

The background of the entire image is a misty forest scene. In the foreground, two orange tents with black and yellow details are pitched on a light-colored ground. Behind them, a dense forest of evergreen trees is partially obscured by a thick layer of white mist or fog. The sky above the trees is a deep blue with scattered white clouds.

WHEN YOU NEED ME

DUANE A. EIDE



Kue Summers and Candy Michaels have grown up in very different worlds. Candy enjoys life in a Minneapolis suburb where wealth, private schools, frequent travel, and privilege dominate. Kue lives in Twin Pines, a quiet, northern Minnesota community where life evolves slowly but family and church assume great importance. Both Kue and Candy have recently graduated from high school; public for Kue, private for Candy. Before embarking on a path to a college degree, each accepts the challenge of group leadership in their respective churches.

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Chapter 16

"I can't believe that nearly two weeks have gone by already." Ben Jacobs for perhaps the last time stood before the assembled mission group that sat attentively in the Calvary Church sanctuary. "Tomorrow will be your last full day here in Puerto Vallarta."

A chorus of "boos" drifted through the small sanctuary.

"I just can't believe," Mr. Jacobs continued, "how much you've accomplished in these two short weeks."

A chorus of "yeas" filled the small sanctuary.

"The people here will never forget what you've done for them. Just think. In the time you've been here, you've made much needed repairs to the windows in one of our orphanages. You've helped the staff at one other orphanage care for our youngest and most vulnerable citizens. In your brief time here you've painted seven classrooms which now stand ready for the kids who in just days will be using them. You've repaired roofs on three schools. And you've broken one arm."

Cheers of "Yea, Charlie" resounded in the sanctuary.

Mr. Jacobs waited as the cheers subsided, his eyes reaching each member of the group. "These stand as marvelous achievements." He paused briefly before continuing. "Probably your most important contribution these past two weeks is making dozens of kids, parents and teachers very happy. These people will never forget you. Believe me. I know these people, and they have found in you the true spirit of giving. We cannot thank you enough."

The entire group sat transfixed, many with dampness in their eyes. During their brief stay in Puerto Vallarta many of these young volunteers had experienced the beginnings of

lasting friendships based on empathy and mutual commitment to the needs of others. At this moment they felt a camaraderie that binds people together for a common cause. Many of the young volunteers turned to the person seated next to them to share a hug or a simple hand shake. Both Kue and Candy watched this reaction among these young teens, really not much younger than they, but experiencing perhaps for the first time the strong emotion that derives from giving.

Taking her hand in his, Kue looked deeply into Candy's eyes, smiled and mouthed, "I love you," words he had spoken more in recent days than at any other time in his life.

Candy, holding back tears, returned the smile, reached to touch Kue on the cheek. "Thank you. I'm so very happy."

As the group settled back into their places, Pastor Taland and Pastor McMasters walked to the front of the sanctuary to stand beside Mr. Jacobs.

"Pastor McMaster is a bit shy," Pastor Taland announced.

A small chorus of Twin Pines teens responded, "Sure he is!"

"I'm going to speak for both of us. Of course, I'm only kidding about the shyness. We drew straws to decide who would speak for our group, and I won. Both of us are so proud of what you young people have done here. It's two weeks none of us will quickly forget."

Applause sounded again through the church.

"Pastor McMasters and I want to thank the families who put up with us for these two weeks. How great of them to offer their homes to us. We also want to thank all the people we worked with in the schools and orphanages. We all are enriched by learning of life in a different culture. We all are enriched by the new friendships we've made."

Several members of the group poked each other in a recognition of these new friendships.

“Finally,” Pastor Taland resumed. “Pastor McMasters and I thank our leaders, Kue and Candy.”

Wild cheers erupted in the sanctuary as the entire group jumped to its feet in a display of appreciation and friendship.

Both Candy and Kue stood up in a thank you gesture, a redness spreading across their faces.

