

FINDING ...

... **T** REASURE 

(OH WOW!)

By

Christopher Davis

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...*

“Finding Treasure,” by Christopher Davis is a simple and elegant story. One, by no means, does simplicity and elegance fully encapsulate what the author has pulled off here.

To wit, Harvey is a blind man damaged by a car accident who ends up at a racing event watching a boy whose dad is not only a racer but a driver well into a few before, while, and after driving.

Irony, is the crux on which this story is written, but epiphany is the foundation upon which it is built.

Davis has crafted a solid and well-built story, one certainly worth reading.

I can remember going to the sprint car races with my father when I was sixteen in Knoxville, Iowa. I just got my license and my sonly duty was to be able to drive my youngest brother there and my dad and whomever of his drunk friends needed a ride back to Newton. I was ecstatic and appreciative and couldn't even tell you if Danny Lasoski won but I sure as hell kept the hat I bought from the races to this day.

The treasure found is emotional, the story built is well crafted, the plot you may be already ready to guess is more subtle than I can describe to you, but the connection that lies at the heart of this story is what gives you the depth that good stories require.

I have a connection to this story through nostalgia. You can find your own, but I think that you will.

Five stars.

QUALITY QUOTABLE (*for the love of language...*)

He stepped off the linoleum onto the softer carpet and guided himself into the bedroom, running his hands along the hallway walls. He put his wallet in his backpack and hit the large button on his Talking Clock, which stated “Two... Thirteen... P.M.” in a loud monotone. He could catch the bus to the SCVBC, but they were only open until three today, so he’d have to figure something out after that. Uncertainty bit at his insides, but he’d deal with that when he came to it.

Word Count: 3223

Finding Treasure

Harvey woke to darkness again. The few seconds after he woke each morning consistently plagued him with panic and fear, no matter how many times he told himself, “This is normal. The darkness is just part of your life now.” Of course, the dream didn’t help either. Every night, it flashed through his brain as vivid as the day it happened, just over a month ago: *He’s walking down his street, a bag of groceries in each hand. A loud screeching of tires sounds behind him, he turns to see what it is, and all goes black.* The dream ended there, but when he’d woken in the hospital, he still saw only black.

They told him a car had blown a tire, jumped a curb, and hit him from behind. He’d been “miraculously lucky,” but had suffered *retinal detachment*. The shock of the information rattled through his bones like a mild electrical shock followed by the feeling of being sucked down a drain and the sickening pangs of intense nausea. It took Harvey a few hours to process what he’d been told, during which he simply breathed deeply and felt himself from the inside out, sightlessly assessing his pain and mobility. But despite coming to terms with the mental reality

of his situation, the darkness pulled at his insides, twisting fear into him. He could hear the common noises of daytime activity – televised conversations, car horns, birds chattering outside, ringing phones. It all *felt* normal, but Harvey perceived it at a distance, like he no longer existed in that moment.

He'd been taxied home two days later with a braille-pamphlet and a sticky-note reminder about his first appointment at the Santa Clara Valley Blind Center, neither of which he could read. Shutting the door behind him, he stood in the silence of his apartment. It smelled familiar. The worn carpet under his feet felt as it always did. The noise of the world outside still sounded the same. But he couldn't reconcile being unable to see, and thus be comforted by, his self-structured surroundings. He could feel the pictures on the wall staring at him, like they knew he'd never appreciate them again. He fumbled around the apartment turning on all the lights simply for regularity's sake. Bumping into things was the worst part. Despite keeping his hands in front of him and knowing the general layout of his apartment, the feeling of suddenly touching something unknown terrified him. He felt his way to the thermostat and turned up the heat, but nothing could warm his insides, full of frantic anxiety and unease. He went to bed that night shaking slightly, alone in his apartment, isolated from everything he once knew and loved.

Two weeks later, Harvey stood in his kitchen, listening to the Pacific Gas and Electric worker inspecting the connections behind his oven. Harvey crossed his arms, then put them into his pockets, then took them back out and set them behind him and drummed his fingers on the

counter. It was bad enough not knowing whether he'd imagined the smell of gas or not, but now he could smell the worker, too – the acrid combination of sweat and his waning deodorant filled Harvey's nostrils, encroaching on his typical home smells. The worker sighed and stood.

“You've definitely got a leak, Mr. Oates,” the worker said. “It's just a small crack in the pipe, and I can fix it, but you're going to have to leave the house for a few hours.” Harvey thought the worker's throaty voice sounded like it passed under a thick moustache, but wasn't sure. He had no sense of what the man actually looked like, which only added to his nervousness. He wasn't about to ask the guy to describe himself, but not knowing what he looked like gave Harvey the feeling of talking to a faceless apparition, an intruder of sorts. Harvey hoped the worker had good intentions, but he knew his own limitations well – the man could be pocketing Harvey's possessions, installing cameras, or who knows what else, and Harvey would be entirely unaware.

