



Adam Martin:
Mystery of
The Puzzling Code
by
David Drake

For 10 to 15 year old readers

An Adam Martin Mystery:
THE PUZZLING CODE

**Book One in the up-coming
Adam Martin Mysteries Series**

**by
David Drake**

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SOME THINGS ABOUT THIS BOOK

The author, David Drake, has been writing for young people for many years. When he writes, he likes to use the 'best' words and not the 'easiest' words. So, once in a while there may be some words the younger readers will not have learned yet. In those instances (cases), he puts a synonym or short definition in parenthesis () next to the word, so the reader won't have to take time to look them up and can learn them instantaneously (immediately, on the spot). The readers that already know those words, can just skip the explanations and continue on their way.

He hopes you will find this approach helpful and comfortable. Happy reading!

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CHAPTER ONE

Danger Just Seemed to Follow the Boy

One might find it difficult to believe, but Adam was the happiest 13-year-old boy he knew – although he really didn't know a lot of other 13 year old boys. He and his grandfather – Adam called him Yapa, the reason for which will become clear – lived together in a very old, rundown apartment building in a very old, rundown section of a city. They had three rooms – a kitchen, his grandfather's room and a living room, which doubled as Adam's bedroom. Yapa described it as cozy rather than small, and adequate rather than cheap. Adam had grown to love his cozy, adequate home – the only one he had ever known. It was on the 8th floor and from the kitchen window he could look out above the rooftops and scan the skyline from the grassy hills on the west to the wide, slow flowing river on the east. He could also look down into the ally and gaze across the narrow space onto the roof of the building just to the north.

Adam spent his days either sitting, or walking with crutches – as a baby he had contracted an infection in the membranes around his brain and one result was that he had never been able to use his legs. The second result was . . . well, that will become obvious later on.

His father had never been a part of his life and at the time he became ill his mother was unable to cope with the problem. The day he was released from the hospital she left him at his grandfather's and never returned.

They lived on a small retirement check his grandfather received every month from the college at which he had taught before retiring to care for his grandson.

Because of Adam's unique physical condition – he and Yapa never considered it a handicap – and because of the second result of the high fever that had been associated with his illness – a super intelligent brain – they determined that it was best if Adam was homeschooled. It meant he didn't spend much time with other children on a daily basis, but he had friends at the library and at the YMCA where he went to swim and workout three times a week.

For a thirteen-year-old, he had developed very muscular arms and chest, a result of his need to depend solely on the upper part of his body for movement. He could do two hundred push-ups and a hundred pull-ups without breaking a sweat. The other boys admired his strength. He had noticed that girls spent time looking at him when he was wearing a tight T shirt – so, he wore lots of tight T shirts!

Most of his 13-year-old friends were in the eighth grade. His studies were mostly at the 12th grade level. He didn't let on about that to them. He didn't want to stand out as special in that way – it was bad enough that most folks seemed to pity him for his physical condition. He hated that – being pitied – but Yapa said that was the other people's problem and he just needed to go on about his life the way he wanted to. He tried very hard to do just that.

Adam liked himself. Adam liked his grandfather. Adam liked his home and most days, Adam liked his life. He was, you see, the happiest 13-year-old boy he knew.

His grandfather had grown up in the area where Hungary is today, a country in Eastern Europe. The word Grandfather in Hungarian is nagyapa. As a young boy, Adam had shortened it to Yapa.

Yapa had come to the United States as a young man in his mid-twenties to escape what he and his friends at the university referred to as 'intellectual suffocation'. The government didn't like people thinking for themselves or questioning how things were in their country. So, when he finished his college degree, he left – escaped would be a

better term. Kolos (his first name in Hungarian, which he changed to Karl in the States) had led many protests and therefore had made himself quite unpopular with the officials in his home country. He barely escaped with his life, having crossed the border in a hail of gunfire from the federal police.

In his adopted country of the United States, he taught in a small college for nearly thirty years. During that time he married and had a daughter. She in turn had Adam. His wife died and the reader already knows about Adam's father and mother. And, so it was that Adam and Yapa had built a life for themselves – one they both considered happy and wonder-filled.

Adam loved things that were out of the ordinary: people who in some way were different from the rest, ideas that made him rethink things he had always believed, and most of all, mysteries – especially those involving puzzles or codes. Yapa loved anything that Adam loved and he encouraged and helped his grandson chase his interests, wherever they took him; it was not always the safest approach to living, but that's sort of how guys do things. On more than one occasion Adam had helped solve local mysteries that had baffled the police department.

Since coming to his new country, Yapa felt it was necessary to stay out of the spotlight – to hide in a way – in case any of his old adversaries (enemies) might still want to do him harm. He changed his Hungarian last name from Nagy to Nelson. He was a brilliant scholar and could have been employed by the best universities in the country, but in order to remain hidden and protect his family he chose to teach at the unremarkable Evergreen Academy – a small four year college at the edge of the city.

After leaving Hungary, Yapa modified his appearance by growing a full beard and wearing his hair long. It remained that way to the present day, although through the years it had changed from brown to gray and finally white. He blended right in with the other poor folks who lived in the nearby apartment buildings and with the street people who occupied the alleys and abandoned buildings in the area. From time to time he still taught a class of sociology (the study of how

people interact with each other) or anthropology (the study of cultures, past and present) at the Academy. [The reader may want to Google sociology and anthropology to gain a more complete idea about those areas of study.] He loved to teach and it brought in a little extra money.

One warm summer evening Adam and Yapa were sitting in lawn chairs on the old, rusted, iron fire escape just outside their kitchen window, hoping to catch the cool breeze that dependably blew through the alley between the tall buildings. Yapa handed Adam an old book. It was large and thick and dusty.

“This is an authentic history of Hungary. It was printed before the government rewrote the country’s past to make it and its people look better than we were. I’d like you to work your way through it so you can have a true sense about where you and your family came from. It was given to me by my father who taught social studies. He placed it in my hands the very last time I saw him before leaving Europe. I had already read it, but I could tell he really wanted me to have it so I made space for it in my travel bag.”

Adam accepted the book understanding it was intended to be a precious gift.

Yapa continued.

“He was an interesting man – your great grandfather. You two would have gotten on well together.”

“Are you implying that he and I are both a bit odd, strange, weird, peculiar?”

“I’m not implying it, son, I’m coming right out and saying it, but the best description might be unique.”

It was good for a laugh between them. They laughed often and long. Yapa believed that helped his grandson stay on the right track in life – to see the humor that lived everywhere around him and especially inside him. Adam believed it helped his grandfather remain young at heart and enthusiastic about life. It seemed to be doing all of those things. And, as Yapa had often said, when you spend your time looking for the happy side of life your mood stays positive and you don’t have time to dwell on the unhappy side, which always drags you down.

Adam remembered isolated stories that Yapa had told about his own father – Adam’s great grandfather. He had spent time as a young man traveling the world and had even spent time right there in the area of the city where Adam lived. Although it had never been said, he figured it was why Yapa had settled there when he arrived in the country.

Adam opened the book and began paging through it. He hated books with pictures because he figured that meant the author wasn’t good enough at using words to describe things in ways the reader could understand. He was delighted to find that there was not a single picture in the entire book. It made him eager to get started.

As he closed it, something fell out and onto his lap – a double folded piece of thick paper.

“This yours, Yapa?” he asked not moving to unfold it in case it might be something private.

“No. Not mine. Looks very old – yellow around the edges and its uneven surface.”

Adam began unfolding it in a much more careful manner than one might expect from an energetic, impatient, 13-year-old.

“Hmm?” was his first response as he turned it bottom to top to set the letters in the proper position for reading.

“Odd!” was his second response as he scanned down the page.

“Take a look,” he said handing it over to Yapa.

“Yapa, whose glasses hung around his neck from a dark brown cord, moved them up to his face, adjusted the wire frames around his ears, and surveyed the sheet.

“Fascinating. Make any sense to you?”

Adam loved it when Yapa asked him things like that. It told him the old gentleman valued his opinion and recognized his intelligence.

“A code, I suppose, maybe, you think?”

“I like the confidence you show in your response – I suppose, maybe, you think.”

There were more chuckles.

“Well,” Adam went on as if explaining his first take on it,

“there are words and numbers that appear to have been set down in a random fashion. That serves no purpose unless it is a code of some kind.”

“Assuming you are correct – and that certainly makes sense – does the pattern point you anywhere? I mean does it give you any ideas about where to begin decoding it.”

Adam looked at it for some time.

“Would you know your father’s printing if you saw it? Is this his?”

“An interesting starting point. Let me look again.”

Yapa looked it over carefully.

“Printing was not his usual method of writing things – he wrote in the fancy cursive style taught during the time he was in school. We really have no way of knowing.”

“Maybe we do,” Adam said. “Look, here at the front of the book - at the bottom of the title page. There is a message hand printed in English.

To my dear son, Kofo. Let history be your path and truth be your profitable destination. And it’s signed, Your loving father.”

“I guess I have never even opened the book – can you believe that. This is the first time I have seen his note to me. Compare the printing with that on the sheet of paper.”

