped us make our target.” Dad said, with a beaming smile on his face, and he hugged me tighter than he’d ever done before, although I think he may have cracked a couple of my ribs.

Together, we went through my wardrobe, separating all the things that we thought would bring in some money. It was actually kind of fun, and amazingly, I didn’t feel sad. Maybe a little about the jacket that Nanny and Grandad gave me. They passed away last year, and I miss them very much. My jacket, and Daniel’s jacket, were the last things they ever gave us. But I’m mature and grown up now - that must be true, as a Museum Professor told me so.

Chapter 5

So What Was it All For?

So it's Friday night. I got home from school and Dad excitedly announced that we have sold all we could, and we have enough money to buy Jeremiah's Fields. The Johnson's had given our bank a promissory note; I think its a legal document that promises the bearer some money. And that, together with the proceeds of everything Mum and Dad had sold, enabled the bank to issue a Banker's payment to the man who owned Jeremiah's Fields. Apparently, despite a bit of paper work needing to be finalised, Jeremiah's Fields was now ours.

So each of us picked up a bag of our things, a few clothes and the clothes we were in, and mine was my school uniform - I could not persuade Mum and Dad to sell that. We all walked out the front door, looked back one last time, and Dad locked the door. We all embraced, and Mum, Daniel, and even Dad, shed some tears. I didn't cry, as I am mature and grown up now, I just had a bit of dust in each eye, making them water, that's all.

Grandpa came and picked us up, which was a good thing, as we had no car now. He drove us to where he and Granny live. Despite Grandpa's best efforts at making conversation, we drove mainly in silence. I don't know what Mum and Dad are planning, but they loved that house too, so leaving it behind was just as hard for them. But remember, Dad, its just a thing. I didn't say that out loud though.

Once we were at Granny and Grandpa's home, we all enjoyed a wonderful meal, and everyone chatted happily. We had just sold virtually everything we had, had no home except an expensive, worthless piece of land that not even property developers wanted to develop, but we had each other and we were happy. Gosh, that sounds so cheesy - sorry.



Daniel and I had to sleep in the same room, and Mum and Dad were sleeping on a blow up bed in the lounge, as Granny and Grandpa's house was not very big. We had all slept well though. I don't know why I wasn't worried, but I didn't feel it. Daniel rushed out of the room to be with Granny and Grandpa. I got dressed quietly, pondering the madness that we all now, must have descended into. But I felt peaceful.

We all sat together at the breakfast table, a bit squashed but it didn't matter, just enjoying being together. After we had all finished eating, Dad said;

"So, we have all clubbed together and have bought Jeremiah's Fields. Do you want to go and see it?"

We all looked at each other. An ugly, little piece of land with a rocky hill and trees on it. "Yeah, why not." I said, smiling.

We borrowed Grandpa's car, they said they would see it tomorrow - we're actually going to come back again tomorrow? What for? We drove in silence, not awkward but serene. On the way we exchanged lots of smiles. It wasn't a long drive, it was just outside the town, just

like Dad told us. We drove down a very short, unmade road, arrived at a gate, and Dad got out and unlocked it, having received the key from the previous owner yesterday. Having unlocked the gate we drove into a cleft surrounded by rocks and trees, where we came across, what could only be described as, *a shack!* No one could live there, could they? It's falling down. I hope Dad doesn't want us to live there. The shack was surrounded by rocks and trees and could only just be seen from the road.

We all got out of the car, and Dad walked around to the boot and got out a shovel that he had borrowed from his Dad, having sold his metal detector and kit earlier in the week. The thought flashed through my mind that Dad *had* actually gone mad, and that he was going to kill us all, and bury us on this ugly little piece of land! But I quickly squashed that thought, after all, I'm grown up and mature now. I looked around. Actually, Dad was wrong. It wasn't an ugly piece of land, but was quite beautiful. You didn't have to listen too hard to hear the sounds of birds in the trees, and movement in the bushes.

"So all this is ours, is it, Dad?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied, "this shack, the rocky hill, and everything on it. Everything." He winked at me as he repeated, 'everything'.