“I’m sorry Rick had to return home early to tend to a sick Mother, but we thank him too.” With reluctance Pastor Taland fabricated the reason for Rick’s sudden departure, deciding, nonetheless, that he had to explain last Sunday’s sudden departure but wishing to avoid details that would distract from the group’s final days in Puerto Vallarta.

Both pastors turned to shake hands with Mr. Jacobs before returning to their places with the group.

Mr. Jacobs cleared his throat. “Thank you so much for those kind words. Now, just one more thing before we get you home for the night. Of course, you all leave for home on Sunday.”

That chorus of “boos” sounded again.

“Tomorrow you will have the chance to play.”

This time the group erupted in applause.

“We have arranged for you to pick one of two very popular tourist activities here in PV. One is called the Canopy Adventure and the other is the Dolphin Adventure.”

Excited chatter filled the church.

Mr. Jacobs reached into his pocket to pull out a sheet of paper. “One problem with these activities. . .you have to pick one. They both are exciting. To aid you in making a choice, let me simply read a brief description of each found in one of the local tourist guides. Let me start with the Dolphin Adventure. It reads, ‘Swim with the Dolphins and Dolphin Adventure are available hourly. At Dolphin Adventure our principal goal is to promote a better understanding of dolphins and their intricate

underwater world. Both programs have been developed for that purpose enabling you to select the program that best meets your interest and comfort level.”

“We can actually swim with the dolphins?” came a question from the group.

“Absolutely, if that’s what you want to do.” Mr. Jacobs returned to the tourist guide. As for the Canopy Adventure the guide says, ‘The lush emerald green tropical forest provides a biological paradise. Canopy Adventure gives you the chance to see this amazing world from a unique perspective. Guests traverse from tree to tree and platform to platform using pulleys on horizontal traverse cables, as they sail through the treetops of the forest canopy and over the trails far below.’”

“Just like Tarzan,” someone belted out.

“Well, those are your two choices,” Mr. Jacobs smiled as he placed the tourist guide back in his pocket. “Before you leave here, I’d like for you to make a decision as to which activity you wish to do. I’ll make the necessary arrangements. Just remember, both of these activities start early so we will have to be ready to go by eight o’clock in the morning. If you have any questions about the activities, I’ll try to answer them. Be sure, though, to sign up for one of them on the lists your pastors have.”

The shuffle of feet and a buzz of conversation filled the sanctuary as the young teens considered which activity they would select and which companions they wished to join, the question of just whom they wished to spend the day with probably the more important factor.

Following a period of hectic negotiations and more questions, members of the group had decided just what they wanted to do. Seven picked the Canopy Adventure. Kue and Pastor McMasters would join the canopy group. Nine picked the Dolphin Adventure. Candy and Pastor Taland would

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accompany the dolphin group. At 8:00 on Saturday morning, eleven members of the group boarded a regular city bus for the drive to Nuevo Vallarta and the Dolphin Adventure. Nine members of the group boarded open back trucks for the ride deep into the jungle and the Canopy Adventure.

Chapter 17

“Kerry, come eat your supper.”

No response.

“Kerry, please come and eat. It’s getting cold.” Maggie Summers’ voice could not conceal her frustration. Recently, Kerry’s behavior hinted at earlier problems he suffered with attention and communication. All the time and attention the family, the Minneapolis Children’s Hospital and the local clinic devoted to his condition had produced significant results until the past few days.

The accident immediately before the closing of school for the summer had caused a setback in Kerry’s progress dealing with his autism. The injury to his head resulted in a temporary lack of balance along with some problems with small muscle control. Frequent therapy sessions proved successful in combating those problems. Now, only Kerry’s occasional slight stumble, along with a minor problem in holding small objects, remained of that head injury.

Rather than calling again, Maggie walked into the living room where she found Kerry sitting on the floor swaying back and forth in a slow rhythmic motion. Not for several months had he reverted to this kind of behavior, common for him at a much younger age.