They spent a few minutes glancing back and forth between the two and came to the same determination.

“They are definitely a match,” Adam said.

“Like two peas in a pod,” Yapa said.

“So, the code on the sheet of paper is some sort of a message from your father to you.”

“I have always thought it odd he would give me a copy of a book he knew I had already studied. I explained it to myself by thinking he was really saying, ‘Never forget where you came from’. Now, I have to think there was something more than that.”

“His message to you is worded strangely, I think,” Adam said and went on to explain. “Doesn’t something seem out of place? Let me read it again. Let history be your path and truth be your profitable destination. ‘Profitable’ doesn’t

feel right does it?”

“I suppose not. Our home was certainly not into profitable – money making – activities. I see what you mean. Perhaps its meaning will come to light as we get further into it.”

Adam nodded and put it aside in his head.

“Okay then, but why a message in code, Yapa?”

“Perhaps something he was afraid would get me in trouble if the authorities saw it or something he wanted to keep very private between the two of us.”

Adam nodded and continued.

“Let me copy what’s on the sheet of code onto another piece of paper so we don’t damage the original. We can put it back into the book for safe keeping.”

With the copying finished, Adam was ready to put it back where he had found it.

“Hmm? I’m wondering exactly where it was in here.”

“Look for an imprint the thicker folded sheet may have left on the pages between which it has been compressed all these years,” Yapa said. “The book’s pages are made of very thin, fragile paper.”

“Good idea. I knew there was a reason I kept you around.”

Smiles.

Adam opened the book to the approximate place he remembered it had been. It was a good guess. A half dozen pages further on there was a perfect imprint on both pages just the way Yapa had figured there might be.

“Page 266,” he said, “although I suppose that has no significance.”

“My father was a thoughtful man – there could well have been a reason he chose that place in the book. What topic is being discussed there?”

“Well, let’s see. The era being discussed seems to be the very early 1900s. The main section is titled: The Pre-World War Connection – 1900 to 1915. Look here! There is something underlined – a subtitle; The Atherton Connection. You remember anything about that?”

“Not a whole lot. As I recall two German agents were working in this part of the United States committing big money robberies. The money was to be sent to Germany to help pay for the war that country was preparing to wage in Europe against Hungary along with all the others. US Government agents had tracked them down and believed they had been responsible for more than one hundred thousand dollars’ worth of thefts – a huge amount of money back then.”

“Right. If I remember the inflation rate correctly that would be worth nearly two million dollars in today’s money.”

“And, I just imagine you do remember it correctly. That brain of yours either remembers correctly or it has no information to remember.”

“I suppose you’re right. Anyway, it goes on to say that as the federal agents were closing in on them the Germans fell off a railroad dock at Atherton and were killed by a passing train. The location of the loot was never found.”

“Lots of ways for a young man’s imagination to fly with that, I suppose,” Yapa said sitting back and waiting to hear his grandson begin spinning interesting possibilities.

“You bet there are. Like your father knew where the hiding place was and this code he put down will lead us to it. Maybe that’s why he added the out of place word, ‘profitable’, to the note at the beginning of the book. Atherton is the name of a section on the north side of this city by the way.”

“You have never been short on imagination, Adam, I’ll give you that.”

“Let’s just suppose that is what it is all about,” Adam began, “and that we follow the clues on this sheet and find the money. Who would it belong to?”

“All that happened over a hundred years ago. I imagine it would be finder’s-keepers, now.”

“Wow! That would be terrible, wouldn’t it?”

“What would be terrible?” Yapa asked, his face looking puzzled.

“To have all that money. Think of all the unnecessary junk a person would be tempted to buy. In my experience, rich people are seldom happy and content like we are, Yapa.

When a person has a lot, he seems to always want more. He depends on stuff to make him happy instead of on himself, which means of course that he never really can be happy.”

“On the other hand, think of all the good one could do in the world if he had that much money.”

“Interesting concept. Medicine and food for sick and hungry kids and old people. Shelters for homeless folks. Scholarships for the uneducated. On and on down a huge list. Maybe that’s why I keep you around.”

Yapa sat quietly, just letting the boy run with the possibilities.

“We will start a fund and begin helping handle those kinds of problems.”

“We will?” Yapa said repeating the phrase Adam had used.

“Yes. Once we decode the message from your father and find the treasure.”

“Treasure is it now? I believe your head is leaping way out in front of the facts, my boy.”

“Well, you say it’s always good to have a set of plans to cover the most likely set of circumstances that may reasonably come up.”

“I direct to you own words – likely and reasonably. I think you’re way ahead of reality in this matter.”

“So, what if we just approach it like a game and see where it leads. How about that?”

“Now that sounds like fun.”

“I have a question, Yapa. Why haven’t you shared this book with me before?”

“To be honest, I had forgotten about it. I was running my finger along the spines of the books in our bookcase last evening, the way people often do when searching for one, and it stopped at this book. It was odd because I have done that a thousand times since we’ve lived here and I’ve never noticed it, but it was extended out just a tiny bit in front of the others – like it wanted to be noticed.”

“Now whose imagination is running a bit wild – a book wanting to be noticed?”

“Well, have you been working with books there on the top shelf?”

“No.”

“Got a better explanation as to how that one slid forward a half inch like that?”

“Yapa, any explanation would be better than proposing a book has thoughts and the ability to move through space.”

“Better, perhaps, but not as much fun?”

Adam wouldn't disagree with that. He was ready to get to work.

“How about we take a serious look at what's on the paper. Here, I have it copied.”

Yapa took the sheet from Adam and read it out loud.

“21, 3, 4 – 33, 1, 6 – 44, 7, 4 – 49, 2, 6 – 66, 10, 2 – 77, 3, 7 – 118, 9, 3. Then, below that, on a line by itself it reads:

SW: E great 4, N great 17, E small 3.”

“And that translates as . . . ?” Adam said, eventually allowing his serious face to blossom into a smile indicating it had been a joke.

“I think it translates into a LOT of hard work for a brain with far more power than mine,” Yapa said.

“Lucky you have access to one,” Adam came back.

He understood he was on his own, at least at the beginning. He knew his Yapa well enough to understand he would come snooping sooner or later. What fun this was going to be!

If they had looked down into the alley they would have seen two strangers dressed in dark suits and wide-brimmed hats as if to hide their faces. They were keeping a close watch up at their window. Mysterious strangers on a stakeout trying to blend in: That's never a good sign at the beginning of a mystery involving bad guys, secret codes and long hidden treasure!

CHAPTER TWO

Although the two of them lived on a tight budget, they did have a few things, which Yapa referred to as 'essential extras'. They included items such as a top of the line laptop with lots of software and an internet connection, monthly bus passes for each of them, Adam's YMCA membership, library cards, as well as many books on a wide variety of topics.

Adam didn't have lots of clothes, but what he had were serviceable and at least close to the styles of the day for boys his age. Honestly, clothes were not important to him – he classified them as necessary stuff (well, there were those tight T's!).

Although he really liked girls and was eager to learn more about them through firsthand experience, he actually had very little contact with them. It was the main downside he saw to being schooled at home. The girls who did make advances toward him – like at the library – usually did so with that, 'poor handicapped kid,' look in their eyes rather than the, 'I want to get my hands on that hunk,' look, which he would have preferred. A new family with a girl about his age had recently moved into an apartment down on the seventh floor just below theirs. He would make an effort to get acquainted. Until then, he'd have to settle for his fantasies.

Adam was an early riser and the following morning he had been up for some time before Yapa came out of his room and into the kitchen. Adam was sitting at the table making a

mess – that is, engaged in an important activity.

“What’s with the talcum powder and little paint brush?” Yapa asked.

“Seeing if I can raise any fingerprints off the book cover.”

“And why would you be doing that?”

“Well, despite your fantasy about it, we both know that book really didn’t just reposition itself on the shelf. Therefore, the logical belief would have to be that somebody – a person with fingers and associated prints – pulled it out. That wasn’t you and it wasn’t me and nobody else that we know of has been in here for weeks.”

“I see. And, I suppose you understand it is reasonable to think the old prints from years ago, would have deteriorated by now, leaving just yours and mine readily available from yesterday.”

“Right – at least without the high-powered tech equipment in a forensics (crime) lab. It’s scary to think somebody else has been in here while we were gone,” Adam said putting on a shiver.”

Yapa assumed no comment was necessary so he continued.

“Have you found anything - prints?”

“I have. Mine are all over the covers – reasonable since I paged through it several times – and a few of yours – also reasonable since you removed the book from the shelf and later handed it to me. Then, there is one other set. Those prints lay underneath yours and mine suggesting that person handled the book sometime prior to when we did. They are fresh like ours so it’s reasonable to assume they were laid down recently. If nothing else, it establishes that somebody else is involved.”

“I see you are powdering page 266. You expect to find the unknown set of prints there?”

“If I do, it will confirm my suspicion that the book mover had a serious interest in the code on that sheet. Furthermore, it suggests he didn’t know how to crack the code so left it there, pulled the book forward so we would notice it, and is

leaving it up to us to decode it – for him.”

