

WHAT ON EARTH?

Salt

BART AND LYNN KING

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CHAPTER 1

Salt from the Sea

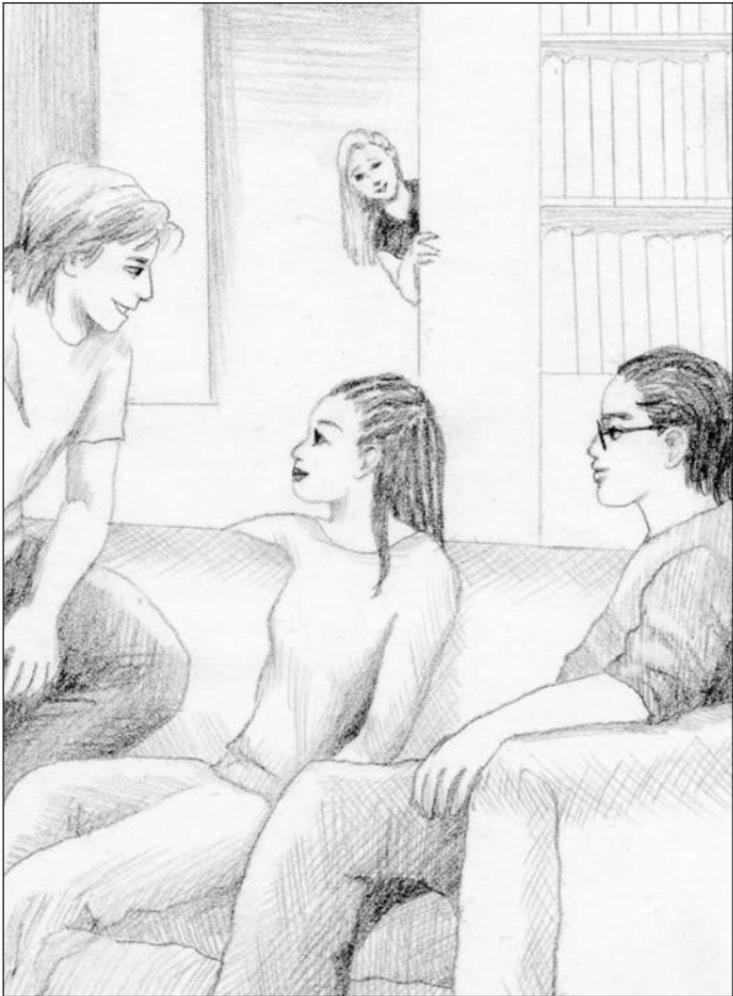
Tess, Nate, and Sam were at Val's house. Tess had made some popcorn. But she could not find something.

“Where do you keep the salt?” she asked Val.

Nate, Sam, and Val were sitting in the next room. The group was about to watch a film together.

“It's in the white jar,” Val yelled.

Nate called out to Tess, “I will take mine



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plain!” He looked at his pals. “Let’s talk about our film.”

“Do you mean the film we are about to watch?” asked Sam.

“Or the film we need to make together?” said Val.

All four had the same class. It was a film class taught by Ms. Reese. They were a team. They had made one film so far. It was about sugar.

“I mean the film we have to make,” Nate said.

“I do not have any ideas. Do you have something in mind?” Val asked. Both boys shook their heads.

“I found the salt!” Tess yelled from the next room.

Val smiled. “That’s it! We could do a film on salt.”

Nate liked this. “Salt is a very pure food,” he said. “Not much is added to it. Salt comes from the sea or salty lakes.”

“But does it come from any place else?” asked Val.

Nate and Sam looked at each other and shrugged. They did not know.

Tess walked in with two bowls of popcorn. She handed one to Nate. Tess heard what Val asked. “Yes, it does,” Tess said. “Salt comes from a jar.”

“I know most foods have salt,” said Val.

“Cooks use it a lot.”

“Sometimes they use too much,” said Nate.

Sam laughed. “I made a cake without salt once.”

“Why?” asked Tess.

“Yes, *why*,” said Sam. “It seemed odd. So I left it out.”

