

Chapter 1

Tim stood in the hallway, in front of a large closet-door mounted mirror. His hazel eyes inspected blooming auburn color in the caramel complexion of his cheeks; a stark contrast to his favorite navy blue Transformers T-shirt, and frayed blue jeans. His tiny fingers combed through his black unkempt natural curls, Dad had just trimmed two days ago. He checked out the slouch of his 9 year-old stance, and flipped an index finger underneath his nose, absently wiping the damp finger across a pant leg.

“I’m not sick,” he mumbled. “It’s just a stupid cold. I don’t know why I can’t go outside.”

“You’re not going outside, because I said so, kiddo.” Dad replied as he walked toward the front door. “You had a slight fever this morning. That means rest and indoor activity for you, buddy; understand?” He ruffled Tim’s hair as he passed by. The front doorbell rang twice.

“Yeah,” Tim grumbled.

“I’m sorry, what was that?” Dad pronounced, as he swung open the door. “Care to repeat?”

Tim drug his feet over to the living room couch, picked up his orange-cover Fire Bible from the arm rest, tossed it across the room, and pressed his face into the soft seat cushions. He smashed a throw pillow over the back of his head, and screamed.

“Yes sir!” His voice muffled beneath the couch cushions.

Dad was already talking to the guests standing on the porch, instructing them to walk a delivery around to the side of the house. As he closed the front door and started back toward the kitchen, Tim sprang up from the couch and peaked through the bay window curtains to catch a glimpse of the visitors. Outside, snow fell from the slate gray sky in huge flakes, blanketing everything in wintery white.

A blue and white delivery truck was parked in the driveway, with the front of the truck facing the street. Tim watched two men walk up a metal ramp lowered from the back of the truck. They reappeared moments later, slowly carrying a huge white cardboard box down the ramp, then up the driveway toward the side door.

“What is that?” He whispered, as he walked toward the kitchen.

Dad stood at the side door stoop, watching as the two men carefully carried the box through the propped storm door, and down the basement steps. He flashed a wink, and two-thumbs up, at Tim.

“We’re back in business now, buddy.” Dad said.

Tim reasoned that Dad was going to be occupied for a while. This would be the perfect opportunity to get into some video game playing time. Last night, Mom made him shut it off, just as he was about to begin a new level. She had told him he spent too much time on the game.

“Dad, since you’re gonna be busy, is it alright if I play the game for a little while?” He asked. A little smirk creased the corners of his mouth.

As Dad descended the basement steps, he called up, "Sure buddy. No, wait a minute. Uh...we'd better ask Mom once she's back from the grocery store. She thinks you should spend a little more time doing other things besides mining blocks and killing exploding Crappers."

"They're 'Creepers' Dad! I don't spend that much time--"

"Tim, you're not getting me busted, son. As soon as Mom's home, you can check with the boss." Tim heard the delivery men laughing. "Why don't you get a jump on the next chapter we'll be reading tonight, in second Corinthians?"

Tim stomped back into the living room, and spied his Fire Bible lying on the floor, next to the television table. He kicked the book across the cream Berber-carpeted floor, flopped down on the couch, and gazed through the bay-window. The sounds of plastic ripping and tools clanking together resonated from the basement. Then he heard an awful sound like metal scraping across the concrete floor. Dad yelled up the steps.

"Buddy, if you don't want to read, why don't you play with your toys?"

Tim clenched his teeth and shook his fists at the living room floor. *I don't wanna read the stupid bible, or play with dumb toys* he thought. He huffed, and rested his chin on top of his hands, folded neatly across the back of the couch. Tim watched snow cover 12th Street in an awesome sheet of white fluff. His ears burned and his stuffy nose dripped, as he watched his brother, Kyle, and twin-sisters, Alicia and Asia, streak through the front yard, throwing snowballs at one another.

"Kyle's outnumbered," he said. "I should be out there with him."

His eyelids grew heavy.

Tim opened his eyes to see Mom kneeling over him. Her warm fingers were gently massaging his brow.

"Hi, sweetheart." Mom said. "You're still a little warm. Are you feeling any better?"

Tim sat up on the couch and stretched wide. He had fallen asleep while watching the snowball fight. Suddenly, he remembered Dad telling him to ask Mom about playing the video game. Faking a horsed cough, he sighed.

"Hi, Momma. Yeah, I guess I'm feeling better. My throat's a little scratchy and I'm a bit tired." He whined.

Mom wrapped her arms around him and squeezed tight.

"Oh, Momma's little man is definitely sick. How about you stay put, and I'll get you a blanket, okay?" She kissed his forehead, before walking toward the bathroom.