“He also had to somehow have information that the coded sheet was inside that book that had been given to me over half a century ago,” Yapa added.

Their eyes met for a long moment.

“That’s an unnerving scenario (alarming possibility), son!”

“I know – that somebody out there is just waiting for us to do our part and then they will try to take it from us before we can act on what we find. Any ideas who it might be?”

“Since I have not known that the paper with the code on it existed, let alone that it had been tucked inside the book, it is impossible that I could have told anybody about it – ever. That takes things back to Hungary at the time I left there. I’m not sure where to go with it beyond that.”

“Well, it could be about firsthand information or second hand information,” Adam went on. “What I mean is, somebody could have known your father created the note at the time he created it – first hand – or, a story or rumor about it could have been passed along down through the years – second hand.”

“If it is from firsthand information that person would be at least my age – in his seventies or older,” Yapa said. “I’m doubting that.”

“Why come looking for it now?” Adam asked, raising one of the most important aspects of the mystery.

“Perhaps, somebody has been searching for me and in some way only recently found where I was,” Yapa said. “I have no idea how that might have come about or who it might be. I’m not what you’d call a front-page news maker, in fact, and as you know I’ve done my best to remain more or less hidden – changing my name and covering my face with fuzz.”

“And a world class growth of fuzz you have achieved,” Adam joked.

“I can take no credit for it since I owe it all to my hormones. Your day will soon arrive.”

Adam acknowledged it with a nod and moved on.

“Would you say we may assume that person has

nefarious (evil) intentions?” Adam asked.

“I suppose if they didn’t, they could have just come out and talked with us about it.”

“Then whoever it is probably knows about the hidden loot.”

“So, loot now instead of treasure. By either name, what you say seems to be a reasonable assumption. We have to establish the trail of connections between my father writing the note, somebody knowing about it, that person knowing about me and that I possessed it, that it was to be found in that particular book, and finding me here years later and thousands of miles away from my homeland.”

“See,” Adam offered smiling. “A piece of cake. You’ve always said knowing the proper questions is the most important part of solving a problem.”

Yapa smiled back. He understood that the term ‘impossible’ meant nothing to the boy who continued thinking out loud.

“I assume they will believe that since the note was still in the book you haven’t yet decoded it or at least that you haven’t located the loot.”

Throughout the conversation, Adam had continued to work on raising the prints.

“Okay, so I have isolated the unknown prints on page 266 and on the note that match those on the covers. Whoever it is, found the note, opened it and looked at it – because there are prints on both sides of the paper – and returned it to exactly the same spot between the pages where it has been all these years. It was nestled perfectly inside the indentations on the pages when I found it.”

“I think you have another one of your mysteries on your hands, son.”

“You always speak about the mysteries like they are mine, but you are always right there with me every step of the way. Why do you call them mine?”

“Because you are the one who always unearths (finds) them. I’m usually just along for the ride. This one is different from all the rest, you realize.”

“Different in which of a dozen possible ways do you mean?”

“This one is personal – built around you and me, not some stranger you may set out to help.”

“I see. Yes. And you intend that to also mean it may be more dangerous than other mysteries we have worked on before.”

“If that was a question, my answer is yes – most definitely more dangerous.”

Adam nodded thoughtfully. He wasn't sure how understanding that would modify his approach, although he knew Yapa's intention was to caution him to be very careful. Adam did understand, however, that being careful was not really a built-in trait of most 13-year-old males; if anything, it was just the opposite – to enjoy risk taking, believing, all quite unrealistically, that nothing serious could ever happen to them. He really would try to keep his grandfather's caution in mind. He wanted to live past thirteen.

“Not sure how to identify the bad guy's prints. I don't have access to any files that would be useful – bad guys from Hungary or at least Eastern Europe who may or may not be old or young. I guess I'll have to just begin making our own file for us to use.”

“Our own file? I don't understand,” Yapa said really posing a question.

“When I see a suspicious looking person that fits those parameters (characteristics), I'll just get a sample of their prints and compare them to what we have from the book. That reminds me, I'll need to see if there are prints on the front door knob. That's the only way into our apartment.”

“There is the widow in the kitchen with the fire escape just outside,” Yapa said. “I know we are careful about always locking it, but there is a possibility we forgot on some occasion.”

“Doubtful, Yapa. I always check before I leave the apartment and every night before I turn off the lights out here. I've wondered about adding some sort of security arrangement to the widow. Not sure just what that would be,

short of boarding it up. Glass can be easily broken.”

“But it hasn’t been,” Yapa reminded him.

Adam nodded as he studied the window with his eyes for a few moments before returning his attention to the material on the table in front of him.

He saved the unknown prints by applying inch-wide cellophane tape over them and in that way capturing them for future reference. He transferred the strips of tape onto a dark blue index card – so the white powdered prints would show up – and put them in the drawer in the table. Later he would scan them into his computer.

Yapa moved to the counter beside the window to put on his morning coffee.

“Sorry I didn’t get to that yet, Yapa. My head’s been occupied with all this other stuff.”

Before the old gentleman could respond he glanced out the window and down to the alley below.

“Come look,” he said.

For most boys, it would have been a simple process – stand up and walk the five steps to the window. For Adam it meant reaching for his crutches, which he always had within arm’s length, adjusting his knee braces from bent so he could sit, to straight, so they would keep his knees straight and locked. He pulled himself into a standing position, adjusted the crutches under his arms, and crossed the room. As much as Yapa wanted to help, he never did. Adam wanted to be completely independent and would have taken it as a put down if help had been offered. It was how life had always been for him so seemed perfectly natural. In less time than one might have expected he was at his grandfather’s side.

“Two men,” Yapa said describing the obvious. “One glances up here from time to time. The other one seems to be keeping a look on the front entrance to our building.”

“Keeping their eyes looking out for us, you think?” Adam asked.

“Unless my imagination is making me manufacture things, I’d say so.”

“From the way they are dressed, they aren’t street

people and nobody else ever goes into the alleys around here. That makes them outsiders and there are almost never outsiders in these parts. Do you think I should go down and talk with them?"

"Talk with them?" Yapa asked. "Why on Earth would you do that? About what? Why?"

"I figure I could manage to get samples of their finger prints. That would be worth risking a short chat I'd think."

"Well, they are staying right out near the alley entrance at the street. If you won't venture into the alley it would probably be alright. Maybe find Old Jim and have him stay close by. He's a little bit crazy, but he isn't dumb. Just his presence should keep the men from trying anything nefarious – your word from last night. A good one, by the way."

Adam finished dressing, combed his hair in the event he might run into the new girl down on seven, and then spent a few minutes in an activity Yapa did not understand.

"I have to ask," he said at last.

"I'm rubbing down the wood on my crutches with a very light coat of oil. That will get rid of any fingerprints they have previously picked up."

"I am still at a loss, son."

"Watch and learn. I'll stay where you can see me while I'm down there."

Adam left and took the stairs down to the seventh floor hoping the new girls might be there. She wasn't, but there was a six or seven-year-old boy playing with toy trucks and cars in the hall.

"So, the new family that moved in belong to you?" Adam asked as he approached him.

The boy looked up at him and beamed.

"Yeah. They belong to me. I own 'em. Who are you?"

"I'm Adam. I live just upstairs from you – my grandfather and I."

"It's Dad, Mom, Allyson and me down here."

"You have a name, kid?"

"Mom and Dad call me Burt. Allyson calls me Pest."

That brought a smile to both faces.

“Allyson?”

“My sister – a real pain. A girl. You know.”

“Oh, yeah, girls,” Adam said going along. “How old is she – the Pain?”

“Fourteen going on thirty. She thinks she’s my boss.”

“So, you plan to just live your life out here in the hall to stay away from her?”

“Pretty much. All I’d need would be my sleeping bag I guess.”

“Might get hungry.”

“And some food, then.”

“And thirsty.”

“I could fill a bottle.”

“And a bath room.”

“That reminds me I need to go back inside. See you later.”

He left. As the door opened and closed Adam got a quick look at the girl – Allyson – in the living room. He hoped she got a look at him. He couldn’t be sure. He took the elevator to the lobby, which was at street level.

Once outside he looked up and down the street – 47th street in the old part of town. The buildings were mostly brick, filthy, with wooden trim in need of paint and repair. The wide, cracked, sidewalk had become home to dozens of people – young, old, men, women, children, crazy, sane, smart, dumb, good looking and ugly, friendly and scary. They all knew and liked Adam. Whenever he appeared, a chorus of greetings arose as he moved down the walk: ‘Hi, Hey, Mornin’, Good to see you, What’s up kid.’ Some of them made him uncomfortable, but none had ever given him any reason to be afraid of them. On the contrary, most were friendly and interesting.

He spotted Old Jim. As his name implied, he looked to be an old man and had lived on the street along that block for longer than Adam had been alive. Somehow, he and Yapa knew each other from many years before. The man topped six feet six inches tall and looked to tip the scales at close to

three hundred. With dark gray hair hanging half way down his back and a full, gray beard that hadn't been trimmed in twenty years he presented himself as nobody to mess with.

