## Chapter 1: The Son

“Hold still. I’m coming with you.”

Santiago’s mother peered down at him from the bow of the great ship. Her green skin glistened in the starlight—a warm night wind rustled her white dress and the rowboat that her son now found himself in.

“Be careful mother—they might hear you!”

Santiago’s bright eyes were wide with fear, scanning the side of The Merrie Marauder for any signs of movement. “But first, take this.” Evangeline pulled something out of one of her deep dress pockets. “What’s that?” The young frog was mesmerized by the object in his mother’s hand: a golden box that glittered in the moonlight. “No time to explain now. Catch!” She tossed it gently to her son. The box was sharp and cold to the touch. Santiago knew they had been planning to escape, but didn’t realize they would be stealing something in the process. “Alright, here I come.” His mother balanced precariously on the side of the boat and began to crouch down for a jump.

*“Evangeline!”*

The deep voice of Broog rumbled from below deck and cut through the air. Evangeline almost lost her balance as she froze. Footsteps shook the ship as the voice drew nearer. “Jump, mother!” Santiago grabbed the oars, ready to push off. Evangeline’s face was turned away for a moment toward the sound of Broog lumbering closer. Suddenly her face shot back toward her son. Her eyes filled with sadness.

“Row westward, my son—row until you can no longer see these terrible, pink sails.”

With that, she cut the rope mooring the rowboat with a dagger, tossed it toward her son, and slipped away into the darkness of the sleeping ship.

Santiago wanted to scream. He wanted to jump back on the boat and grab his mother—but he knew that would not accomplish anything. Within moments, the entire ship of ruffians would be awake, and they’d be in an even worse predicament than when they started. His mother had told him to row and he would obey his mother.

As he gently pushed off with the oars, he could hear the kind voice of his mother talking to Broog, buying him precious time to slip away. His eyes filled with tears as he thought of the failure of his mission. He had finally come to set his mother free but instead he had become a captive himself, and his mother had just saved him. He glanced down at the mysterious, golden box at his feet. *I didn’t want a stupid box.* He thought. *I wanted my mother!*

Santiago sadly rowed westward—away from the ship—until he no longer could see The Merrie Marauder*’s* terrible pink sails.

## Chapter 2: The Ficus Family

*“I think I can see it!”*

Eight year old Alexander Ficus was peering through his trusty, green binoculars out of the speeding, gray, minivan window.

“It would be impossible for you to be able to see it already.”

Alexander’s ten year old brother Arthur rolled the blue eyes behind his round glasses. He didn’t even look up from his copy of *Robinson Crusoe*.

“If my calculations are correct, we are still approximately twenty-five miles away from our destination.”

Arthur said this in a way that definitely implied that his calculations, in fact, *were* correct. He pushed his wavy golden hair out of face as he continued to read.

“I still think I can see it.” Alexander mumbled under his breath defiantly—still peering out of the binoculars with his squinty dark eyes.

Arthur stopped reading and looked at his foolish younger brother. He wasn’t about to let this go.

*“Zander,”* he addressed Alexander by his family nickname, “we left that gas station at 3:45 and we still had approximately 105 miles left to go.”

Arthur glanced at his dad in the driver’s seat.

“Dad has been consistently going seventy-five miles per hour, which is fifteen miles per hour over the speed limit. At that rate, we should arrive at Slaughter Beach at 5:15. It’s 4:45 now, which gives us another half hour before we would be able to see the beach, let alone actually be able to see our cottage. So—trust me—you *don’t* see it.”

Alexander sighed.

“Whatever. I still think I can see the beach anyways.”

Arthur rolled his eyes again.

Suddenly, the minivan went quiet. Their third and youngest brother, Gus, stopped blowing on his dad’s shiny, Marine Band harmonica for a second.

“What do you see, Zander?” he asked with a slight speech impediment, that made *Zander* sound like *Zandew*.

Five year old Gus was wearing a bright red ball cap with a pair of clear, blue swimming goggles strapped to the top. Gus was a sweet boy that loved to entertain and make his brothers and parents smile. But even with his constant harmonica playing, singing silly songs, and telling funny stories, Gus’ big brothers always found a way to forget about their little brother. His real name was Augustine, but everyone just called him Gus.

“He sees *nothing*, Gus!” Arthur barked.

“*Shut up!*” Alexander smacked his smarty-pants big brother in the face as Arthur ripped the binoculars out of his brother’s hand. Feeling left out of the fun, Gus reluctantly smacked Arthur on the head with his harmonica, and then began blowing on it incessantly, to add to the drama and tension.