“I should be done and out of your hair by six,” the worker said.

“All right,” Harvey replied. “I'm just going to grab my stuff and I'll head out.” He stepped off the linoleum onto the softer carpet and guided himself into the bedroom, running his hands along the hallway walls. He put his wallet in his backpack and hit the large button on his Talking Clock, which stated “*Two... Thirteen... P.M.*” in a loud monotone. He could catch the bus to the SCVBC, but they were only open until three today, so he'd have to figure something out after that. Uncertainty bit at his insides, but he'd deal with that when he came to it.

Harvey asked the PG&E worker to lock the door when he left, and pocketed his keys from the bowl on the table by the door. He opened the door and the overwhelming combination of cheap perfume and cigarette smoke poured over him. He knew who it was before she spoke.

“Oh. Hi, Harvey. It’s Susan from 13B. I was just coming to talk to you, actually. Is this a bad time?” Susan asked. She didn’t wait for him to respond. “Hey listen, I’m supposed to take David to his father’s race tonight, but I just got called in to work and I can’t find an-y-one,” she broke the word into three syllables for emphasis, “to go with him. Is there any chance you could take him?”

Harvey’s immediate response was no. He didn’t know how he could “take” her son there in the first place, being obviously unable to drive. But more importantly, the races sounded like the last place he wanted to be. He tried to put it politely.

“Well, I don’t really know if I’d be the best person to…” He started, but she interrupted him.

“Oh, you wouldn’t have to do much of anything. David’s dad would pick you up, and then you’d just sit with David until the races are over. He usually sits with my friend Debbie, but she’s off tonight with that *boyfriend* of hers, and you know what women get like with men like that,” she continued. Harvey tried again.

“I really don’t think…” Harvey started, but again, she cut in.

“He’s a really great kid, and I know he’d have fun with you. He always runs to say ‘hi’ to you anytime he sees you getting the mail. And it could be really fun for *you*, even…” she said, her voice trailing off hesitantly.

Harvey hated when this happened, and it happened all the time. People talking to him would unintentionally venture into the “blindness” territory of conversation, where they weren’t sure what to say or if it was okay to bring it up at all. Occasionally, he almost enjoyed the corner people talked themselves into – it gave them a taste of the confusion and unknowing that plagued

Harvey every day. But it was bad enough being blind and afraid and isolated without people getting all worried they'd offended him or weren't being politically correct. He stood there, listening to her smack-chew the soggy lump of gum in her mouth, and figured he didn't have anywhere else he could go until six, anyway.

"I can take him," Harvey said.

She thanked him profusely, hugging him again and again, the gum-smacking reverberating loudly in his ear with every embrace.

The drive there took longer than Harvey expected. He made small talk with David's father, Mark, as the truck knocked down the freeway, the sunset pressing its dissipating warmth on their faces. Harvey dug his fingers into the fraying seat cover. He could feel the truck pulling back and forth, straining under the immense weight of the trailer, but worried far more that it actually came from Mark's continued swigging from beer bottles – Harvey could smell it even despite the open windows. Adding to his anxiety, Mark set the empty bottles upright next to his feet, where they quickly fell over and rolled toward the pedals. Every *clink* of the bottles rolling into each other under the steering wheel made Harvey flinch. Mark never changed his method, though, setting each "fallen soldier," as he called them, back upright once he found it with his free hand. Harvey continually mopped the nervous sweat pouring from his forehead, but it's not like he could ask to be let out or offer to drive.

The wind coming through the open windows – Mark insisted they be rolled fully down the entire drive – pelted his face as the trailer barraged them with sounds from behind the truck: the *CHINK* of a chain hitting the road beneath it, the guttural groan of replacement tires rubbing against each other every time the trailer went over a bump, causing the nylon tie-downs holding them in place to crack and squeak as they stretched tight. After about an hour, they turned off the freeway and Harvey smelled and heard pines rushing by outside the windows as the truck wove down a quieter road. Mark told them he'd have to let them off at the "public entrance," as kids weren't allowed in "the pits." Harvey got out, glad to be alive, as David hugged his dad and wished him good luck. Harvey realized he'd left his cane in the cab of the truck, but David must not have realized, and shut the door. Harvey called for Mark to stop, but it went unnoticed. As the truck and trailer rumbled off, David took Harvey's hand and led him toward a cacophony of foreign sounds.