"Old Jim. What can you tell me about the two strangers I noticed standing at the edge of the alley?"

He pointed.

"Been hanging around for three days – sometimes one and sometimes both of them. At least one is always there – six in the morning to ten at night. Can't get them to talk with me. Can't figure them out. Aren't fuzz (cops) – I'm sure about that. I figure they may be aliens."

Adam ignored the reference to ET's. It was Old Jim's obsession (extreme interest) that defined his mental illness.

"They intrigue me so I'm going to go chat with them. You ride shotgun for me?"

"You know I will, Sprout. Nice shine on those sticks of yours, by the way."

"Thanks for noticing. Every once in a while, I figure they need to be 'spruced' up a bit."

They shared a chuckle at the pun.

"Old Jim knows what's going on," the old man said his eyes dancing. "It's the new girl up on seven. Slicked up sticks and combed hair. Old Jim knows the signs."

He giggled his high-pitched giggle. Adam felt no need to respond. Most of Old Jim's conversations were with himself so keeping his attention was often difficult.

Adam made his way to the alley. Old Jim laid back, but made it obvious he was accompanying the boy.

Adam moved to within five feet of the men, remaining out on the sidewalk. He twirled around pretending something behind him had suddenly caught his attention. In the process, he dropped one crutch, directing it to fall at the feet of one of the men. It appeared to be a reasonable accident caused by the distraction.

The two men were startled. They looked at Adam and then at each other. One of the men reached down and picked it up handing it back. The boy tucked it under his left arm and thanked them. He reached out his right hand as if to offer a

shake. At that point the crutch on that side slipped away, skillfully guided to land at the feet of the other man. Like the first man had done, he picked it up and returned it. They seemed eager to have him leave.

“I’m usually not this clumsy. Sorry and thanks. You are very kind men.”

The second man nodded and mumbled something - *sives*, perhaps. It made no immediate sense.

Adam moved on down the street with Old Jim following.

In the middle of the block Adam stopped and let his big, old friend catch up.

“What did you think of them?” Adam asked.

“Seemed upset when you approached them, that’s for sure. Tried to turn and hide their faces until you did the thing with your first stick. The one who spoke had an accent – like Russian maybe.”

“Could it have been Hungarian?”

“Could have. Yes. Some sort of Slavic I suppose. Want me to encourage them to leave – like forever?”

“Oh, no. I’d like to find out what they’re up to, first.”

“Okay. I’ll keep an ear out. You just give me the word and they’re gone. You alright, by the way?”

“Alright?” Adam asked, confused.

“Yes. I have never seen you lose your sticks like that before. Figured you might be dizzy.”

“Oh, that. No. I just needed to get their fingerprints. It’s the real reason I cleaned up the sticks so when they picked them up they’d leave big, beautiful prints on them.”

“Your grandfather says you have the most powerful brain he’s ever known. You just keep proving it by pulling off stunts like that. Don’t be surprised if you don’t find any prints, though. Most aliens don’t leave finger prints.”

He nodded in an exaggerated manner and winked – a frequent response from the big man. Adam never really understood what that combination of signals meant, but he didn’t dwell on it.

“I better be getting back up to our apartment, now. You

need anything – I can always spring for a box of Lucky Charms. I know you love them.”

“Got a supply earlier in the week. Thanks though. You are a good boy. Tell your grandfather, Karl, hello from me.”

Adam took the elevator to the seventh floor and walked the hall, killing time. Pest was nowhere to be seen. He finally sighed and started up the flight of stairs to the eighth floor. Using stairs really wasn't difficult for Adam – he was strong and had developed a system that worked fine. It took a longer time that way so he often used the elevator just to speed things along. He was thirteen. He was impatient. Everything seemed to take too long.

About half way up he heard a voice coming from below.

“Adam. Is that your name?”

He stopped and turned his head to look down and see who was there. It was Pest's sister – Allyson. She had a wonderful smile and long brown hair and blue eyes. She was wearing jeans and an oversized, pink sweatshirt. Adam tried to muster a response.

“Yes. Adam. That's always been my name. I know, that was a dumb thing to say. Let me start over. Hello. Yes, I'm Adam. I assume you are Allyson from the new family on the seventh floor. I've met your little brother – Pest, I believe is his name.”

She smiled clearly liking Adam's comment. He took that as a good sign.

“Want to talk?” she asked, taking a seat on one of the lower steps and patting the space beside her.

“Sure. Give me a moment to get turned around and I'll be right down.”

He studied the look on her face as he moved back down the stairs. It definitely was not the ‘pity the poor handicapped boy look’. Since he didn't think he'd ever really seen the, ‘I want to get my hands on that hunk,’ look, he couldn't be sure if that was it. Until he got more information, he'd assume it was just the, ‘maybe we can be friends’, look and see where things led.

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CHAPTER THREE

A half hour later Adam entered the apartment – talking.

“She’s fourteen and a freshman in high school. She plays volleyball and likes English and Social Studies. She smells good and I think she likes me.”

“I must say that from up here neither of the people in the alley looked anything like that to me,” Yapa said.

They shared grins.

“I’ll provide a full explanation later. Briefly, the new girl down on the seventh floor and I just talked for a while.”

“I was beginning to wonder why it was taking you thirty minutes to get from the sidewalk up here. Considering what you have said about your encounter, I suppose I’m lucky to see you after only a half hour.”

“I got prints – the men’s not the girls – so don’t touch my sticks – er, crutches. That reminds me, Old Jim says hello. Someday I need to hear how you two really know each other. Let me get onto finding these prints.”

He took his place at the table and arranged his legs.

Five minutes later he had captured the fingerprints and taped them to blue cards. Yapa watched from over his shoulder as he placed them side by side on the table with the ones from the book and sheet of code paper. They looked back and forth for some time. Adam repositioned the cards so they the prints were oriented in the same direction.

“Crutch one, no match; crutch two, a definite match,

wouldn't you say, Yapa?"

"I agree and both are complete prints – no partials to contend with. Good job. That was some performance you put on down there in the alley. Were you able to get good looks at them close up?"

"Yes. They spoke with an accent. Old Jim thinks it's Slavic – maybe Hungarian or Russian. One man responded when I thanked him for the help. He mumbled something that sounded like sives. I didn't recognize it as Hungarian, but then I'm better at reading it than listening to it.

"That could certainly be szivesen, which, in parts of old Hungary would mean 'you're welcome' or 'it's okay' or 'forget it'. My take on it would be that it was a slip up on his part – speaking in Hungarian. Your performance must have flustered (rattled) them.

"Is that enough to make a Hungarian connection for us?"

"Just might be. Has Old Jim heard them speaking?"

"He says he hasn't. Are they still down in the alley?"

Yapa moved to the window.

"Still there. What do you suppose they have Adam up their sleeves?"

"I assume you mean besides their elbows," joked and then gave his serious response.

"I'm thinking they expect to follow us to the hidden loot and take it from us."

"Well, before that can happen – and remember we still can't be certain this is really about those Germans and the loot – I guess we need to get that code decoded," Yapa said. "Have you come up with anything useful yet – any starting place?"

"Maybe. The clue that defines the undertaking – Atherton – is underlined in the book. Nothing else in the entire book is underlined. The sheet with the code on it was placed in that book on the Atherton page. So, it seems reasonable that the code itself may refer to something about that book. Does that make sense?"

"It does. Very interesting. My father was a very

practical – pragmatic – man. It makes sense he would keep it as simple as seemed reasonable.”

[Remember the CODE: 21, 3, 4 – 33, 1, 6 – 44, 7, 4 – 49, 2, 6 – 66, 10, 2 – 77, 3, 7 – 118, 9, 3.]

“Okay, then,” Adam began. “Let’s look at the first section of the code – the part in which there seems to be sections or sets of three numbers, which are separated by commas – like the first one is 21, 3, 4. There are seven sections like that, which are further separated from each other by dashes. Most codes translate into words that provide the message. Since it is unlikely there would be a seven-word sentence that is made up entirely of three letter words, it seems likely that each set of three numbers does represent a word, but that the numbers are not substitutes for letters – like ‘1’ = ‘A’ and so on. It is the sequence of the three numbers that somehow indicates the word. Follow me?”

“Well, let’s see,” Yapa said. “Seven words in the code. Each set of three numbers represents one word. We have to determine how each set of three numbers will point us to a word. And, the code relies on something about the book to give us the answer.”

“Correct. At least that’s my thinking. Now, what do books have that could be numbered?”

Yapa cocked his head and began spinning a list:

“Books have covers, pages, chapters, words, letters, spaces, punctuation marks. This book has chapter titles and titles of subsections within each chapter.”

[CODE: 21, 3, 4 – 33, 1, 6 – 44, 7, 4 – 49, 2, 6 – 66, 10, 2 – 77, 3, 7 – 118, 9, 3.]