“Kerry,” his mother reached down to grasp his shoulder. “Don’t you want to eat your supper?”

Kerry stared straight ahead oblivious to his mother’s presence. In the past, Maggie Summers typically waited patiently for this almost spell-like condition to end. Generally,

after a short time, it would. She sat down on the sofa, watching as her son ignored her.

“How did your day at the hardware store go?” She tried a different topic which just might penetrate the shell Kerry had erected around himself, slowly rocking from side to side. Still no response.

At nearly fourteen years old, Kerry did not qualify for any significant employment because of child labor laws. Nonetheless, Kerry did have a part time job at the local hardware store owned by Wayne Finch, a long time resident of Twin Pines. Mr. Finch and Kerry’s father had shared a close friendship for years before Ted Summers succumb to a malignant brain tumor. Mr. Finch had full knowledge of the autism suffered by Kerry. He also knew the attention and treatment Kerry had received over the years. Kerry did need something to occupy his time. He rarely participated in playground sports, particularly following the accident which left him with a tendency to lose his balance.

On Sunday shortly after Kue departed for Mexico, Mr. Finch stopped Mrs. Summers after church to inquire about Kerry and about Kue’s adventure in Mexico. The result of that conversation proved beneficial for Kerry. Mr. Finch suggested that perhaps Kerry could work a few hours a week at the hardware store doing odd jobs like sweeping, cleaning and stacking shelves. Kerry had responded enthusiastically to the thought of working, giving him a sense of independence after so many years of dependence on others.

For several minutes Mrs. Summers waited, quietly watching Kerry swaying in his own little world. “Kue’s coming home on Sunday.”

Kerry's motion slowed then stopped. He turned to look at his mother. In a voice with only a hint of excitement, Kerry asked, "Where'd he go?"

"He went to Mexico, honey. Remember he left almost two weeks ago now." She kneeled before her son, running her hand through his hair. "Why don't you come to eat your supper?"

Though Kerry's response to Kue's name didn't really surprise her, she just didn't realize that Kue's absence could have affected Kerry the way it did. More important at the moment was his return to the real world.

Slowly, Kerry got up from his position on the floor, walked into the kitchen where, at last, he did eat his supper. While he ate, he even engaged in a brief conversation with his mother about his day at work. His comments revealed his pride in this small job. He loved Mr. Finch, doing anything he asked him to do. Today that involved working outside the hardware store trimming weeds in the back of the property where Mr. Finch stored lumber.

"I'm tired, Mom." Kerry offered after cleaning his plate. The episode in the living room did extract considerable energy from Kerry. In the past, he would sleep for hours following one of his plunges into the mysterious world of autism.

"You do have to work tomorrow. You'd better get to bed." His mother advised.

With that he did go to his room where in a few minutes his mother entered to say good night.

"I miss Kue." Kerry said in a quiet voice.

"I know you do, honey. So do I."

"Sunday he's home?"

"Yes, he should be home sometime Sunday evening. Now get a good rest. I'll see you in the morning." As Mrs. Summers left his room, already Kerry's eyes had closed.

“Hello, Mr. Finch, this is Maggie Summers. Has Kerry left work yet?”

“Why, yes. He left about a half hour ago.”

The strain in Maggie’s voice disclosed her sudden concern. “He has not come home yet. Did he seem all right to you when he left?”

“He sure did. He couldn’t stop talking about the fact Kue would come home on Sunday. Maybe he’s just taking his time walking home.”

“Maybe. He usually comes home right away.” Maggie relaxed just a bit with the reassurance she extracted from Mr. Finch’s comments.

“Look, Maggie, keep in touch. If he doesn’t return in another half hour, give me a call, and we’ll go from there.”

A half hour passed, then an hour. Maggie called Mr. Finch at the hardware store to let him know Kerry hadn’t yet returned home. “I’m going to get in the car and see if I can find him.”

“Good idea. Why don’t you drive here to the store. We can decide then just where we should look.”

