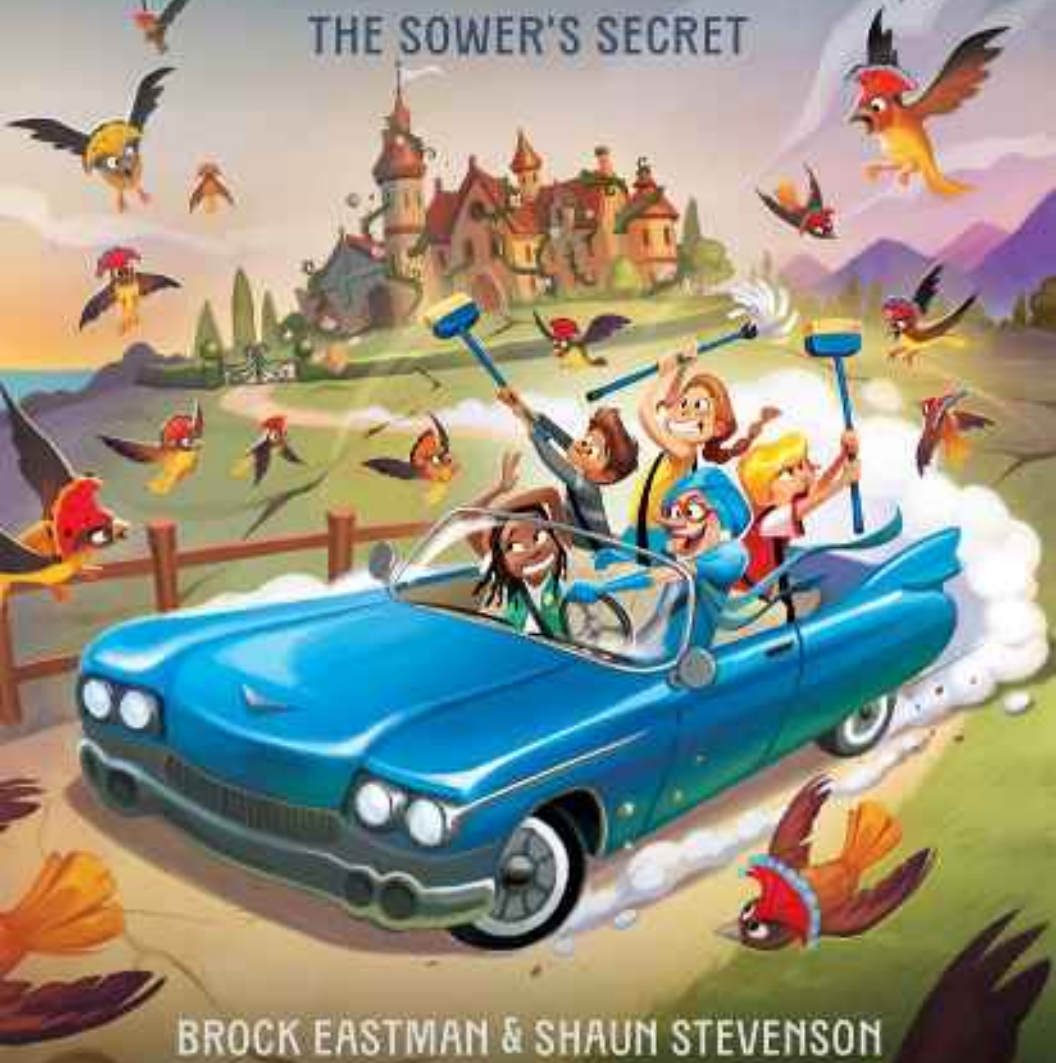


Parable Port

BOOK ONE

THE SOWER'S SECRET



BROCK EASTMAN & SHAUN STEVENSON

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Tyndale House Publishers
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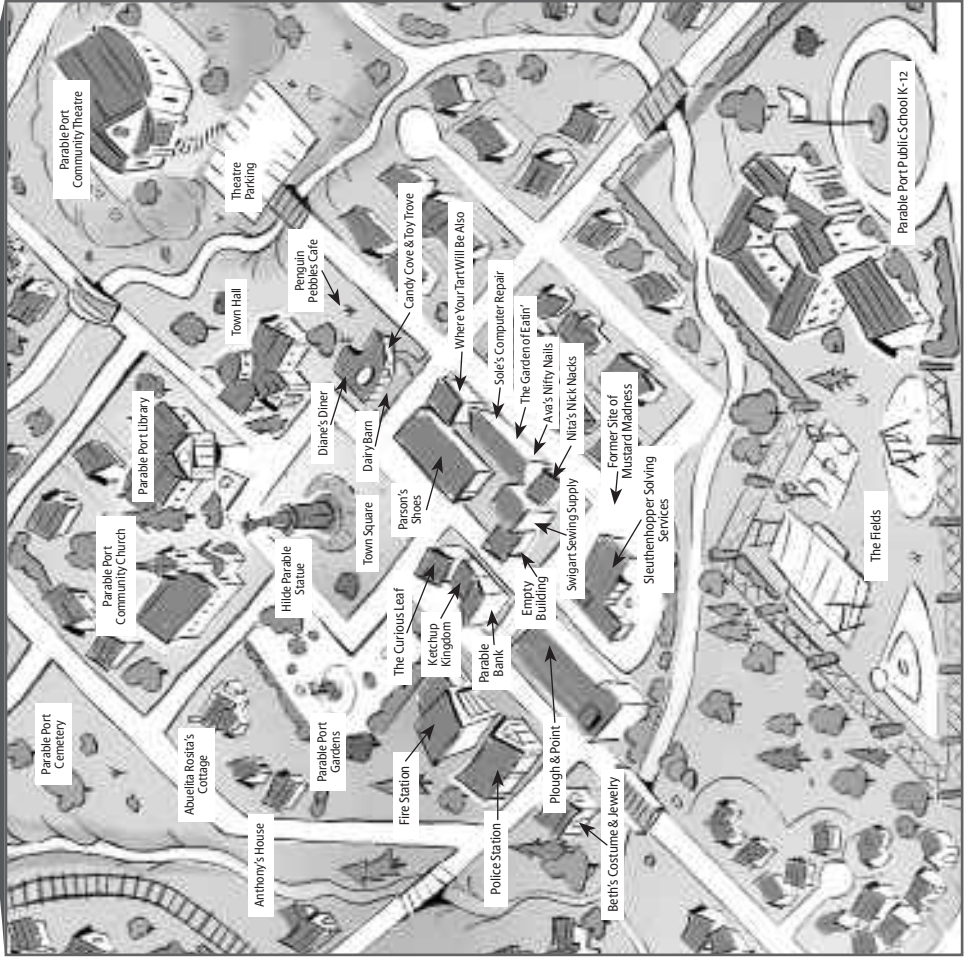
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Note to the Reader

WELCOME TO YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE, FRIEND. We invite you on this journey to explore a town that may seem much like yours, yet very different. Even though Anthony, J.R., Grace, Brooklyn, Duck, and Blake encounter wild adventures in Parable Port, they're still kids like you with the same worries, excitements, fears, and feelings you might face. We welcome you into this story inspired by the Parable of the Sower, a Bible story you can find in Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; and Luke 8:4-15. So read the pages within, find the clues, and reflect on who you are and who God made you to be. This adventure is for you, friend.

Your fellow adventurers,
BROCK AND SHAUN





CHAPTER 1

The Winding Path to Parable Port

“WATCH OUT!” Anthony threw his fingers over his eyes as his mom swerved across the road. But it was too late. There was a bump, thump, and pow! The passenger side of the car drooped as the vehicle slowed.

“What was that?” Anthony’s mom, Amanda, asked.

“A branch or something. It was a flash of green whipping into the road,” Anthony exclaimed. His heart pounded in his chest.

His mom took Anthony’s hand and quietly whispered, “*Gracias, Jesús*. We’re safe.” She sighed and looked into her rearview mirror. “Let’s see the damage.”

The passenger-side tire was toast, or perhaps flat as a

pancake. But at least Anthony and his mom were safe. Had this happened anywhere else on the winding mountain road leading down to Parable Port, they may not have walked away.

