

THE SECRET OF THE HIDDEN SCROLLS

BOOK ONE
THE BEGINNING



M. J. THOMAS

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BY M. J. THOMAS


Worthy **kids**
ideals[®]

*For my wonderful wife, Lori,
and amazing sons, Payton and Peter.
Thank you for your love and encouragement.*

—M.J.T.

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THE BEGINNING

Peter waved as he watched his mom and dad drive away. Africa was a long way off, and a month was a long time. Especially when it meant staying with Great-Uncle Solomon.

“Ruff!” barked Peter’s dog.

“You can’t go, Hank,” said Peter. “You have to stay here with us.”

Hank whined. Peter wasn’t happy either, but he wasn’t going to show his sister, Mary, that he was trying not to cry. She never cried. She never even laughed much, come to think of it.

She was too smart and serious for that sort of thing.

Peter looked up at the huge house. Then he looked over at Mary. She shrugged and said, “We should go in now.”

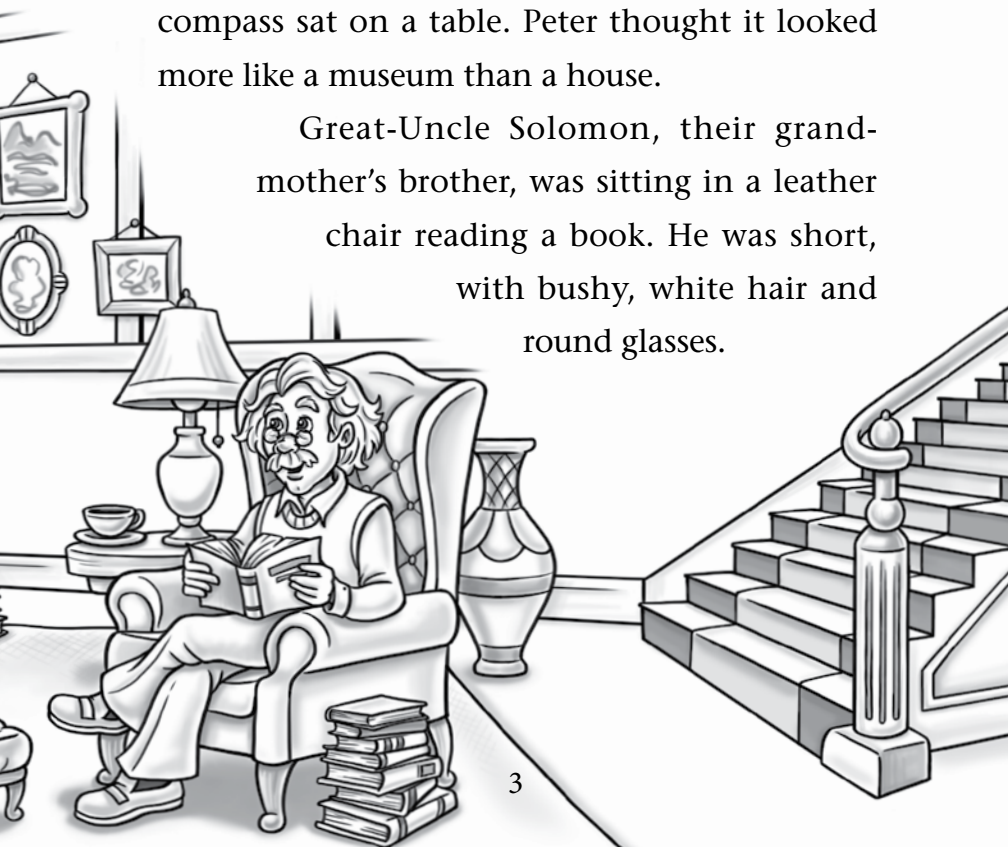
You would think she was five years older than him instead of just one.

“Okay,” said Peter.



He opened the tall wooden door and followed her into a large room. Peter looked up at the high ceiling. His eyes followed the stairs up to a landing leading to the second floor. Mary looked at a large map on the wall. It had red thumbtacks stuck into every continent. Small stacks of books were scattered around the room, and an old compass sat on a table. Peter thought it looked more like a museum than a house.

Great-Uncle Solomon, their grandmother's brother, was sitting in a leather chair reading a book. He was short, with bushy, white hair and round glasses.



“He looks like Einstein,” whispered Mary. “But he’s probably not as smart.”