Maggie backed her car out of the driveway, heading to the hardware store. When she arrived, Mr. Finch met her in the parking lot next to the store. “No sign of him on your way here?”

“None.” Tension mounted as Maggie started to fear the worst.

“Why don’t you drive toward Central Avenue. I’ll drive the other way. Let’s meet back here in about fifteen minutes.” Sensing Maggie’s apprehension, Wayne Finch assumed control of the situation.

In fifteen minutes the two of them did return to the store’s parking lot. Neither had seen anything of Kerry.

“I just can’t believe he’d wander off like this.” Maggie folded her arms across her chest as if to console herself in view of her growing apprehension.

“Let’s contact the police just to be safe.” Reluctant to feed her apprehension, still Mr. Finch believed the police did need notification.

Wayne Finch called the police who arrived at the hardware store in minutes. After discussing Kerry’s failure to return home after work, his autistic background, and his recent escape into that private world, the police took charge, explaining they would put three separate squad cars into the search. They assured Maggie that Kerry would show up. After all, he had been gone only a couple hours.

Though they did not discuss it, the police, Mr. Finch and Maggie all realized the difficulty of finding someone who might have wandered off into the area surrounding Twin Pines. Heavily wooded, that area offered ample opportunity for anyone to get lost, especially someone with the physical and mental challenges Kerry faced. Those challenges had precluded his exposure to the wooded areas around Twin Pines. Not an avid hunter or outdoorsman himself, Kerry’s father rarely engaged either of his sons in those types of activities. Consequently, except for an occasional drive in the country, Kerry lacked familiarity with the heavily wooded areas around Twin Pines.

The police advised Maggie to stay at home to ensure her presence there if and when Kerry returned. The police would assume responsibility for the search. At home, she did check with the neighbors to discover nobody in the neighborhood had seen Kerry. Attempting to control the tension spreading through her body, Maggie sat at the kitchen table watching the clock and waiting for the phone to ring with some information about her son.

Seven o'clock, nine o'clock, ten o'clock and still no word. Maggie walked between the living room and the kitchen, fighting the anxiety and the fear. She kept asking herself where he could have gone, and what he was doing at this late hour? Just as she reached for the phone to call the police station again, she heard a car pull up in the driveway. Slamming the phone back in its stand, she rushed out the front door to see a squad car coming to a stop in her driveway. Her heart pounding in her chest, she ran to the squad car, hoping the officer would have something good to report. He did. In the back seat of the squad car sat Kerry his hands folded in his lap.

Maggie rushed to open the back door of the squad car. "Where have you been?" She asked trying desperately to control her bounding emotions.

The officer now stood behind Mrs. Summers as she reached in to help Kerry out of the back seat. "We found him just sitting in a swing at the city park, the one just south of downtown."

Maggie folded her arms around Kerry while tears streamed over her cheeks. Through her sobs, Maggie expressed her deep gratitude to the police, put her arm around Kerry's shoulder and walked him into the house. There she called Mr. Finch, reported the good news, and thanked him for his kindness.

"I'm hungry." The first words Kerry uttered since his return.

Gradually, Maggie relaxed as the emotional strain faded. She and Kerry sat facing each other at the kitchen table. "I suppose you are."

While his mother prepared him a sandwich and a glass of milk, she asked him, "Why didn't you come right home after work?"

Kerry sat for a moment as if contemplating what to say. "I was happy."

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“That’s wonderful that you’re happy. I’m happy now too. I wasn’t happy you did not come home when you should have.”

“Kue’ll be home on Sunday. I was happy.” Kerry said with conviction. “I walked. I saw the playground. I like to swing.” That served as complete an explanation as he could give.

Maggie smiled, shook her head, placed the sandwich and milk in front of her son, and patted him on the head. “I love you, Kerry.”

With a mouth half full of sandwich, Kerry looked up at his mother, smiled and mumbled, “I’m happy.”



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