“I notice that the first number in each three-number set gets larger with each succeeding set – it is 21 in the first set, 33 in the second, 44 in the third and so on up to 118 in the last set. None of the other numbers within sets do that, in fact there are even numbers that are repeated in the second and third places from one set to another – 3 for example is in the first set, the sixth set and the final set.”

“Interesting observations. Think about this. If you were giving directions to someplace within the United States to

someone who was unfamiliar with it, you might first direct them to the state – say Arkansas – then you could get a bit more specific and say the county – Washington – and then the town – Fayetteville.”

“I think I see where you’re going. The code may start with a big area, then provide some smaller division, and finally the smallest division, which in this case might be the word that is needed to make the code work.”

It was met with several moments of silence between them as they thought it through and surveyed the code. Then Adam continued.

“Let’s say the final destination in this book is going to be a word so we will assign the last of the three numbers in each sequence to the word. Now, working backwards, what are some possibilities for the next biggest division?”

[CODE: 21, 3, 4 – 33, 1, 6 – 44, 7, 4 – 49, 2, 6 – 66, 10, 2 – 77, 3, 7 – 118, 9, 3.]

“Like sentence, or paragraph, or line, or page?” Yapa said/asked.

“Of those, the one that is next to word in size would be line, correct?”

“Correct,” Yapa said. “You’re thinking like word 4 on line 3.”

“Right. But then which next biggest unit is there – paragraph, page, chapter?”

Yapa thought about it out loud.

“Paragraphs are not numbered. Pages and chapters are numbered. How many chapters in the book?”

Adam opened the book to the front and read down the list of chapters.

“Thirty-five chapters. So, since that final set of three numbers begins with 118 it can’t be referring to chapters – there aren’t that many chapters. The book has over 400 pages, though. I’m thinking that first number in each set refers to a page.”

Yapa tried to put it all in order.

“The sequence, then, would be page, line, word – or for the first set (12, 3, 4) it would be page = 12, line = 3, word= 4.”

“Let’s get to work and make a list of words by decoding the numbers in that fashion,” Adam said. “I’ll turn through the pages and look them up while you call out the sets of numbers, then you can add that word to the list here on the yellow pad.”

They began.

“Page 21, line 3, word 12.”

“That word is Posts.

“Page 33, line 1, word 6.”

“That word is Below.”

“Page 44 line 7, word 5.”

“That word is Arc.”

“Page 49, line 2, word 6.”

“That word is Assignment.”

“Page 66, line 10, word 2.”

“That word is Grim”

“Page 77, line 3, word 7.”

“That word is Meadow.”

“Page 118, line 9, word 3.”

“That word is Undercroft.”

“So, let’s hear the sentence,” Adam said clearly enthused at the prospect of finally having something to go on.

“You’re not going to like it,” Yapa said. “It reads: Posts below arc assignment grim meadow undercroft.”

“You’re right, I’m not. Either we have not located the proper words or there is a second level of decoding needed – a code within a code – figuring out to what these words refer – like synonyms, maybe. Like posts could mean notices or mail or columns or stakes. Below could suggest a position – like the posts are below something. In this case that would be below arc. Arc could refer to a shape or to a line segment on a circle or to an electrical source of light.”

“Actually, you are liking this more and more, aren’t you, son.”

“It seems to have just become more of a challenge, and you know how I love a good challenge. We’ll lick this, yet.”

Yapa smiled as Adam took the pad and placed it on the

table in front of him studying what had been recorded on it, his brow (forehead) furrowed.

“Five of the words are nouns – only below and grim are not. With no verbs, that probably means it won’t translate into a complete sentence under any circumstances. It may just be like hints or generalized clues. The word undercroft intrigues me. It’s old fashioned and is almost never used anymore. In general, it refers to a storage area in a basement, typically the basement of a church and often used to store dead bodies in caskets like a burial chamber or a crypt.”

He shuddered at the thought of having the solution to the code require that he move among the dead in a dark underground holding area. That would test the mettle (bravery) of any thirteen-year-old!

“That word suggests some connection with a church maybe, or a cemetery, I suppose,” Adam went on. “You see any other possibilities?”

“The word ‘undercroft’ in Hungarian is *atemplom* and would be specifically translated by native speakers as *crypt* – a burial place, whether above ground or underground. A quick look through this book tells me it was translated from the original Hungarian text by a westerner rather than a native Hungarian speaker who would have had a better feel for how the language was used.”

“So, you’re suggesting the eeriest and spookiest meaning was probably your father’s intention.”

“That’s what I’m saying.”

“I’ve been wondering two things, Yapa.”

“Only two. Isn’t that running way behind your usual level of intellectual curiosity?”

It was worth smiles between them. Adam went on without comment.

“First, why was the book your father gave you written in English instead of Hungarian? And second, why the note he put in the book was also written in English.”

“My father thought that English was going to become the universal language across the world since the United States had such power when it came to communication and

wealth. History shows the language of choice in any locality is typically the one spoken by the people in power. From my earliest years he insisted I speak and read English as well as Hungarian, French, and Russian.”

“A simple answer. I’m glad I asked. I had fantasies about him really being a spy from America sent to live in Europe and communicate important information back to our government by using books sent through a network of libraries in various countries.”

“Sounds like the makings of an interesting story, but I’m afraid that’s not the case.”

“I have one more follow-up question and then we’ll get back to work. You speak perfect English with no trace of an accent. How can that be when you grew up in Hungary?”

“My parents hired an American nanny (baby sitter) for me. My mother was French and spoke only French to me. My father only Hungarian. My grandfather only his native Russian and my nanny only English. So the English sounds I heard and learned produced my English without an accent. The same for the other languages, you see.”

“Fascinating. I suppose my mother just spoke English to me, correct?”

“Correct.”

“Did she speak other languages?”

“Hungarian and French although she hated learning foreign languages. She picked them up quickly, like you do, but of course, like you, she was – is – a brilliant person.”

“I often wonder where she is, you know,” Adam said allowing a sad tone that was not typical of him.

“As do I,” Yapa said.

His eyes watered and Adam thought it was time to change the topic. The last thing he ever wanted to do was to make his grandfather sad. If it hadn’t been for Yapa, who knew what might have happened to him – an orphanage or even something much worse he supposed.

“Let’s get back to the code, Yapa. I’m thinking the words ‘grim’ and ‘meadow’ may go together – an adjective modifying a noun. What could that phrase refer to?”

“Well, meadow is an open, usually grassy area. And grim suggests sadness or unattractiveness often with a hint of fearfulness. We – meaning you – will need to research any such area that existed around the Atherton area back in the early 1900s.”

“Like a dump or land fill, maybe – that might be considered grim. A place visited by some natural disaster like a fire or a tornado? The scene of some horrific (terrible) battle, like from the Civil War or the Revolution?”

“What might be alternative words for meadow?” Yapa asked trying to broaden the boy’s thinking.

“Okay. Let’s see. Field, turf, ground, parkland, lawn, pasture . . .?”

Adam’s face brightened.

“A pasture grazed by depressed cows!”

Yapa groaned. Adam always felt like he had won when he could force a groan from somebody with a terrible joke or pun.

“You happy now?” Yapa said.

“Oh, yes. Happy, but not enlightened (not having the answer). Let’s look somewhere else. The word ‘posts’. It is plural suggesting more than one something-or-other is a part of the intended meaning.”

Again, Yapa took the word in a different direction.

“Post is a last name associated with a wealthy family back in the early part of the last century.”

“Oh, yeah. The cereal company – now General Foods, if I’m not mistaken. Not sure where that might lead us.”

“Nor am I. Remember, I’m the part of this team that makes off the wall, random, observations and you are the one who has to make sense out of them.”

“You know, posts can mean electrical terminals – places wires are attached – like the posts on car batteries. I think that’s a relatively old fashioned use of the term – like might have been used back in the period we’re concerned with.”

“And . . . ?” Yapa asked.

“Well, arc could be an electrical term – it’s where

electricity jumps between two electrical posts looking like lightning. It used to be the light source in projectors in movie theaters because it could be so powerfully bright.”

“It makes sense, but does it point us in any useful direction?”

“Who knows? We’re just accumulating possibilities at this point.”

“Moving on, what about the word, assignment?” Yapa asked.

“Task, job, project, duty, obligation, mission, transfer? Maybe refers to the transfer of the stolen loot from one place to another. Probably not. Maybe refers the duty of the bad guys, the German agents. Probably not. Hmm?”

“That’s just our first romp through the seven words,” Yapa said. “But, any thread of a connection stand out for you.”

“Not really. Maybe our first interpretation of what the sets of numbers mean is off base – not actually page, line, and word, I mean.”

“Or not,” Yapa said, his subtle way of cautioning his grandson not to give up so easily.

“Yeah. I know. ‘Or not’. At my age, I have noticed I tend to grow quite impatient when things don’t fall into place right away. I assume I will grow out of that.”

“Most adults do. A little impatience is not such a bad thing, I think. It keeps one on his toes – encourages him to look at other possibilities. Can only be detrimental (harmful) if it causes one to forget or write off those first possibilities too soon.”