All Peter knew was that his Great-Uncle Solomon didn’t know anything about kids. The last time they had seen him, four Christmases ago, he had given them each a new toothbrush.

Hank ran past Peter and barked at a tall, shiny suit of armor standing at the entrance to a long hallway. It held a shield in one hand and a long sword in the other.

“Your parents didn’t mention a dog,” said Great-Uncle Solomon.

“His name is Hank,” said Peter. “And he’s the world’s smartest dog.”

“Really? Can he tell time?” said Great-Uncle Solomon.

“He sure can,” answered Peter. “Hank, what time is it?”

Hank ran to the front window and looked at

the sun high in the sky. He ran back to Peter and barked four times.

Great-Uncle Solomon pulled out his pocket watch. "You are right, Hank. It is exactly four o'clock."

"He can also catch a Frisbee and play dead," said Peter.

"Impressive," said Great-Uncle Solomon. "Well, dinner will be served at five o'clock sharp. Hank, make sure they get to the kitchen on time. You kids can take a look around the house."

Hank ran over and barked at a scary wooden mask hanging on the wall. Peter picked up a rusty knife with a leather handle and a few coins with strange images on them.

Mary unfolded a dusty old map on a table. "Why do you have so many old things around your house?"

"Because I'm an archaeologist," Great-Uncle

Solomon said. "Do you two know what an archaeologist is?"

"Is it someone who decorates their house with old, breakable things, like my grandmother does?" said Peter.

"Not exactly," said Great-Uncle Solomon. "Mary, do you know?"

"Of course I do." Mary put her hands on her hips. "I'm ten years old. It's someone who travels to faraway places to dig up ancient artifacts and solve mysteries from the past."

"You're right," said Great-Uncle Solomon.

"That's what I meant," mumbled Peter. Of course Mary was right. She was always right.

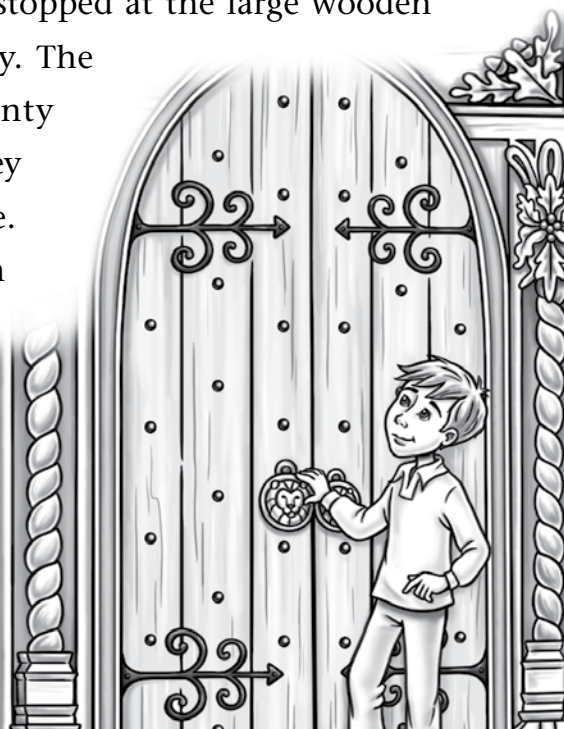
Great-Uncle Solomon walked over to the large map on the wall and pointed at the red thumbtacks. "I have been all around the world and made many amazing discoveries." He pointed at one red thumbtack poked into China and

looked toward Mary. “Like the one your parents made when they traveled to China and brought you home.”

Mary gave Peter a look that said, *You heard that, right?* Then she said to Great-Uncle Solomon, “Where do you keep your discoveries?”

“I keep a few around the house, but the most important ones are in the library—down the hallway.”

Peter ran down the long hallway past the suit of armor and stopped at the large wooden doors of the library. The doors looked twenty feet tall and like they were from a castle. Peter tried to open



one, but he couldn't turn the large handle that was shaped like a lion's head. Hank barked and scratched at the doors.

"Not yet," said Great-Uncle Solomon.

"Why not?" asked Mary.

Great-Uncle Solomon shook his head. "I don't think you are ready."

"Ready for what?" Peter stood straight and tall. "I'm nine years old, and I can read."