“*Hey!* What’s going on back there?”

Their father Abram's dark sunglasses glared through the rear-view mirror before them. His bearded face was clearly scowling. He had been trying to enjoy a pleasant, adult conversation with their mother, Margaret, but was now trying to avoid using all of the cliché road trip phrases his own father used say during situations like this. Phrases like: *Do I need to pull this car over?* Or, *Don’t make me come back there!*

“Alexander *hit* me!” Arthur yelled, adjusting his specs that had become askew during the scuffle.

“Well, Arthur took my binoculars!”

Gus had started wailing on the harmonica again. This proved too much for his father.

“Gus! Would you *stop* playing that silly thing?”

The van got very quiet now. Abram was not so proud of his words this time—and neither was his wife.

“*Honey!*” She whispered sharply, moving her hand from her round, seven-month-pregnant belly to her husband’s leg.

Abram let out a defeated sigh.

“Sorry Gus.”

The father tried looking at his sad little son in the rear-view mirror as he drove.

“You sound great, buddy. I love that you’re learning the harmonica. It’s just…dad’s trying to talk right now. Ok?”

“Ok.”

Gus sounded like he was on the verge of tears. His uncle Tim had started teaching him how to play the harmonica a few months earlier—and now he could play Mary had a Little Lamb, Old MacDonald, and the less popular tune, Harmonica Veronica. He was so proud of having something special that only he knew how to do.

Abram had to put a bow on this situation.

“Arthur. Give your brother back his binoculars. Guys, we’re gonna be there in, like, five minutes. I promise! Just hold your horses.”

“More like *thirty-*five minutes.”

Now Arthur was the one mumbling as he threw the binoculars at his brother’s feet.

“What was that?”

Arthur’s dad strained to peer at his son over his shoulder while he drove.

“Nothing.” Arthur mumbled again.

Dad turned back to mom in the front seat.

“I don’t get it. I would have *died* to go on a vacation like this when I was a kid!”

Margaret moved her hand from her husband’s leg back to her baby bump as she replied.

“I thought you said you used to go on this exact vacation all the time when you were a kid?”

Abram paused.

“Well, yeah—and I almost *died* of excitement every time! Gosh, I swear these kids could ruin a trip to Disneyland!”

*“I wanna go to Disneyland!”*

Whined Gus, now looking forlornly out the window.

The dad shook his head, “You’d probably hate it!”

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True to Arthur’s prediction, thirty-five minutes later they saw the sign:

*Welcome to Slaughter Beach*.

The grayish-blue hue of the ocean stretched off into the distance—just beyond grassy fields, rolling hills, and seaside cottages.

“Slaughter Beach. What a cool name!” said Alexander. His signature, creepy, toothy smile coming over his face. “I bet someone got slaughtered to death here!”

“Actually,” Arthur predictably corrected “it was named after a guy named William Slaughter in the 1700s.”

“Dang it, Arthur! You ruin everything.” Alexander scowled disappointingly.

“Boys!” Their dad must have been oblivious to their conversation in the back seat. “Wanna know why they call it Slaughter Beach?”

“I already do.” Arthur whispered, rolling his eyes and continuing to read.

“It’s because of the horseshoe crabs! This time of year, the beach is covered with them, and they die by the thousands. We used to grab the dead ones by the tails and throw them into the water when we were kids!”

“Cool!” Alexander’s creepy face returned. “I wanna cut them open and pull out their guts!”

Arthur simply stared at his younger brother.

Gus was still staring out the window. “Slaughter…otter…water...” He loved to make little rhymes.

“Gus—honey—that’s creepy! Don’t say things like that!” His mother corrected him from the front seat. “See what you started, dear?” She jabbed her husband with her elbow.

Distracted, Abram could see something approaching on the horizon.

“Look boys! There she is! *The Slaughter House!”*

## Chapter 3: The Slaughter House

Almost every summer of his childhood, Abram Ficus’ family made the long drive up the coast and spent a few weeks in The Slaughter House. Despite its somewhat terrifying name, the house was a place of great memories and adventure for Abram. Now, twenty-five years later—as he pulled up the long gravel driveway to the house, he was struck by how little seemed to have changed. Except, of course, its size.

“It looks small.” Margaret Ficus squinted through her dark brown frames up at the two-story, white, wooden structure.

“Oh, it’s way bigger on the inside! Kind of an optical illusion.”