As they approached, Harvey knew he'd made a terrible mistake. Even from outside the track boundaries, the smell of smoke, gas, nachos, dirt, sweat, and beer permeated his nostrils. His ears weren't any better off, ringing with the yells and whoops of the crowd, the deafening, cyclical roar of the cars, and the staticky-shouting of the race's announcer attempting to narrate the race over all of it. He let David guide him through the ticket gate toward the blasting noise of commotion. They waited a few minutes beside the bleachers as the cars flew around and around the track. After a few minutes, the cars slowed to a crawl and the announcer's booming voice echoed over the area, "*THE YELLOW IS OUT. SCOTT BUSBY HAS BLOWN A FLAT TIRE AND KISSED THE BARRIER IN TURN TWO.*" David took Harvey up the metal bleachers, where he tripped repeatedly over baseball-sized gobs of thick mud, as the announcer continued: "*GET A BEER WHILE YOU CAN, FOLKS, 'CAUSE IT'S GONNA' BE RIGHT BACK TO THE*

ACTION HERE AT OCEAN SPEEDWAY AS SOON AS WE GET HIM OFF THE TRACK.” They must have walked almost to the top of the bleachers, because Harvey could feel the night air cool as it twisted around them.

“My dad says I have to sit up here at the top because it’s safer. The cars fling mud at the lower seats, and one time a car got flipped over the fence,” David said, as they sat down.

“Oh, that’s good,” Harvey said distractedly, shaking slightly on the cold bench. He didn’t know how to feel except overwhelmed. His ears were filled with so much vibration he thought they might not work properly ever again. Even when the cars slowed for a yellow flag, it sounded as if massive beasts paced the oval track, panting deep, violent breaths, just waiting to be set loose, and occasionally firing off what sounded like gunshots. He even thought he could feel peoples’ eyes on him, though no one said anything if they were staring. *It must look pretty strange, seeing a blind man at the races, he thought, like seeing a deaf person at the symphony.* David wasn’t joking about the flying mud clumps, either – every lap or two, Harvey heard either the higher-pitched *CHING* of a clump shaking the chain-link fence apparently surrounding the track or the *THUCK* of a clump hitting the metal bleachers.

“These are the Street Stocks,” David told him, his warm breath caressing Harvey’s ear, “but this is only the B-Main heat race, so there’s two more races for each car type, the A-Main and the Main Event. My dad drives the Modifieds. They should start their series right after this race. Then there’s the Sprint cars, the Four-Bangers, and the Figure Eight race.”

Harvey slowly adjusted to his surroundings – at least, as much as he could given the circumstances. As the wind blew through his legs from the gap beneath the bench seats, David filled him in on some basic details, then went quiet watching the race. Harvey shut his eyes tight

and concentrated, finding he could distinguish a lot more than he'd expected: one car's roaring engine pulling slightly ahead of another, or the metallic-*KENK* of car-on-car contact, followed by the distressed skidding of tires and fluctuating engine revs of one of them trying desperately not to hit a wall. Most of these actions was followed by a sudden, collective cheer or gasp from the crowd, and the announcer – when he could hear him over the cars – helped orient Harvey to where his general attention should be on the track: “*BOBBY HOAG GRABS THE LEAD AT THE FRONT OF THE PACK, BUT KENNY NOTT IS REALLY PUTTING THE PRESSURE ON! THEY'RE NOSE AND NOSE DOWN THE BACK STRETCH, BUT HOAG IS BOXING HIM OUT STAYING LOW INTO TURN THREE! FIFTEEN LAPS DOWN, FIFTEEN TO GOOOOOOO!*”

After that race, the Modifieds trundled out onto the track revving their engines threateningly at the other drivers. Harvey could tell they were smaller than the Street Stocks by the slightly higher-pitched growl of their engines. David cheered like mad when his father's name blasted over the P.A. system: “*RIGHT BEHIND BURKE, WE'VE GOT MARK MARTIN IN THE NUMBER NINE CAR...*” as they lined up behind the pace car. However, David's enthusiasm evaporated almost as quickly as it had appeared. Only moments after the race began, Harvey heard a number of metallic crunches, followed by a collective gasp from the crowd, and the announcer calling, “*OOOOH! AND CODY BURKE CONNECTS WITH NICK DECARLO, PUTTING HIM INTO THE WALL ALONG WITH MARK MARTIN! LOOKS LIKE EVERYONE'S OKAY, BUT YOU MIGHT WANNA GRAB SOME MORE BEER AND SNACKS, BECAUSE THE RED FLAG IS OUT AND IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE GOING TO NEED THE TOW TRUCK...*” The entire race came to a stop for a couple of minutes while a tow truck dragged the cars back into the pits. Harvey felt David plunk back down on the bench next to him,

but didn't know what physical-comforting protocol was for consoling a little kid you weren't related to. Luckily, David rebounded fairly quickly. Harvey guessed this wasn't an uncommon occurrence, but admired David's positive attitude nonetheless.