"I'm sure you can," Great-Uncle Solomon said. "But there is much more than books in the library. Amazing things. Things you could only dream about." He paused and looked into space for so long that Peter thought he might have fallen asleep. "Well, enough about the library for now. I have to go make dinner." He turned and walked down the long hallway toward the kitchen.

Peter stood there and stared at the old library

doors. "One month stuck in a house filled with old stuff."

Hank kept barking.

"I hope he has a television around here somewhere," said Mary.

"I forgot to tell you, I don't have a television," Great-Uncle Solomon shouted down the hall.

"What have we gotten ourselves into?" said Mary.

"I just hope he's a good cook, because I'm starving." Peter headed off to find his bedroom.



AN AMAZING DISCOVERY

Peter put his last pair of socks in the drawer and his suitcase in the closet. Then he lay down on the bed to test it out. As he stared at the ceiling, his stomach growled and his mind searched for something to do.

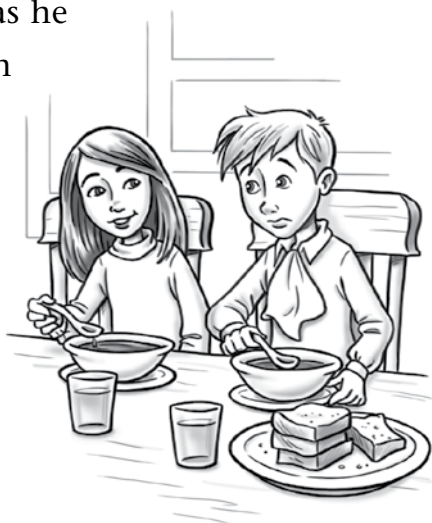
He heard Hank running down the long hallway, barking. “*Woof. Woof. Woof. Woof. Woof.*”

Mary poked her head out of her bedroom. “It must be five o’clock.”

“Good.” Peter slid off the bed and joined her. “All this boring stuff is making me hungry.”

“It’s not boring! It’s very interesting.” Mary led the way down the hall.

Peter rolled his eyes as he walked behind her. When they walked into the kitchen, they saw Great-Uncle Solomon pouring soup into three large bowls.



“Have a seat,” said Great-Uncle Solomon. “We have lots of things to talk about.”

Peter swallowed a big spoonful of the soup. It tasted like soggy cardboard and warm pond water.

“How does your soup taste?” asked Great-Uncle Solomon.

“It’s good . . . I guess,” said Peter.

Mary kicked him under the table and gave him a look. Peter reached down and rubbed his shin. Mary's karate training was really working.

Great-Uncle Solomon ate without saying anything. That seemed strange for somebody who had a lot to talk about. Finally, when Mary's bowl was empty, she asked, "What do you want to tell us about?"

"Come with me." Great-Uncle Solomon pushed himself back from the table and led them into the living room.

Peter could almost hear the old man's bones creaking. Mary and Peter sat on the big leather couch, and Hank lay down in front of the fireplace. Peter tried not to groan. This wasn't going to be fun.

"I have spent my life traveling around the world, and I've discovered many artifacts that prove the stories in the Bible are true," said

Great-Uncle Solomon. "But none of those discoveries compare to what I found one year ago on this very night."

"What was it?" Mary scooted closer.

"I haven't told anyone about this discovery yet," said Great-Uncle Solomon. "But I am getting old, and I think someone needs to know."

Peter sat up straighter. Maybe this wasn't going to be so boring after all. "You can tell us."

Great-Uncle Solomon stood up and quickly looked around the room. He checked under the pillows and behind the curtains like he was making sure no one else was in there.

"Who are you looking for?" said Peter. Who else could there possibly be?

"I think we're safe," said Great-Uncle Solomon.

"From what?" Mary looked behind the couch.

"Please don't interrupt," said Great-Uncle Solomon. He grabbed a safari hat and flashlight

and sat down. “I was on a dig in the desert beside the Dead Sea in Israel. Did you know that anyone can float on the Dead Sea? You can lie right on top of the water like a boat. You can even roll on top of the water like a log.”

“Was that your *amazing* discovery?” asked Peter. Okay, back to being boring.

“No, of course not.” Great-Uncle Solomon stood up and put on his safari hat. He slowly walked across the room, looking ahead as if he was seeing something. Peter looked, too, but he didn’t see anything.

“I was all alone one night when I found a tunnel that led to the middle of a big hill.” Great-Uncle Solomon ducked