Abram put the van in park and turned off the engine. The whole family stared at the small house in silence for a moment. Arthur was the first to break the silence.

“I don’t think we’re going to fit.”

“That thing’s dinky.” Chimed in Alexander.

“Dinky, pinky, winky.” Rhymed Gus, randomly.

“Ok, we *are* going to fit, guys! Believe me. Everyone take a chill pill, and let’s start bringing everything in.”

Abram opened his door and the rest of the family clambered out of the van.

The Slaughter House *was* small. It wasn’t an optical illusion. Abram even started realizing this fact as he walked up to the porch, but his pride kept him from admitting it publicly. The house was up on stilts, but not as tall as the stilts on some of the other coastal homes nearby. This was probably due to its being situated on top of a great hill. Abram began to fiddle with the combination on the door, and a few moments later they were inside.

“See? I told you it was bigger on the inside!”

Remarked Abram with his hands on his hips, scanning the room with a face beaming of nostalgia.

But he was wrong again—it was still pretty small.

“And she hasn’t changed a bit!”

He was right on that point, however. Aside from the electronic combination on the door, very little had changed. Even the appliances were the same ones that his family had used twenty-five years earlier—and some of them had been old even back then.

“Hopefully everything still works.” Margaret muttered setting down a bright, orange suitcase.

“I’m *sure* it all works.” Abram quipped.

The door opened up to a small living room area, filled with a few pieces of old furniture and nautically themed decorations. To the left was a small, metal, spiral staircase going up through a round hole in the ceiling. The living room led to a cramped kitchen/dining room area surrounded by windows that looked out to the sea. Those panes of bluish-gray expanse did the most to make the small cottage seem bigger than it was.

The boys threw down their backpacks and ran to the kitchen to look out the back windows. Alexander scurried up on to the counter and pressed his nose and hands to the glass.

*“Zander!* Be careful—if you break that you’re gonna cut yourself!” Margaret shouted as she and her husband walked into a hallway to their right. The hall divided The Slaughter House, basically in half—separating the living room/kitchen half from a couple bedrooms and a bathroom. The master bedroom overlooked the sea, while the other bedroom—featuring two sturdy, wooden bunk beds—overlooked the front porch and winding road.

Abram walked into the bunk room and pulled a metal chain hanging from a ceiling fan in the center of the room.

“Wow! I remember these old beds.” He said as he grabbed the railing of the closest one and shook it—testing if they were just as sturdy as he remembered. They were. The three boys, apparently done looking out the kitchen windows, clambered into their new bedroom and started staking out their territory. Alexander took the top bunk to the left, Gus took the bottom, and Arthur claimed the entire bunk bed to the right by throwing his backpack on the bottom bunk and his body on the top.

“My brothers and I carved little things into the headboard. Let me see...” He moved the pillow on Arthur’s top bunk, and smiled as he revealed a plethora of scribbly carvings—half words and half doodles.

“What’s that?” Arthur exclaimed as he pointed to a menacing looking creature covered in what appeared to be porcupine quills. His dad chuckled as he remembered. “When I was a kid, my dad said there were legends of these creepy, spike-covered sharks. Their spikes were supposed to be razor sharp and could scratch holes in the bottom of wooden ships. Your uncles and I thought that was hilarious! We made up this character named *Spike.* See? There’s his name!” Sure enough, there was some rough lettering underneath the drawing:

“SPIKE THE SPIKY SHARK”

Gus, now staring at the ancient etchings, was hanging from the rail. “Are those sharks real, dad?”

“Spiky-sharks? Ha! No, buddy. I think old ship captains just made them up to have a more interesting story to tell their kids when their boats would hit a rock or something.”

“Aw, man!” Alexander sighed disappointingly. “Why are all the coolest things always made up?”

Abram smiled. “Ok, I think we’ve had enough archeological excavation for one day. Why don’t you guys go outside and explore while your mother and I unpack?”

“*Yeah!*” The boys sang in unison as they sprung out of the bunk bed and scrambled toward the back door.

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Behind The Slaughter House was, of course, the sea.

It was grayer, larger, and more mysterious than the boys could even have imagined. Only Arthur had ever even seen the ocean before, and even then, only as a baby. He had seen pictures of himself as a six-month old baby, wearing a fuzzy, brown hoodie and plaid shorts on an apparently cold and windy shore. His parents would annoyingly show him these pictures every time he complained that they never take him to the beach. The Ficus kids lived in a completely landlocked and desolate place, somewhere in the middle of the country. There were definitely no oceans where they were from. No mountains either. There was barely even a river to break up the bare fields and hills that sprawled as far as the eye could see. But now, here they were: staring into the magical wilderness of the Atlantic Ocean and their imaginations were set ablaze with excitement. Even the white, sandy cliff that led down to the shoreline seemed like an adventure unparalleled by anything they had ever experienced in their bleak, short lives. As they hurried down the soft, crumbly sand, they could hardly contain their excitement.