Val and Nate looked up. They knew how to cook. And they both knew that you had to add a little salt to make most foods taste right.

“How did the cake taste?” asked Val.

Sam made a face. “Bad.”

“Most sweet foods have a dash of salt. It adds to the sweet taste,” Val said. Nate gave a

nod.

“I like the sound of that,” said Sam.

“I tried to make a batch of sweet corn bread once,” said Val. “But I must have used salt, not sugar.”

“That’s quite a slip up,” said Nate. “How was the corn bread?”

“Really bad,” said Val. “More salty than Sam’s cake, I’m sure.”

The group talked some more. All four of them agreed that salt would make a good film. They thought about what each of them could do for the project. Nate would learn about sea salt. Tess would see if salt came from more places than just the sea. Val would find out if salt was

found in their state. Sam would shoot the film.

Tess put some popcorn in her mouth. Then she made an odd face.

“Oh, dear,” she said.

“What’s wrong?” asked Nate.

“That was not salt in the white jar,” said Tess. “It was sugar!” She set down the bowl of popcorn.

Val smiled. “Did I say the white jar? I meant the blue one.”

Sam reached for the bowl. He ate some of the popcorn. “Hey, this is pretty good!” he said. “You should try it.” He munched happily on the sweet popcorn.

Tess looked at him. She shook her head

from side to side. “Sam, you are too much. Is there anything sweet you don’t like?”

CHAPTER 2

Salt of the Earth

The day came for the team to meet in class. The group sat around a table. Ms. Reese was there, too. She wanted to check in with them. First, Ms. Reese looked at Val.

“How is it going, Val?” she asked.

Val had made some calls about salt in their state. So far, she had found nothing.

“I am still working on it,” Val said.

Then it was Nate’s turn. He had learned a lot. In the old days, salt was a big deal. It was

worth as much as gold in some places.

“Wow!” said Sam. “I wish I lived back then. I would be rich!”

Nate nodded. He said anyone with a lot of salt back then could be rich. In some places, coins were made of salt. It was worth that much. Large cakes of salt were worth more than the salt coins.

“Sam made a cake with no salt once. But I have never heard of a salt cake,” said Val with a laugh.

Ms. Reese said a salt cake was just dried up salt. It was cut into a long, flat shape. This made it easy to carry and sell.

“Why was salt worth as much as gold?”

Tess asked.

“We all need salt to live,” Nate said. “But when it’s hot, we sweat. Then we lose salt.”

“Is that why my eyes burn when I run hard?” asked Val.

“Yes,” said Nate. “The salt in sweat stings your eyes.”

“Time to buy a headband,” said Val.

Nate shared more. Some of the first roads were made to carry salt from one place to the next. This was called the “salt trade.” Folks back then had learned something about salt. When added to food, it kept the food from going bad. There was no way to freeze food then. Salt made the food last longer.

“I think I get it,” Tess said. “We all need salt, and this makes it worth more.”

“That sounds right, Tess. Now, I know that salt can come from the sea. Have you learned how the salt gets there in the first place?” asked Ms. Reese.

Tess knew this. “Salt is a kind of rock. This makes salt the only rock that we eat!”

“I eat rocks?” said Sam.

Tess went on. “Salt is found in some rocks and in dirt. When rain falls, salt gets washed away. The rain and salt end up in streams. Then it goes to the sea. If the mix of rain and salt is left in the sun, it will dry up. All that is left is the salt.”

She told the group more. In spots where seas had dried up in the past, salt was left in the ground.

“So we can get salt from the sea *and* from the ground,” said Tess.

“It sounds like you will have a good film,” said Ms. Reese. Just then, the bell rang. The school day was over.

Nate, Tess, and Val reached for their backpacks. Sam stopped them.

“What are you three doing now?” he asked. Before they could speak, Sam said, “Come with me.”

“Why?” asked Val.

“Never mind that,” Sam said.

Nate gave him a funny look. “Should we be scared?” he asked.

“Does this have to do with junk food?” asked Val. She knew Sam liked a snack after school.

“If you must know, I want to go to the store,” said Sam. “But not just to buy junk food.”

“Why, then?” asked Tess.

But Sam would not tell them any more.