A wicked smile glistened across Tim's freckled face, as he lie back lacing his fingers behind his head. Mom returned carrying a small plastic medicine cup half full of pink medicine that always reminded him of liquid bubble gum.

"Here honey," she said handing over the cup and a small Afghan blanket. "Drink this and rest for a while. I'll be in the kitchen putting the groceries away, if you need me."

It was now or never. Tim quickly swallowed the pink medicine, and called out to Mom as she turned the corner, into the kitchen.

"Momma, Dad told me to ask you if I could play the game for a while. So, can I, please?"

Mom peered around the corner; one raised eyebrow, a sideways smirk lit across her face, and a hand rested on her hip.

"You must think I came down with the rain, Mister Smith. I was on to your little ploy from the beginning. Since you have enough strength to concentrate on your game-play, you've got enough strength to walk right into this kitchen and help put the groceries away. Hop to it, skinny-minny."

Skinny-Minny; he hated being called that. Tim huffed and launched the blanket across the living room. It came to rest over the bible. Jumping from the couch, he defiantly folded his arms and stomped into the kitchen, grumbling under his breath.

"Hey! What's with all the racket up there?" Dad called from the basement.

"Tim is about to help put away the groceries. I don't think he's in the mood to cooperate, Daddy!" Mom yelled down the basement steps.

"Tim, do you want me to come up there?"

Judging by the tone of his voice, Dad must have been standing at the bottom of the steps poised to race up. He was probably waiting for Mom to give the word. Best to drop the attitude.

"No sir, I'm fine. I was just about to help *her* put the food away." Tim cut a sour glare at Mom, who stood before him smiling.

"Alright, mister." Dad said, "You behave yourself, up there. I'm going have something for you to play with, shortly. In the meantime, be my big guy and help Mom out."

Tim pouted all the way through the boring tasks of gently stacking eggs in the refrigerator, stacking canned goods inside the low cupboard, gathering up the discarded plastic bags, and depositing them in the storage bin. Mom made small talk, but Tim had decided to ignore her. It wasn't fair that she wouldn't let him play the game.

"Hmm, not talking to me, eh?" Mom said. "That's fine. You and your attitude should be able to keep each other company in your room; definitely no video game time for you, Timothy Jonathan Smith."

"What?" Tim yelled.

“Don’t you back sass me, mister. Off you go, now. Make sure to pick up, and refold, that blanket in the living room, please. And pick up your bible as well.”

As Tim tromped through the kitchen, Dad intercepted, yanking him off his feet, and hoisting him in the air above his head. Tim squealed in frustration, as Dad hugged his little body and spun around the kitchen. Tim didn’t know whether to yell in anger, or laugh at how dizzy Dad’s spinning made him.

“Hey!” Mom yelled. “You two knuckleheads take that foolishness out of my kitchen. Your son’s going to spend some quiet time in his room.”

Dad set Tim on his feet. The whole kitchen seemed to spin around him. He reached out to steady himself, when Dad caught a loose arm, helping him regain a sense of balance. A few seconds passed before his eyes adjusted. Tim scowled at Dad.

“Whoa! If looks could kill, I’d be in serious trouble, Momma,” Dad chuckled. “What’s with the lemon face, buddy? Your attitude earned you a ticket on the ‘time-out trail’ again? We just read in Proverbs 29:11 this morning, ‘fools vent their anger, but the wise quietly hold it back.’”

Mom whispered, “I think the T-Y-L-E-N-O-L he swallowed, is making him a bit S-L-E-E-P-Y and C-R-A-N-K-Y.”

“I can spell, you know.” Tim said. “The bubble-gum stuff isn’t making me tired, and Dad, I don’t even know what that poor verb means!”

Mom and Dad laughed. Dad reached into the snack cupboard, and pulled out a juice box and small bag of potato chips.

“Here buddy,” he said, shoving the snacks into Tim’s hands. “I’ll give you a pass on the trail today. The *Proverb* means you have to learn to control your temper. Foolish people allow their anger to control them. When that happens, trouble usually follows.”

Tim rolled his eyes, and sighed. Dad always had a bible scripture ready to recite.

“Okay, I can see you’re not in the mood to listen. Tell ya what: the new dryer is installed. Why don’t you go on downstairs and check out the box I had the guys leave, by the steps. Maybe you can make something happen with it.”

“I don’t want to--” Tim started to protest. He was quickly interrupted by Mom.

“Timothy, I’ve had just about enough attitude from you, mister. You can either go to your room and sulk, or you can go to the basement and play with the box. Either way, you will not continue to traipse through this house, pouty-faced over your video game! Are we clear, Mister Smith?”