“How about wisdom,” Yapa. “You are so wise. How does that develop? I assume it doesn’t just happen like wrinkles and hair turning white.”

“Here’s the secret to becoming wise. It’s really quite simple.”

Adam laid down his pencil and prepared to listen, assuming it was going to be profound (deep).

“Ready for this?”

“Yes, sir.”

“As you are growing up, let yourself make lots of mistakes, treasure them, AND learn something important about life from each one of them.”

Adam thought for a long moment before replying.

“I have to believe then that you must have made a huge number of mistakes in your younger years, because you are the wisest man I’ve ever known.”

Yapa smiled and repeatedly raised his eyebrows. Adam wasn’t sure what that meant, but continued analyzing what his grandfather had said.

“The lesson from that for a boy my age seems to be don’t be afraid to try something just because there may be a good chance you will fail at it the first time. As if failure is just a signal to revise your approach next time and try again and again in that fashion – try, fail, revise; try, fail, revise; and so on.”

“A sagacious (wise, smart) observation. I’d only add that in any risk-filled undertaking, one has to enter upon it with an appropriate degree of thoughtfulness and carefulness.”

“I hear you hinting around about that a lot since I turned twelve.”

“And I hope there is a positive message there for you.”

“Like, guys my age normally tend to be careless and enter into risky situations without an appropriate amount of forethought.”

“It would seem all my hints have found their mark.”

“More accurately, I believe, they have found their Adam.”

“That was terrible, you know?” Yapa said.

“Yes. I know. Thanks for saying so!”

Again, smile met smile. They had a very good thing – Yapa and Adam.

CHAPTER FOUR

“What about that last line of the code?” Yapa asked, reminding Adam they had not yet tackled the entire puzzle.

“Well, let’s take a look. NW: E great 4, S great 8, E small 3, S great 2.”

He sat back and looked at it for some moments before sharing his first thoughts out loud.

“NW could mean northwest. The E’s and the S could fit in as representing East and South. It is divided by comas into three sections. It begins with the NW set off from the rest by a colon – like that first entry is setting the stage for what follows. The words ‘great’ and ‘small’ suggest that perhaps importance or size plays a part – ‘great could mean big or large as opposed to the ‘small’. And, there are three numbers.”

“Three parts like the combination to a lock, perhaps?” Yapa suggested as a question.

“Interesting. Directions are not usually a part of a combination plus instead of just two possibilities – turning the dial to the right or left – there would be three directions; E, W, and N.”

“I see. Hmm?”

“Steps or paces maybe?” Adam said. “Like in a pirate’s treasure map: four paces east, seventeen paces north, three paces east.”

“Possible. To what would the great and small refer – the length of the pace?”

“I see the problem,” Adam said. “Has to refer to something other than pace size.”

He offered his own, “Hmm,” then continued thinking out loud.

[CODE-section2: NW: E great 4, S great 8, E small 3, S great 2]

“Looking at the entire code – the first and second sections – I’m thinking the first part – with the seven, three number sections – gives the general location and this second section gives the specific spot within that general location – like some place within a city or a park.”

“That certainly makes sense.”

“If that’s the case, I doubt if this second section will make much sense until we locate the general area,” Adam said.

“Again, that makes sense. So, it’s back to the first section, then.”

“Seems so,” Adam agreed. “Going back to the word ‘posts’ and taking it in its most general use – like fence posts – it would seem to be telling us those posts are supporting an arc. In this configuration of the hint, the arc would refer to some shape, I think.”

“What do posts support around here?” Yapa asked, having nothing in mind other than focusing the hint a bit.

“Good question. Fences? Very few fences in the city – around a park, perhaps, but they support strands of wire or horizontal boards, not arc-shaped thing-a-ma-bobs.”

“Oh, yes, those dreaded arc-shaped thing-a-ma-bobs – the stuff of every young boy’s nightmares.”

Yapa put on a shiver and pretended to be frightened.

Adam smiled, appreciating the poor attempt at humor. Yapa continued.

“Posts also support docks along the river and they support signs all over the city.”

“Very good. Not many arc-shaped docks. So, signs. Let’s see, I will estimate in a city of a million people there will be at least 5,000 signs on posts. Not many of them, however, are probably arc-shaped. Not sure how to follow up on that.”

“A partial moon is arc-shaped – sort of,” Yapa said. “Could you Google ‘moon’ among the names of business in the city and see what comes up?”

“You’re on fire, Yapa. See, this is really why I keep you around.”

Adam turned in his chair and reached behind him to the counter and removed his laptop. He was soon pressing keys and the expected list popped up.

“Look to be several hundred.”

He began moving his finger down the list. He finished the entries under the ‘A’s’. He finished the entries under the ‘B’s’. He began moving through the ‘C’s’. Although it was not in the list, something prompted a new idea to pop into his head.

“Cemeteries often have arc-shaped signs at the entrances held between two posts, right?”

“You found a Moon Cemetery?”

“Sure – on the corner of Orbit and Crater. Of course, not. It was one of those, ‘one-thing-leads-to-another’ chain of thoughts things. Let me look ups Cemeteries.”

He spent a few minutes. Yapa figured he just might be onto something so he got up from the table and moved around behind him so he could follow his progress.

“Since we’ve used up the ‘arc/moon’ reference I’m sure we’re not looking for one with either of those in its name. Maybe something will jump off the page at us.”

They continued down the short list – fifteen cemeteries. They both expected there would be more. Reading down the entries did nothing more than alert them to the possibilities. Adam printed it off for further reference – more for Yapa than for him since he rarely forgot anything.

“If we assume we are on the right track with the cemetery sign, then we have very likely accounted for the first three words in the code: posts, below and arc,” Adam said.

“And,” Yapa added, “the fourth and fifth words as well, perhaps: Grim and meadow.”

“I see,” Adam said nodding. “A cemetery could certainly be characterized as a grim meadow – a small plot or

field in which bodies are buried.”

“And all of this fits with the final word, ‘undercroft’, that we discussed earlier, an underground room or area to hold the dead.”

“If all that is true, Yapa, it leaves only one word – assignment.”

Yapa moved to the counter and poured himself another cup of coffee. He returned to his chair across the table from Adam.

“How about starting with synonyms?” he suggested.

“Okay. Let’s see. Task, job, project, duty, obligation, mission, transfer, undertaking.”

“An impressive list right off the top of your head.”

“I have to admit, I just asked MSword for its list of synonyms so let’s give it the credit, I guess.”

“Ah! The mind-numbing, all-knowing MS thesaurus. Even so, none of those words seems to fit the cemetery names on the list,” Yapa said.

“You have to admit, a burial place would make an excellent hiding place. Who’d just stumble onto it, except some ten-year-old boy fulfilling a bravery test on Halloween night, maybe?” Adam said with a sigh. “Everything else seemed to fit so well.”

“I don’t hear you giving up, do I?” Yapa asked.

“Just re-grouping. You know I never give up so long as there is reason to believe there is a solution within reach.”

“What does this do for you?” Yapa asked. “We think we are referencing something that took place back in the early years of the 1900’s.”

“Do cemeteries close down?” Adam asked, then answered his own question. “They can’t just close down – their clients can’t just get up, tip their hats, and go someplace else,” Adam said trying to get his head around the concept.

“I have known of cemeteries being moved, like when a new dam on a river was going to force the water to inundate (flood) them,” Yapa said.

“So, a new search,” Adam said. “Cemeteries in or close to this city that have been moved.”

He did a new web-search.

“Nothing. I’ll try Bing.”

He made a few more mouse clicks.

“Still nothing.”

“How about something relating to the history of cemeteries in this area?” Yapa suggested.

“Very good. There you go again giving me reason to allow you to remain underfoot. Bound to be lots of articles from Cemetery maharishis (experts, gurus, historians).”

A good deal of time passed. Yapa opened the paper and read for a while. Adam continued paging from article to article. He had narrowed his search parameters (limits) to ‘closed’ and was surprised at the large number of entries.

One coffee refill for Yapa later, Adam’s face brightened and he spoke.

“Mission Cemetery! ‘Mission’ from the clue ‘assignment’.

Yapa put down the paper and folded it signaling Adam had his full attention. Adam read the highlights from the article.

“Mission Cemetery was established in 1856 behind the low-lying Mission Community Church in the valley area north of the city that came to be known as Atherton – named after the family that owned the area and eventually subdivided it and donated land for the church. After the church was burned by the Ku Klux Klan in 1916, the cemetery stopped being used and fell into disrepair. In 1962 the First Commercial Bank Building was built on the site with the stipulation from the trust that owned the property that the cemetery would be preserved.

“It remains intact in the area of the second basement below that building. The Bank moved from that building in 2005 and sits vacant to this day. It has recently been sold and is scheduled for demolition (destruction) in the near future.”

Adam looked up at his grandfather.

“That article was dated three months ago. How can we find out if the building has been taken down?”

“I imagine the Department of Building Permits could tell

us. Atherton does sit within the city limits, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it does; annexed to the city in 1912."