"Jeremiah's Fields used to spread over acres of land," Dad started explaining. "Over the past decade, developers have gradually bought up all of the actual fields, and had built new housing estates on them, making our town even bigger. They didn't want this piece of land as, there was barely enough flat ground to build the shack, and the rest was the rocky woodlands, and it would have been very costly to clear them away to build on." He started walking, "Come on, this way."

It was very slow going. I was hoping for a path, but we had to fight our way through the bushes, long grass, brambles and going around trees. After covering just a hundred meters in about 20 minutes, Daniel pipes up:

"Is that the cave, Dad?"

"Yes, Daniel. You see that big rock? That used to stand in front of the cave, blocking the entrance. I've been here many times, with the owner's permission of course, and last Sunday when I was here, it started to rain, hard. That large rock must have shifted in last month's storms. Come on, let's go and have a look."

We pushed our way through the bushes. I even fell over at one point, tripped by a bit of gorse, but that was fine, I even laughed about it. Finally we reached the entrance to the cave. We carefully climbed over the large rock that had hidden the cave for so long. Dad had borrowed some torches, and they lit up the cave well. As caves go, it was fairly small and unremarkable. I wandered around looking at the cave walls which were damp and musty.

"So, I clambered into the cave last Sunday, to get out of the rain," Dad continued, "soaking wet, filthy, and I threw my kit and my metal detector down in frustration. The metal detector let out the biggest squeal I have ever heard."

I threw my gaze at my Dad. "You found something, didn't you?" I gasped.

"Why don't we have a look?" And with that he took Grandpa's shovel, and started to dig. He had hidden the spot very well, covering it over incase anyone else came looking in the cave this last week. He started to dig with the shovel. After getting the top spoil off, he started to use his hands to carefully move the dirt aside. The rim of a clay pot came into sight. Dad, switching into his archaeologist persona, started to carefully clear around the edge of the pot. "Its quite old. The museum will certainly want to have these, so I must be careful."

"What's in them, Dad?" Daniel exclaimed, excitedly.

Having revealed half the pot, he worked at removing the lid. As he took it off we all eagerly gathered around to look and, inside was the remains of, what looked like a linen belt, rotten and falling apart. We all stepped back, disappointed.

"No," Dad coaxed, "keep looking." He removed the cloth, and inside was the glint of shiny metal.

“Are they coins, Dad?” I asked

“Yes, darling, gold and silver coins ranging back through the centuries. It looks like someone was a collector, maybe Jeremiah himself.”

“But don’t we have to give them to the museum?” Daniel asked.

“Yes son, but there are finders’ fees, and there are another 5 pots just like this one, full of coins and trinkets from the past. This collection is priceless! We’ll be sorting through them at the museum for years. And yes,” Dad looked straight at Daniel, “Our finder’s fee will be big, worth much more than it has cost us to buy the land.”



“But look, there is a seventh pot, and this one is different.” Dad located it and uncovered it quickly, and opened it as he had done to the first one. But this one was a modern clay pot, with a clay lid, which once removed had, what looked like, shiny rocks in it.

“I’ve had one of these appraised,” Dad said, taking out one of the shiny rocks and holding it up. “They are nuggets of gold, and they all belong to us. There are some stones in there as well; including diamonds, rubies and sapphires. We are rich!” He exclaimed.

“We didn’t want to tell you about this treasure in case you talked about it at school,” Mum said, “and someone else bought the land before we could. Thank you for trusting us.”

We all looked at each other, smiling, and then laughing, and then cheering. We were rich. We were rich!



We picked our way, carefully, through the bushes and trees back down to the car, mostly speechless with the enormity of what had just happened. We had sold virtually all we had, but in doing so, had found riches beyond our wildest dreams - beyond anyone's wildest dreams. We got to the car, Dad carrying the shovel and the clay pot full of gold nuggets and gemstones.

"There's one more thing," Dad said as we approached the car, and he nodded at Mum. She opened the boot of the car and got out two bags, giving one to Daniel and one to me. "We couldn't sell these, but thank you, both of you, for offering them to us."

We both opened our bags and found our jackets, the ones Nanny and Grandad had given us before they had died. We both cried. Some things are worth more than money.



Andrew's Epilogue

I hope you have enjoyed this story about Chloe. What a roller coaster of a ride she had through it. In the beginning, she was convinced that her parents had gone mad. Her parents were keeping a secret from her and Daniel, and were expecting them both to just trust them. At first, Chloe didn't trust them, and rebelled against her parents, trying to find out what was going on for herself.