Tim glowered at Mom.

“Better do what Mom says,” Dad said. “Go on downstairs and let that imagination, between your ears, take over for a while. Who knows? You just might have a bit of fun.”

Tim gazed into Dad's brown eyes, reassuring smile and shiny bald head, like a chocolate milkdud. He remembered watching the delivery men haul the box toward the side door, through the snow. It did appear to be a pretty nice sized box. He sighed then slowly walked toward the basement steps.

"Wait," Mom said, walking into the living room. She reappeared carrying the Afghan blanket and his Fire bible. As Tim mounted the first few steps, she draped the blanket over his shoulders like a cape, and handed the bible to him.

"Here ya go. You might need these down there. Have fun."

"It's just a dumb box," Tim mumbled. "How much fun can I have with it?"

Chapter 2

Tim descended the tile basement steps determined to completely ignore the dumb box. Instead, he planned to walk straight to the toy chest. Better yet, he decided to destroy the stupid box, using Dad's tools. He just needed to reach the toolbox inside the laundry room.

"Go play with a stupid box. What am I gonna do with it," he complained, "Rip it to pieces."

After the last step, Tim rounded the corner leading toward the laundry/utility room. Standing there, blocking the path of the basement hallway, sat the white cardboard box. He had only seen it from a distance before but, up close, the thing was humungous. He stood before it, marveling at its size.

"Wow! Hey, Dad this thing is huge," he yelled. "Can I cut a hole in it? I might need a window for my...fort...or something." Ideas and possibilities began to flood his mind, and suddenly destroying it seemed like a bad idea.

Dad shouted down the steps, "No buddy; no holes. We can use it for garbage later, this week. That won't stop you from playing with it, right?"

"No, I guess not. I can tip it over and make..."

An idea clicked as quickly as a flash, and he was off to collect supplies and equipment. Tim squeezed between the box and the narrow sheet-rock basement wall, and darted for the wooden toy chest at the far end of the hallway. Tossing the lid open freed the familiar smell of cedar. Secretly, he loved the smell of the old chest. It was filled with all sorts of toys he and Kyle played with. He rummaged through the chest, randomly inspecting an action figure here, a stuffed animal there. A variety of things were at his disposal. What would he need to make a trip through the depths of a newly discovered and uncharted cave?

"No, not a cave," he thought. "It's my new race car, so I'll need a few fix-it guys to put the wheels and stuff together."

While rummaging, he happened upon a red tyrannosaurus, and several action figures of interest. One was a plastic ocean diver, with one pull-off, retractable flipper still attached. The futuristic diver was equipped with a removable utility belt and a flattened inflatable yellow plastic air-tank draped across his back. Mom had given the diver to Kyle for his ninth birthday. A few years ago, he had given it to Tim.

The second action figure was a limited edition metal spaceman, Dad bought for Tim's fifth birthday. He paused for a moment to press the buttons on the spaceman's wrist computer, and smiled as miscellaneous lights buzzed on the action figure's suit.

"Cool. Your lights still work Abe," He said. "I guess you can come, too."

The third action figure was a big-game hunter, Tim had bought with his own allowance money, two years past. He remembered how proud he'd been, paying for it himself. There had been so many adventures the little hunter had shared with him, and so many nights the hunter had been tucked under his pillow while sleeping.

"Nimrod," he whispered. Tim felt his cheeks stretch in a wide grin, as he stared at the hunter. "I almost forgot about you, buddy. How about you take one more big adventure, with me?"

Tim set the dinosaur and three figures on a shelf, before continuing his search through the toy chest. He pulled a lion-tamer's bullwhip from the chest: a souvenir from a visit to the circus. Deep down at the bottom of the chest, his fingers wrapped around a battery powered light saber, Mom had bought for Kyle a few years ago. Flipping the toggle switch activated the toy. The plastic, round tipped blade flashed then hummed a bright indigo blue.

"Wow! The sounds still work, on this thing. Better take it with me, just in case I might need to fight off monsters, or something."

Leaving the toy chest, Tim turned and walked through the dark utility room passing the new dryer and the washing machine, and headed straight for the linen closet where mom kept the winter comforters and Dad's special-occasion winter hats. He held the light-saber overhead, illuminating the dark closet as he searched for the perfect comforter. As he waved the toy left to right, he thumbed through the neatly stacked linens.

"The force is strong with me," he said.

