

Adventures in
ODYSSEY

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY PRESENTS

36

THE IMAGINATION STATION



Hope in the Ashes

MARIANNE HERING & MARSHAL YOUNGER

OVER 2 MILLION SOLD IN SERIES



Hope in the Ashes

BOOK 36

**MARIANNE HERING AND MARSHAL YOUNGER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY SERGIO CARIELLO**

**FOCUS
ON
THE FAMILY®**

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Hope in the Ashes

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The Tree House



Patrick opened the door to Whit's End. The bell above the door rang. He let his cousin Beth walk through first. He then stepped inside. The soda shop smelled like freshly made waffle cones.

"The whole thing is weird," Patrick said.

Beth nodded. "It's sad."

The cousins headed to the front counter,

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where Mr. Whittaker had just served another customer.

“Good afternoon,” Whit said. He tucked a receipt into the cash register.

“Hi, Mr. Whittaker,” the cousins said in unison.

Beth put her school backpack on the floor. Patrick did the same. “What’s weird and sad?” Whit asked. He stroked his white mustache.

“Have you seen Patrick’s old house lately?” Beth asked.

“Well, I noticed some construction going on over there.” Whit put an elbow on the counter and rested his chin in his hand. “What’s happening?”

“They’re tearing it down,” Patrick said, sliding onto a stool at the counter. “It’s to make room for a row of townhomes.”

“They’re planning to tear down all the houses on that street,” Beth added.

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“Well, I didn’t know *that*.” Whit’s wise eyes were full of concern.

“Isn’t that sad?” Beth asked. “People lived in those houses, including Patrick’s family. Now they’re just bulldozing them all down.”

“How do you feel about this, Patrick?” Whit asked.

“It’s strange, but I’m actually okay with it.” Patrick sighed. “We like our apartment. And we’re doing fine.”

Whit leaned across the counter, closer to Patrick. “Are you sure?”

“It’s my mom,” Patrick said. “She talked to one of the construction workers yesterday. He said they were going to cut down all the trees. And we had a huge oak tree in our backyard. My dad built a tree house—”

“I played in that tree house a lot,” Beth said.

“My whole family would have picnics up there,” Patrick said.

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“It had a really great swing,” Beth added.

Patrick had a thoughtful look in his eyes.

“The swing is almost as old as I am.”

Whit smiled. “You had a lot of great memories there, didn’t you?”

“Here’s what’s strange,” Patrick said. “My mom knew the trucks would tear down the house. But she didn’t cry until she heard about the tree.”

“People can get emotional over important family things,” Whit said. “She watched you grow up in that tree house.”

Patrick bowed his head. “I don’t like seeing my mom sad.”

Beth placed her hand on Patrick’s shoulder. “There’s nothing you can do. You can’t chain yourself to the tree to stop the bulldozers.”

“I know,” Patrick said. “Though I did think about it.”

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“Well,” Whit said, “I’m sure there’s something you can do for your mother.”

“What, then?” Patrick hoped Whit would have an answer.

“I’m not sure,” Whit said. “That’s something you need to figure out. But your mom’s sad. And you can help her through that sadness.”

Patrick held his hands up in the air and shrugged. “I’m just a kid. What can I do?”

“Hard times reveal heroes and cowards,” Whit said. “I believe you can be one of the heroes.”

Beth giggled. Patrick glared at her. “What are *you* laughing at?”

“Sorry, I just . . .” Beth laughed again. “I had an image of you in tights and a cape.”

Beth’s laughter faded. She cleared her throat. “No. You’re right. I’ve seen you do brave things. I can see you as a hero. But no tights, please!”

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Patrick rolled his eyes and turned back to Whit. “What do you mean? How do hard times reveal heroes?”

Whit stood straight up. He stared at the ceiling for a moment and twirled his mustache.

“Uh-oh,” Beth said. “I’m guessing you’re not going to tell us the answer to that.”

“Right.” Patrick crossed his arms. “He’s going to show us.”

Now it was Whit’s turn to laugh. “What fun is it if I just tell you the answer? Wouldn’t it be better to take an . . .”

“Imagination Station adventure!” the cousins said at the same time.



The cousins stood by as Whit typed on a keyboard. The computer was attached to a large machine that Beth thought resembled a helicopter without its blades. This was the

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Imagination Station. At Whit's End, kids used it to experience biblical and other historical stories firsthand—kind of like a time machine.

“Are you going to tell us where we're landing?” Beth asked.

“No,” Whit said. He punched the last button and nodded to the cousins. “But when you get there, be alert. Things will be happening fast all around you.”

“Are you going to give us track shoes? Then we can keep up with the fast things, right?” Patrick asked.

Whit always gave the kids items to take along with them. They never knew what the items were for until they needed them.

Whit chuckled and moved past them toward a workbench. “No track shoes.” He grabbed some items with each hand and turned back around.

“Patrick, you get these.”

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“A carrot?” Patrick asked. His mouth turned down. “It hasn’t been peeled.”

“I didn’t say you had to eat it,” Whit said. “And here’s the second item.” It was a black wire about ten inches long. It had two metal squares, one on each end.

“Those are silly-looking earmuffs,” Beth said.

“Interesting guess, Beth,” Whit said. “But you’ll figure out what they’re for soon enough.” Whit reached for another item.

“This is for you, Beth.” Whit handed her what looked like a single firecracker. It was small and white. Beth squished it a bit with her fingers and felt powder inside the paper shell.

“What is this?” she asked.

“Someone in the adventure will explain it to you. Just get in,” Whit said. He guided them into the Imagination Station. The cousins climbed inside and sat down in their seats.

“Are you ready?” Whit asked.

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Patrick nodded, and Beth said, "Yup!"

"Okay, then. Have a nice trip." Whit smiled.

"And try not to get trampled."

"What?!" Beth shouted.

Before Whit could answer, Patrick hit the red button. Suddenly the room shook and everything went dark.