"Cody Burke always crashes people," David said. "He's the biggest squirrel out here. That's what Dad calls drivers who drive crazy all over the track." He sighed, then stood up. "C'mon, I wanna show you something," David said, taking Harvey's hand. Harvey tried to protest, but it was all he could do to not fall down the bleachers as David led him by the hand. David guided him back down the bleachers, through the mud-splattered concrete, and around the corner of the stands. Toward the back of the stands, David put Harvey's hand on a metal support beam under the bleachers. Harvey ran his hands over the cold scaffolding, unsure what exactly David was trying to show him. They were about three feet apart and crisscrossed at waist height, and then again at chest height. The noise of the race was softened behind the stands, and the wind hissed quietly through the bars like they stood at the entrance to a great tunnel. It smelled dank and wet – spilled beer and mud, old french fries, and waterlogged paper.

"People always drop stuff down here and then Dad lets me look for treasure," David said. "Come with me!"

"David, I can't. It'd be really..." Harvey started, but he could already hear David climbing into the metal labyrinth.

"David, wait!" Harvey called after him, but heard only the sound of David's palms and shoes sliding over the bars fading farther into the entanglement of scaffolding.

"Come on, Harvey!" David called from a ways off.

Harvey stood, still holding the bars. He couldn't move. The races had been bad enough, but this was just insane. He couldn't just let David go, but the number of obstacles between him and the other side seemed insurmountable. He didn't know how he could possibly climb through the metal labyrinth to start with, but he could also smell garbage and couldn't even imagine what else might be down there. The race felt many miles away.

Seeing no other option but to go in after David, Harvey crouched, and contorted his way through the first set of bars. He immediately knocked his head against a cross-bar just inside and the sound vibrated through the bars around him. Massaging his head with one hand, Harvey clasped the bar above him with the other and tried to slow his breathing.

"I can't do this," Harvey called into the metal skeleton, but he'd said it more to himself than to David. He couldn't hear David anymore and knew he had to press on. He slid his foot across the sticky ground, pushing litter out of his way, until it hit the next support. He ran his hands along the bars around and above him, trying to memorize the shape and distance of them – a cross-bar a foot to his right, another diagonal directly above him that sloped down toward his left shoulder, and a third at waist-height about a foot in front of him. He tried to picture the next open space. If these supports were all the same, he could go under and through the next one on the left side, then stand up to the right to avoid hitting his head again. He twisted himself slowly through the next bars and stood up, this time without injury. He tried the same movement into the next space to see if each was laid out in the same pattern and found it was. Still slowly, but more confidently, he spun himself through the next three or four, not hesitating to check each open space, but moving with relative ease, relying on his understanding of the sameness of this caged entanglement of metal.

Twice, Harvey had beer spilled on him from high above, kicked over by a drunken fan, and other litter dropped near him occasionally, but somehow, it didn't bother him at all. He was almost enjoying himself down here. The sound of the cheers and clanging footsteps above, the cold metal bars in his hands, even the smell of discarded and forgotten clothing, deteriorated by time and weather – it all felt oddly like a familiar, even visual, experience. He swung through five or six more sections, picturing himself as a monkey using vines to traverse the forest canopy and realized, for the first time, he wasn't focused on the darkness.

“What do you think?” David asked, making Harvey jump and hit his head on another cross-bar.

“You nearly gave me a heart-attack,” Harvey said, rubbing his head. “Why didn't you say something earlier? I thought you were through to the other side by now.”

“I was watching you. You're a good climber,” David said, and Harvey heard the smile break on David's face.

“Did you find any treasure?” Harvey asked.

“Nah, not this time,” David replied. “You?”

“I think I did, actually,” Harvey said, smiling.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Finding Treasure spawned from a collection of memories I have as a kid watching my dad race Grand American Modifieds at Ocean Speedway in Watsonville, California - the thundering engines, flying clumps of mud, and post-race, sub-bleacher spelunking. Attending races at a dirt track is to experience sensory overload, so I thought it might be interesting to write about it with one less sense than we're typically used to, which also supplied my protagonist with a point of conflict in his life and something to work toward, simultaneously. Obviously, sound became central to this story, and it was both a challenging and enjoyable task to attempt writing auditory description of that magnitude. At its core, it's a story about being shoved violently by life and finding some way to claw your way through it, inch by inch, which I hope translates well enough to my fellow humans. While I wouldn't say I have specific stylistic*

influences, I've always enjoyed the work of Raymond Carver, Tobias Wolff, and Ron Carlson. A few, more recent, literary "influences" (people I've read) include: John Updike, George Saunders, Stephen King, Billy Collins, George Orwell, and Cormac McCarthy.

AUTHOR BIO: Chris Davis earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in Creative Writing at Utah State University in 2017 and 2019. His work has been published in such literary magazines as *Foliage Oak*, *Sink Hollow*, *Biostories*, *Fleas on the Dog*, and *Z Publishing House's* anthology, "Utah's Best Emerging Poets 2019." He currently lives in Tyler, Texas, where he teaches Composition at Tyler Junior College. His story 'Corbin' appeared in **Issue 9**.