“The ocean!” Exclaimed Alexander as he tossed off his slip-on shoes and shot to the lead in their speedy descent to the shore. “I think I can see the other side!” Arthur, stumbling a bit, grabbed onto a tree root for support. “You most certainly can *not* see to the other side! The Atlantic Ocean is approximately 5,000 miles to the nearest shore from this point.” Which is, approximately, correct.

“Ocean...potion...motion...lotion...” Gus rhymed as he followed his older brothers down to the beach.

At the shoreline, Alexander suddenly halted. His final step produced a loud crunching sound . “*Ow!*” His eyes had been so transfixed by the misty horizon that he had overlooked something even more spectacular directly before him.

“*Horseshoe crabs!*” The children exclaimed together.

Their father had not exaggerated in his description. As far as their eyes could see, the beach was littered with large, round, brown shapes—with long sharp tails sticking out behind. Some were dead and lying on their backs. Some were cracked fragments, like the one Alexander stepped on. But many were still alive—their tails moving up and down as they scurried around slowly on the shore.

Forgetting about his hurt foot, Alexander grabbed the shell that he stepped on and hurled it into the ocean. Arthur was already looking over a live specimen and starting to examine it in detail.

“They look so…*prehistoric*!” He gently touched the shell as it glided along the sand. Alexander, now holding a stick that he found, kneeled next to Arthur—as Gus watch quizzically from behind. “Let’s flip it over!” He shouted. And before Arthur could respond, he had successfully flipped the huge crustacean onto its back. Dozens of interdependent, clicking legs writhed all around—its long, straight tail trying to flip itself upright.

“I don’t love horseshoe crabs.” Gus said as he stared bewilderingly at the creature. “Don’t do that!” Arthur said as he shoved Alexander over and grabbed his stick. He flipped the crab back on its many feet, and it proceeded to glide away over the beach.

The three brothers stood up in unison from their crouched positions and paused for a moment, taking in their surroundings. White cliffs of sand, crashing waves, the entire Atlantic Ocean, and a beach full of prehistoric crabs.

Arthur couldn’t hold it in.

“This is going to be the *best* vacation ever!”

## Chapter 4: The Box

“This is the *worst* vacation ever!”

Arthur exclaimed loudly as he threw his body into the old leather couch in the front room of The Slaughter House. “I’m bored out of my mind.”

What a difference a week makes. Alexander chimed in.

“Yeah, there’s *nothing* to do.”

If there’s one thing that parents hate to hear—especially on a costly vacation—it’s that their kids have *nothing* to do. Parents can always find things to do at all times. Of course, many of these things would be considered boring to most kids. Their mother, apparently found seashells stimulating.

“Arthur, why don’t you guys go find some shells on the beach?” Margaret Ficus called from her seat at the kitchen table. “You haven’t been out there at all today!”

“I hate that *stupid* beach.” Arthur exclaimed.

“We‘ve already found every *stupid* shell on that *stupid* beach.” Added in Alexander who had joined Arthur in slouching miserably on the couch, looking as if the two of them were melting under an intense heat of boredom. Gus—who had been contentedly coloring a picture of a red panda on the floor—was starting to feel like he was being left out of some great complaining.

“First of all,” their mother looked up from what she was doing, “stop saying *stupid.* That’s not a word that Ficuses say. Secondly, why don’t you try flying that kite you guys found under the bed? It looks pretty windy out there!”

Arthur stared at the ceiling in disbelief. He was probably the only one present that realized their mother was literally telling them to “go fly a kite*”*.

Figuring out how to play his brother’s boredom game, Gus chimed in, “Kites are *stupid*!”

His older brothers couldn’t help but smile approvingly. “Yeah!” Alexander agreed.

“I just told you guys to stop saying that word!” Their mother was now looking up from her pen and paper at the kitchen table and talking much more sternly. “I’m over here trying to make a meal plan so you guys have something to eat! Why don’t you go see what your dad is doing?”

Arthur never understood why their mom had to spend so much time making a “meal plan” anyways. None of his friend’s moms did. Sophia’s mom buys the same food from the grocery store, and just “makes stuff up”. Sophia’s mom also buys Sophia soda and candy.