"Let me make the call – adult to adult may work best in this case."

"My voice is getting lower, you know," Adam said.

"I do. Would you rather make the call?"

"No. That's not what I meant. I guess I was just taking the opportunity to celebrate the fact I am now as much a man as I am a boy."

"A most interesting way characterize those in-between years. I like it."

"You're welcome!"

They shared smiles.

Yapa made the call and determined that although a permit for demolition had been secured, the date to begin was still a week away.

"So, while you were on the phone I got this Google Earth picture of the building. Dumb as it sounds, I was expecting to see the cemetery."

He hit himself in the forehead – the universal sign for, 'I'm an idiot'.

"You do realize that before Google Earth there was another way to survey a geographic area."

Adam's initially furrowed brow smoothed as he came to understand.

"Maps."

He went to work looking for historical maps of the area.

"I found the cemetery on a 1900 map of Atherton. It is actually very small – maybe only 100 feet by 100 feet. It looks to have probably butted right up against the rear wall of the church – the one that burned down."

He turned the laptop so his grandfather could see what he had found.

"We have to visit it, you know," Adam said as he turned it back toward himself.

"I know. You'll need to figure out how close we can get by bus."

“I’m quite sure the Red, crosstown, bus route goes right by the old bank building on its way to the North Ridge Mall. I’ll print out the route and schedule.”

“We still have one problem, you know,” Yapa said.

“Being followed by the Alley Men, you mean?”

Yapa nodded.

“I’ve been thinking about that – knowing the time would come we’d need to leave for some reason,” Adam said. “Let me take care of that.”

“After lunch, then?” Yapa suggested.

“Sounds good. I’ll cook. How about ham sandwiches and potato chips?”

“I thought I heard you use the term, cook.”

Adam smiled.

“I can heat the ham.”

“Actually, that sounds pretty good,” Yapa said. “Add an egg to that sandwich and I’ll stay for lunch.”

The ‘cook’ got to work and they were soon enjoying the sandwich and, of course, more conversation.

“So, what’s your plan to distract the Alley Men, son?”

“Like I said, let me take care of that.”

After they had enjoyed the sandwiches, chips, and lemonade, Adam placed several items, including his laptop and flashlights, in a backpack and the two of them were on their way by one o’clock. They took the elevator to the lobby level.

“Stay here inside the door for just a minute, Yapa. I’ll be right back.”

The old gentleman knew better than to ask what was churning through his grandson’s gray matter (brain) so he did as Adam had suggested.

He was back in short order and looked at his watch.

“One more minute, then we leave, turn south, take the bus east to Mulberry where we catch the crosstown.”

Outside, Yapa looked north toward the alley entrance. Old Jim and two dozen other street people had begun mulling around, making it impossible for the Alley Men to either see

the two of them or follow them had they been able to see them. Yapa smiled and gave a short wave in Old Jim's direction. It was returned with a smile and a thumb's up.

"Well played, son. That will whet (arouse) Old Jim's imagination, you know. He's probably already convinced the two men are aliens."

"Aliens seem to be the focus of his mental disturbance," Adam said. "He mentioned that very thing to me when we were down at the alley entrance together before. What gives with him – if that's not intruding?"

"It probably is intruding, but you need to know, I suppose. He is much younger than you think – prematurely gray hair and beard. He was one of my students fifteen years ago. After graduation, he entered the military. During the war, he was captured and treated in the most inhumane (cruel) ways. He has never been the same. According to him, since no other people came to get him, it was the aliens he kept counting on to come and rescue him. When rescue came, he was, therefore, convinced it had been the aliens dressed as American military forces. I guess you could say he snapped under the pressure of torture and the conditions of capture. He is brilliant and functions rather well except in relation to the belief that aliens will again come and take care of him. It's why he gave up on a job – he didn't need a job if he was about to be taken by space ship to Alpha Centauri, (a far-off place in the universe) you see."

"So, he continues to wait for them?"

"Yes. He's ever hopeful that each passing day will be the day. He feels quite secure and content as far as I can tell. They took care of him once so he has no reason to believe they won't take care of him again."

"What was his major – what field did he study in college?"

"Philosophy and anthropology."

"What a loss to society. Think of the good things he could have done."

"Who is to say he is not doing good things? The street people around here look up to him. He offers them good

counsel. Remember how quickly he was able to rally that distraction for us a few minutes ago. I'd not say he was wasting his life and good intentions."

"I feel somewhat embarrassed to have thought badly of him. I guess we each do what we can in whatever ways we can."

They rode on for another half hour and then exited the bus just a block from the big, old, abandoned, bank building.

When they got to a place they could see the entire structure they stopped and looked it over.

"It's a shame such a great old building has to be destroyed," Adam said.

"It's called progress," Yapa said as if that were a full, if somewhat sarcastic, explanation. "These days' things change more completely in a single year than they did in fifty back when I was as boy. It's a wonder the human mind can keep up with it all."

"Looking at Old Jim I guess some minds can't."

Yapa nodded and they moved on toward the bank.

It was surrounded by an eight-foot-high, chain link fence in preparation for the demolition. Several large cranes with demolition balls and a number of long, heavy duty, dump trucks had already been moved onto the site. Adam removed a pair of binoculars from his back pack and followed the fence from the front of the area where they were standing around the side and to the back of the lot

Presently, Adam spoke.

"There at the center of the back – an opening in the fence."

He pointed and handed the glasses to his grandfather. Yapa nodded and returned them. They began the block-long trek along the outside of the fence toward the opening.

"From the map, I'd say the cemetery had been, well, is, under the rear of the building – the north end," Adam said. "Once inside the fence we need to find a way into the building."

As they were finally approaching the back wall – brown brick with ten-foot-high windows set only a few feet apart –

Yapa pointed to a door. From a distance, it looked to be ajar (partially open). Once up close they determined that had been an illusion caused by a shadow.

“Not to fear, Yapa,” Adam said digging down into the backpack.

He found his set of lock picks.

“Probably not legal, son,” his grandfather said.

“Like, trespassing on this land clearly marked with No Trespassing signs has been legal?”

Yapa shrugged and stated what Adam took to be his permission to proceed.

“Once in a very few instances, laws can be appropriately broken – just don’t make a habit of it. Our intention is not to pilfer (steal), disturb or damage anything. Understand that signs such as those often are meant to protect the would-be intruder from unseen danger. It may well be an unsafe environment inside – collapsing ceilings or walls, floors that fall out from under us, things like that.”

“Or, foot long rats – like that one – eager to gnaw off our legs for supper?” Adam said pointing into a dark depression alongside the building.

“Yes. That, too, I suppose.”

Adam examined the lock.

“It’s an older model key lock. I suppose we will know if there’s a security system at about the moment I turn the knob and an alarm goes off.”

He selected two long, thin, metal picks and inserted them into the key opening.

CHAPTER FIVE

Three clicks. One big sigh. Adam looked up at his grandfather as he slowly turned the knob. He pushed on the door just enough to call it open. He stopped. They listened. No alarm sounded. He began breathing again.

“If it isn’t a silent alarm we’re home free, I’d say,” Adam said.

“How will we know if it’s a silent alarm?” Yapa asked.

“In about sixty seconds a SWAT team will pull up in black vans with lights flashing, and the lasers from their automatic weapons will be projecting red poke-a-dots onto our chests.”

“Sounds colorful, at least,” Yapa said, looking behind them with more than a hint of discomfort.

Once inside they closed the door and broke out the flashlights. Adam provided their bearings (position).

“North is to our left. That will take us toward what is my best guess about the location of the cemetery. It is two floors below us. We need to find stairs.”

Together they turned to their left and followed the outside wall down a long, wide hall littered with bits and pieces of rubble that had fallen from the walls and ceilings. There were tall, dirty windows to their left and doors to their right. At the far end, they came upon what they assumed was an enclosed stairwell.

Adam used his picks to open the door. They shined their lights inside. It looked to be a run of the mill set of plain

Jane concrete stairs – down a dozen steps, a landing, and then down another dozen steps, which wrapped back toward them. Adam took the lead.

At the second landing, they came upon the first basement level. It was a parking area – a subterranean garage. There were dozens of two-foot square cement columns – one every twenty feet or so – that supported the building above.

“I see no way down to the cemetery level,” Yapa said moving the beam of his light across the fully darkened area.

“I don’t either. Surely, they didn’t just build over it leaving no access for relatives and such. These pillars have to be supported in the ground below this floor.”

At the same moment, their two beams met on a small box-like structure in a far corner. It looked to be ten feet square with walls from the floor to the ceiling. It was cement block. They moved to examine it. As expected there was a door on the side that hadn’t been visible from where they had been standing. Adam tried the handle. It was locked.

He handed his flashlight to his grandfather, removed the lock pics from his backpack, and was soon at work. Again, they heard the three necessary clicks and the knob turned. Clearly that door had not been opened in decades. It was a metal door, set into a metal frame, connected with metal hinges. All of those things were layered in years of rust.

“It will take more force than I can muster to open it,” Adam said to Yapa.

He moved back out of the way.