Trusting someone else can be really hard sometimes, especially when you can't see a reason to do it. Chloe also said, and did some bad things, but as the story went on, she decided to trust in her parents, even if she did still think they were mad. As a result, she actually grew closer to her brother, and to her parents too, and felt joy, just being together with them. She even had fun giving away the things that she thought made her happy; her clothes, her Xbox, even her precious trainers.



Trusting someone close to you, like a best friend, or your parents, can still be hard sometimes. How about trusting a complete stranger, like me? Would that be easier or harder? How about believing in and trusting in God? Is that possible? Could you do that?

I believe and trust in the God whose story is written in the Bible. You might think I am mad to do such a thing. But there is a lot written about God and his son, Jesus, not just in the Bible but in other books as well. You might have heard about Jesus?

God sent Jesus, out of heaven, to be born as a little baby. He had to trust that his parents would look after him as he grew up. When he grew up, Jesus taught people about God, about God's great love for us, and that God wants us to trust him, now and forever. Jesus went around, telling many people that he was the only way to get back to God, and to go to heaven. One day, someone asked Jesus what heaven was like?

Jesus replied: *"The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure, hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."*

This parable teaches us that knowing God is more important, and more valuable, than anything else that you could possibly imagine. Many people trust God and enjoy his love in their lives. Other people don't want to trust him. Some rebel against God, preferring to run their lives their way. They behave badly towards God, or just ignore him. This rebellion separates us from God. When we rebel, or behave badly, we should be punished, shouldn't we? But instead of punishing us, God sent Jesus to tell us that he could make things right again. One day, some jealous men had Jesus put to death because they didn't like what he was saying. This wasn't a surprise, Jesus knew that this would happen, and he loved us so much, that he willingly died to save us, and so became our Saviour. Instead of God punishing us for our rebellion, he put all that punishment on Jesus. His death means that people can be forgiven of their rebellion, and they can once again, put their trust in God, follow him, and receive his love and joy.

Many people have chosen to believe in God, and believe that Jesus is their Saviour. Others could think that they are mad to do such a thing. But they have discovered that finding a way back to God, is worth more than anything else you could possibly imagine. If you agree that this is true, you could say this prayer:

God, I thank you that you love me so much, and that you sent Jesus to die, so that I could be forgiven. Please forgive me for all the bad things I have said and done. I want to put my trust in you. Please help me to know you more. Amen.

If you have said that prayer, then tell someone. If your parents give you permission, you could tell me; I would love to hear from you.



When Jesus died, **he** was put in a cave, or tomb, like the one pictured below, and the rock was rolled across the entrance to seal him in.



This is like the cave in the story, with the stone moved away from the entrance. But apart from a few cloths, this one was empty - the treasure had gone. But that's another story - *The Gardener's Story*.

The story of Jesus' death can be found in the Bible. Or, look on the Jesus Loves Bexhill website, and look for *The Gardener's Story*.

Spoiler alert: because Jesus is the son of God, he came back to life again three days after he was killed. He is now in heaven praying for everyone to know God as their Father. That means he is praying for you too.

Look out for more
of Chloe's
adventures -
the next one is
already being told.

Join Chloe, on the adventure of a lifetime, and she's only 11 years old. She is convinced that her parents have lost the plot, as they start to sell everything they own. How is she supposed to react when her mother won't give a suitable explanation, but simply tells her to trust them? As more and more of their possessions disappear, what will Chloe do? Is the madness catching? And can she actually trust her parents, even though what they're doing seems totally wrong?

This book is brought to you by *Jesus Loves Bexhill*; a group of Christians who want to serve the community by clearing away some of its litter; and also wants to tell the people of Bexhill that God loves them.

If you want to know more about us; or about what it means to be a Christian; or more about why I am so convinced that the world around us supports what is written in the Bible; or if you have said the prayer on the previous page; **once you have your parents permission**, why don't you check out our website for *The Gardener's Story*, and other fun activities, and write us an email. We will get back to you as soon as we can.

www.jesuslovesbexhill.org.uk or email me on andrew@jesuslovesbexhill.org.uk