“Fine.” Said Arthur, slouching even more to get off the couch. His dad had been upstairs all morning getting some “quiet time.” Arthur led his brothers up the small, spiral staircase and through the hole in the ceiling.

The stairs led to a single upper room directly above the living room with large picture windows on either side. Crammed bookshelves lined the walls, and under the window facing the ocean, sat the boy’s father at a tiny wooden desk, feverishly typing on his laptop.

Arthur broke the silence.

“I thought you said you weren’t going to work on this vacation.”

“Hey boys!” Their dad exclaimed, coming out of his state of concentration. Then he focused on Arthur. “You know I’m not *working*—I’m just trying to make some progress on my book. I’m not going to have this kind of time and energy again, and I need to make the most of it.”

“What can we *do*, dad?” Alexander whined. “There’s *nothing* to do.”

“Guys, I’m really in the zone right now. Can’t you just go throw some more horseshoe crabs in the ocean or something?”

Now Gus chimed in.

“They’re all gone.”

“What?” Their dad turned to face them and removed his “screen glasses” that he would often wear while working to look smarter.

Alexander continued for Gus. “All the live ones are gone, and we’ve thrown almost all the dead ones in the sea. Now there’s *nothing* to do.”

Abram glanced back at his manuscript.

“You threw *all* of them into the sea? I find that hard to believe. Well, anyways—why don’t you make some swords out of sticks and pretend you’re Hobbits or something—that’s the sort of thing I used to do when I was a kid! Your uncles and I were *never* bored.”

He felt guilty as he said this last bit—partially because it wasn’t really true, and partially because it sounded exactly like something his dad would have said. However, he took some comfort in the fact that he had restrained from following that cringeworthy comment with the even worse: *“*If you’re bored, I’ll find something for you to do!*”* Yes, at least he hadn’t said that.

But still each of the three boys was undoubtedly rolling their eyes on the inside—and, in fact, Arthur even did a partial eye-roll on the outside. The kind where you don’t do a full, obvious roll—but make it look like you could have possibly just been looking into the corner of the ceiling for some reason. But it was enough to make Abram feel like an even crummier father than he already thought he was.

“Arthur, Zander, Gus—I’m sorry. I promise tomorrow I’ll take the whole day off. We can do whatever you want! But right now I’m actually making progress—I feel *inspired*. Arthur, you know what that’s like, don’t you? That feeling of inspiration?” He looked pleadingly at his half-eye-roll son, looking for a sign of understanding to help assuage his guilt.

Arthur clenched his fists. Of course he knew what true inspiration felt like, but he definitely wasn’t feeling it now, and he definitely didn’t think his dad should, if he couldn’t.

Arthur simply turned around and started stomping toward the staircase. “I guess we’ll just go do *nothing* then.”

His brothers followed him sulkily down the metal spiral to the front room, through the kitchen past their mother and her meal plan, and out the back door toward the beach. Abram watched from his picture window as his three boys sullenly marched down toward the sandy cliff. “They’ll figure something out.” He said to himself as he turned back to his dimly glowing computer screen.

“Now where was I?”

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Arthur angrily kicked a broken horseshoe carcass out of his way.

I guess they hadn’t thrown them *all* in.

His squinting eyes scanned the watery horizon. It was an unusually gloomy, gray day. Not the kind of gray that looks like a big storm is coming, or that it could shower a torrential downpour in minutes, but the kind of gray that suggests that perhaps the sky itself is also plagued with boredom.

“I hate this beach.” Mumbled Arthur. “It *stinks.”* He kicked a clod of seaweed into the gray surf. “Literally *and* figuratively.”

“Yeah, I guess it does.” Said Alexander as he sniffed the stale sea air. “But we gotta do *something*. Maybe we could play pirates? Make some swords like dad said?”

Arthur grunted disapprovingly. “Pirates stink too, and so does using your imagination like a baby. And so does doing what dad says! I bet his book is going to stink as well. In fact, I *hope* it does.”

“Gee whiz!” Said Alexander who was also bored, but not quite as hopeless about it as his brother. Alexander, as you may have already deduced, was very different than Arthur. He was not nearly as artistic and book smart as his big brother, but what he lacked in brains and creativity he made up for in his resourcefulness and work-ethic. He also had an insatiable streak of mischief running through him, and found it especially enjoyable to harass moody, stubborn older brothers. Alexander struggled to hide a mischievous smile as he looked down at the sand and pretended to think to himself.