He grabbed a large green and brown comforter usually found on his parents' bed. Tim yanked at the comforter and dragged it across the basement floor, out the utility room, back into the hallway toward the box. One swift kick at the bottom, toppled the huge box. The open lid landed just before Tim, spilling miscellaneous wrappings to the ground. Inside, he discovered big rectangular pieces of packing foam and a large wad of bubble wrap.

"These might come in handy later" he thought.

Setting the light-saber aside, he grabbed the comforter with both hands. In one quick yank, the comforter flew into the air and settled down over the big box. Tim ran back into the utility, over to the low shelf where Dad kept all sorts of paint cans. Mustering all of his strength, he picked up one of the cans by the metal loop handle and dragged it back to the comforter-covered box. He walked the can to the back of the box and set it down on top of a corner of the comforter just as Dad came down the stairs, carrying Tim's Fire Bible.

"What are you...ah, I see," Dad said. "Making a little hideout huh?"

"Yep," Tim beamed. "I just need one more can to hold down the roof so it won't blow away when the storm comes."

"Oh, yeah we wouldn't want the *roof* to disappear would we?" Dad said. "I don't think your insurance claim would cover imaginary disasters. I see your roof doubles as a front door too. That's pretty good thinking, kid. I won't tell Mom that you've got her clean comforter on the basement floor."

"Thanks Dad," Tim said as a yawn escaped through his parted lips. "Can you help me carry another can over here?"

"Sure buddy. Where are we gonna put it; on the other side, at the corner?"

"Yeah, I was thinking about maybe using something for the-" Tim started, but was interrupted by another yawn.

"Sure you're not getting sleepy buddy?" Dad asked.

"Dad I can't sleep now! I've got stuff to do here."

Dad shook his head and raised his free hand feigning retreat. "Alright, why don't you go back in the closet and grab one of the spare pillows. You may need a seat in there. I'll just toss this inside, in case you need a little light reading on your trip."

"Yeah, the pillow's a good idea, Dad." Tim said.

Dad started for the stairs. "Okay buddy, I'll leave you to it then. You need any help, just yell. I always knew you were gonna do something great, kid. It's your destiny." He was half way up the staircase, when Tim yelled.

"Dad! Can you cut the light off up there please?"

"Sure buddy."

Everything was just about set. The lights flicked off, surrounding Tim in the darkness of the basement. He stood motionless allowing his vision time to adjust, before reaching for the light-saber on the floor. Thumbing the button, the basement was illuminated in a soft indigo-blue.

Tim walked through the darkened basement toward the toy chest, back through the utility room to the linen closet. Opening the closet door, four different hats – each its own unique color with a silk band

around the crown – hung from cap hangers screwed into the door. Each hat wore its own see-through plastic bag. Dad once told Tim the Fedoras, as the hats were called, needed to be protected from dust.

“Probably shouldn’t touch these.” Tim whispered. He reached up the door and tipped the brim of the hat on the lowest hanger: a caramel brown Fedora with a chocolate colored silk band. Setting the light-saber down, Tim removed the thin plastic bag covering the smooth felt hat.

“Wow, this is so sweet.” Tim snickered. “Every explorer needs a cool hat.”

Tim shoved the plastic bag between two blankets, closed the closet door, picked up the light saber and walked back to the box. He set the large hat over his head. It sank low over his ears. Tim picked up the small bag of potato chips and the juice box, while holding the light-saber under his arm. He crawled into the box and set aside the snacks and the light-saber; right next to the bible. Next he hauled the packing foam and bubble wrap to the back of the box. He then crawled out to gather his passengers: the diver, the spaceman, the hunter and the red T-Rex. With just enough room inside to maneuver between the front and back of the box, he decided to organize everything.

“This is great, Nimrod! You guys need to sit in the back just in case of an emergency.”

Tim pushed the dinosaur and action figures between two packing foam blocks near the rear of the box, before sitting on the pillow.

“Well, I guess I need to eat before takeoff. You guys check the ship back there for any broken pieces. I’m just gonna have a snack and then we’ll be off.”

Tim sat, ate chips, and drank the juice while staring into the blue light of the light-saber. The light reminded him of the night light mom used to turn on at bedtime. He was afraid of the dark once.

“Not anymore. I’m a big kid now, playing in the dark. Nothing to be afraid of,” he thought.

As he ate and drank, Tim flipped the little bible open to the spot where his Spongebob book marker had been set in second Corinthians, chapter 13. By the blue light of the light saber, he absently read through verse 13:14.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the presence and fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Tim barely noticed another yawn slip through his lips as his eyes slowly glided toward the soothing glow of the blue light. The blue light was nice. The blue light was...somehow warm. The blue light...the light...