The cold rain pelted Anthony's face and arms as he walked toward where the branch should have been. But there was no sign of an obstacle. He glanced from side to side of the quiet, empty road for any evidence of an injured animal.

"Mami, I'm not sure what we hit," Anthony said. "There's nothing here."

His mom didn't respond. She'd popped the trunk of the car and was unloading their boxes. Anthony's heart sank at the reminder. All their stuff, what little they had, shoved into the trunk and the tiny trailer they towed behind the car as they started their "new" life in Parable Port—a new life *he* hadn't asked for. Anthony had been happy with their humble apartment in New York.

"Anthony, a little help, please," his mom called over her shoulder.

Together, they removed the boxes and a few other items from the trunk to find the spare tire, but no car jack.

His mom groaned and retrieved her phone from the car. She held it up. "Great, no service." She looked at the road ahead. "It looks like we're walking."

"It's raining."

She rubbed her forehead with both hands. "It's drizzling. And we only have a few miles to go. Have a little faith, *mi hijo*. We'll be fine."

He hadn't even wanted to move here in the first place, but he certainly didn't want all the kids in Parable Port to see him walking into town with his mom, carrying a waterlogged backpack and soaked like a dog caught in the rain.

Anthony looked back as he heard tires on gravel. A Jeep pulled over with its flashers on.

"Gracias, Jesús."

Anthony shook his head. She was always doing that. Every little thing was God or something about praying.

"Everyone all right?" a man in a moss-green raincoat and hat asked as he stepped onto the gravel shoulder. His dark-green boots crunched against the rocks as he squinted at the car and then back at Anthony and his mom.

"Yeah, we're okay," Anthony said. "Just a flat tire. Do you have a car jack?"

The man nodded. "Yep, let me grab it." He returned with a fancy-looking electronic jack in hand. He stuck out his free hand. "Name's Green."

Is Green his first or last name?

Anthony shook his hand. "I'm Anthony, and this is my mom, Amanda."

"Thank you for stopping, sir," Amanda said. "Our jack is missing."

"No problem. Always want to help someone in need," Green said. He went to work on removing the lug nuts. The car jack hummed as it lifted the vehicle. "You new to town?" he asked, nodding to the boxes and trailer.

"Yes," Anthony's mom said. "Do you live here?"

Green laughed. “No, just here on business.” He spun the wrench on one of the lug nuts. “What brings you two here to Parable Port?”

Anthony’s mom waved a hand at the car. “Long story. But I guess you could say we needed a change in our lives. My . . .” She glanced over at Anthony. “It’s just us now, so we needed to do *something*.”

Anthony swallowed and wandered back down the road while the man worked to change their tire. He surveyed the tree line, wiping the rain off his face. What had he seen? Anthony closed his eyes. A whip of green, he was sure of that. Too big to be a snake. It had to have been a branch. The wind had been blowing the trees around, but if a branch had fallen, where was it now?

He scratched his head. It had been a very long drive across the country. He was tired, and maybe his mind was blending the miles and miles of scenery together.

“Should be good to go,” he heard Green say to his mom. “But I wouldn’t drive on that spare for long.”

“Thank you for your help,” Anthony’s mom said.

“You’re welcome. If we don’t help each other out, then who are we?” Green said with a nod. He gave a short wave and drove off down the road.

“Anthony, come on. We’re ready to go,” his mom called.

He glanced at the tree line one last time. *Had* there been something in the road? Vines curled around the tree trunks, and for the briefest moment, Anthony thought he saw one of the vines squirm across the bark.

Anthony blinked and stared at the tree, scanning the limbs, the vines, and the thorns poking deep into the bark.

“Excuse me?” Anthony’s mom cleared her throat. “*Mijo?* In the car? About now? I’d really rather not be soaking wet!”

“Oh yeah! I’m coming!” Anthony whirled around and climbed back into the car, pressing his face against the window as his mom took the last few miles extra slow.

An aging, weather-beaten sign proclaimed, “Welcome to Parable Port, population 4,435.” If the sign was any indication of what the town would be like, then Anthony might be worse off than he had expected.