“Hmmm.” Alexander said quietly. “Maybe we could just—*OHMYGOSH A RED PANDA!*”

And just then, he yanked Gus’ beloved stuffed red panda named “Cinnamon” out of his little brother’s hands and hurled it at Arthur’s face, full-force. “Hey!” Gus yelled. The flying panda almost toppled Arthur over as it careened into his nose and fell into the sand. But Arthur was a quick thinker. In the half-second between the plush toy hitting his face and the sand, he had already devised the perfect comeback. Without missing a beat, he ripped the green binoculars from Alexander’s hand and threw them with all his rage into the dark, churning waves.

“*Arthur!*” Alexander was taken off guard. His laughter turned into an annoying whine, that was very satisfying to Arthur’s ears. He immediately kicked off his slip-on shoes and began to wade into the shallow water. He could see his plastic, green binoculars bobbing on a small wave not far off shore. In a few moments he had them in his hand.

Arthur was the one laughing now, as his soaked little brother brought in his dripping, priceless instrument. Alexander’s body was turning blue from the cold, and yet red from anger toward his quick-witted brother, ripening his normally rather pale skin into a quite vivid purple.

“*I hate you, Arthur*!” He shouted at his brother as he shook the saltwater out of his moist magnifier. “*You’re the meanest person in the whole, wide world*!” If there was anything that could make this moment more enjoyable to Arthur, it was hearing his frustrated younger brother’s poor come-backs. Arthur prided himself on his clever, quick-witted responses, like this one:

“You’d have to know every person in the entire world in order to make a statement like that with any certainty, you imbecile!”

He also loved educated insults like “imbecile”, “dim-wit”, and “nimrod”. Mainly because, in addition to sounding very smart, they also did not seem to get as big of a reaction from his parents—while getting an even bigger reaction from his brothers.

“I’m gonna *kill* you!” Alexander said as he started stomping angrily toward his brother. But then, all of a sudden, his expression vanished. His eyes darted back and forth and his voice changed.

“Where’s Gus?”

The two older brothers had been so busy torturing each other that they hadn’t realized that their younger brother was nowhere to be seen.

Arthur turned around as well, and began to scan the sandy hill where they had just come. Gus wasn’t there. Neither was Cinnamon.

“He was just here with us!” Arthur said as he looked back toward The Slaughter House.

“Are you sure, Arthur? Maybe he never left the house?”

“*Maybe he drowned!*” Cried Alexander as he threw his wet binoculars onto the sand, and dove back into the water. “*Augustine!*” He shouted.

A pang of fear shot through Arthur’s body. Then he saw it.

“Wait Zander—Gus’ footprints! Right over here...”

Sure enough, Gus’ wide sneaker prints stopped a few yards behind where they were, but then led off into the opposite direction of the house, along the rocky shoreline.

“Let’s follow them!” Alexander shouted, a look of relief coming over his purple, soggy face.

“*Gus*!” Arthur shouted. “He’s probably just hiding again. I hate when he does this! He’s just trying to get attention.”

“*Augustine!*” Alexander shouted with all the might his little body could muster.

“Come out!” Arthur added. “We’re not playing this game!”

The footprints led to a rocky part of the beach where they quickly lost his tracks. *If I were Gus—*Arthur thought rather detectively—*where would I go?* He looked up ahead and saw a big, black rock, roughly the size of a Volkswagen. They had played on this rock several times during the week , and he instinctively knew that his little brother had to be there.

Sure enough, Gus’ footsteps picked up on the sand on the other side of the rocky patch, and led directly behind the enormous boulder.

“Alright Gus!”Arthur stood tall with his hands on his hips. “We’ve found you now. Knock this off!”

Sure enough, after a few tense couple seconds, the clear form of their fun loving little brother stuck his smiling face out from behind the rock.

“Get your little rump over here!” Alexander scolded as he stomped toward his brother, trying to hide his joy and relief.

As Gus finally stepped fully into view, both Arthur and Alexander stopped dead in their tracks. It was not Gus that now had their attention, but something that he was holding. Something that they had never seen before.

He was holding a shiny, smooth, golden box. It gleamed brightly in the dingy, gray light.

His inseparable harmonica was stuffed into his front pocket, and his beloved Cinnamon was poking out of his backpack. Augustine smiled, sheepishly.

“Where did you *find* that?” Arthur exclaimed.

“What *is* that?” Alexander followed up.

Finally Gus spoke up:

“I found it in the *boat*.”