“Let’s see what magic my old shoulder can work,” he said.

At first, Yapa merely pressed his weight against it. Nothing. He then stepped away several feet and moved against it with considerably more force. It squeaked and groaned and eventually budged a bit. It required several repetitions before the opening was wide enough to allow them to enter. Inside were more concrete steps that led to open ground fifteen feet below.

“We have definitely found the cemetery,” Adam said

stating the obvious. “There is the old, metal sign arcing between two metal posts: Mission Cemetery.

They moved the beams from their lights across the area.

“Eerie!” Adam continued.

“Fascinating!” Yapa said.

“That, too,” Adam agreed, nodding with a shiver. “What would you estimate – maybe a hundred head stones?”

“More or less. Plots look to be very small – perhaps only six feet by ten feet. A wide variety of headstone sizes from tiny ones bearing just a name and dates, to stone structures with little pillars and roofs.”

“I often wondered about that,” Adam said.

“About what?”

“About why some graves are marked with small stones and some with those grotesque (ugly) big things.”

“Various reasons, I assume. Some families feel the need to say they are better or richer than the others so they put lots of money into the markers. Others either can’t afford more than a small stone or understand the deceased would have been uncomfortable having such a big to-do made over the place he or she was laid to rest. Others may feel guilty about the way they had treated the person so they try to make up for that by spending a lot of money on the marker. I’m sure there are other reasons – both reasonable and unreasonable.”

“When my time comes, I’ll take the tiny one and request that the rest of the money be used to help people in need.”

It had been Adam. Yapa smiled into the dark. It had been the thirteen-year-old talking about his grave marker, not the seventy-five-year-old referring to his. It somehow seemed humorous to him.

“I’m with you on that, you know,” Yapa said as if a reminder of conversations they had already had and put to bed.

Adam nodded not wanting to think about either of their deaths. Cemeteries seemed to bring out those sorts of disagreeable thoughts.

They just stood there for several minutes surveying the

area. Presently, Adam spoke.

“The south end would have butted up against the back of the church. That would have stood over there.”

He pointed. They moved in that direction weaving an irregular path in order to avoid the stones. Adam focused his light on a hole at the far south side of the area.

“Something seems to have collapsed there? A grave you think?”

“Perhaps, but I doubt it. The ground above old graves covering pine boxes often dip a bit over the years as the box rots away, but not usually to that extent. The excess dirt is usually mounded up on top and it sinks to fill in the dip when it is finally created. I’d bet it’s above a cellar that was under the church or something like that.”

“I guess that won’t be of real interest to us, then,” Adam said. “Let’s see if we can find a way to apply that last line in the code to this place.”

He recited the line from memory.

“NW: E great 4, S great 8, W small 3, S great 2.”

Yapa began.

“If the letters refer to directions, then the code directs us to begin in the NW corner, I assume. You agree?”

“I agree.”

They moved back to that point and Adam continued.

“Then it says ‘E’, or east we’re thinking, and ‘great 4’. If great means large and small means little, to what would those dimensions refer – the size of the markers, maybe?”

“That would seem logical. Let’s see, if we move east from this corner to the fourth large marker we will be where?”

“At that solid gray, four-foot-high, granite obelisk (pointed pillar),” Adam said.

They went to it.

“Then south for eight large markers,” Adam said.

Yapa stood and, pointing, counted the markers.

“There are only large markers in this row. That takes us almost to the south end of the area.”

Again, they moved to the new point of focus.

“Okay. Now, east again three small markers.”

Yapa moved his beam along the ground and counted off three.

“That puts us just a few yards east of center,” he said.

They moved to that spot.

“Finally, two large markers to the south – toward where the back of the church had been.”

They found themselves ten or so feet to the west of the hole they had discovered earlier.

“It is the largest marker in the cemetery, wouldn’t you say, Yapa?”

“I would. I suppose we need to examine it.”

“It makes no sense you understand.”

“How’s that, son?”

“First, if the German agents buried the loot here, it would have taken some time for the ground to settle in solid enough to hold such a heavy marker – I estimate it weighs close to a ton. Second, if the monument has some secret door, inside of which they stashed the loot, then I’d think the mere setting of such a large marker would have drawn a lot of unwanted attention. Third, there probably needed to be a body to bury to make it all seem legitimate. Finding a dead guy who had good reason to be buried in the cemetery of this old church seems like it would have posed a number of problems.”

“I see,” Yapa said. “All of that makes sense. Do you have an alternative suggestion?”

“No. So, I suggest we search for a secret door on the monument. I can’t see them burying it below such a huge monument if they were planning to move it to Germany right away. I’ve wondered why they had to hide it in the first place.”

“Several ideas,” Yapa said: “It sounds like they had been doing the robberies over a period of many months – perhaps a year. They’d need some place to keep it until they were ready to ship it all together. I doubt if they would risk sending it in small amounts – more likely one large, very secure means of transportation. Also, it sounds like the good guys – whoever they were – were closing in on them so they

wouldn't have wanted to be caught with it in their possession. Eventually they were cornered at the train station, remember."

"I do. That all makes sense and still it doesn't of course. Burying it here took some planning and time and effort – not something that could be accomplished in a day or so," Adam went on elaborating on his doubts. "So, it wasn't just something that came up overnight. And, if they were continuing to add to it from time to time – as they pulled more robberies – they needed to have easy access to the hiding place."

"But think about it," Yapa explained. "Burials are very efficient operations. Somebody dies unexpectedly, they are buried, the marker is put in place – all within three or four days – less than that, probably back in the early 1900's."

"I see what you're saying – it's a process with proven quick results. Very good. Let's find that hidden door in this big old stone edifice (structure)."

Adam circled it describing what he saw as he went.

"Looks to be a square central, stone, box about three feet by three feet by four feet high. There are six-inch wide pillars at each corner of that box, which support a pyramid shaped top or roof-like part that overhangs the big box. It all sits on a six by six-foot piece of granite about two feet thick. Top to bottom it looks to be nine or ten feet."

"Here is the inscription," Yapa said. "In loving memory of Elisa Joseph Marshal, 1865 to 1913. He'd have only been fifty years old."

"That final date is within our time span," Adam said. "Search for cracks and seams, I guess. Anything that looks like it could represent the perimeter (outer limits) of an opening. Then we have to find some way to open it – a secret lever or some such thing."

Yapa had a thought.

"In my experience monuments with hollow space inside them – like those used to contain the ashes after a cremation – always have a key lock. On first pass, I saw no such lock on this one."

They searched the surface again – they found no lock.

Yapa tried to turn each of the four big pillars thinking that might be the trigger to open something. None of them would turn. Adam pushed up on the pyramid shaped roof with his crutch thinking it might tip up. It didn't. They pushed and pulled everything that could be pushed or pulled. Nothing.

"This could be disheartening (discouraging)," Yapa said at last.

"In some way, we are bound to be on the wrong track, I think," Adam said moving several yards back from the structure.

"I tend to agree, though I must admit it looks like a great hiding place. I think we need to spend some time rethinking things," Yapa said at last.

"I agree. The trip wasn't all in vain, however," Adam said. "We found the cemetery, we now know the lay of the land, and we seem to know at least one place that is not the hiding spot we're looking for. Also, I got a new idea about it all that I need to check out. Before we leave let me draw a quick diagram of the layout down here."

He took out a pad of paper and soon had a sketch, which, in a rough way, represented the location of each small and each large head stone. He was then ready to go. Yapa noticed he had blackened in all the squares that represented markers along the west side of the plot – the western two rows to be more specific. He didn't ask why.

They made their way back up the steep stairs to the rusted door. Privately they both hoped it was still open the way they left it. If not, they were in deep trouble. It was open. Yapa pulled it closed behind them and Adam used his picks to relock it – just in case there might be a watchman who checked on such things.

They were soon out back behind the building. Again, Adam locked that door, partly because they needed to leave it like they had found it and partly so inquisitive children could not enter and get hurt. They returned to the bus stop to wait for their return transportation.

It didn't appear that they had been followed. There were no Alley Guys in sight. There was, however, the figure of one very large person disappearing into the shadows

around the corner the next block over. Adam was sure he had intentionally tried to quickly move out of sight the moment he spied them. Perhaps the Alley Men had an accomplice. That would not be a good thing! He didn't mention it to his grandfather who had been looking up and down the street for the bus.

At three thirty they arrived back at their building – the Green Terrace Apartments, where there was nothing green and were no terraces. They entered the elevator.

“I think I'll get off at the seventh floor,” Adam said.

Yapa understood.

“Want me to take your back pack up to our place for you?”

“Great. Thanks.”

Adam removed it and handed it over.

Yapa understood his grandson was new to the boy/girl thing. He wished he could help make it easier. He knew he couldn't so, wisely, he kept quiet. Yapa almost never offered advice unless it had been requested. They'd had 'the talk' when Adam was eleven and since then it seemed he felt comfortable about asking any questions he had about such things. Young love was wonderful and young love was terrible. That was just how it was. Yapa felt sure the boy would learn good lessons from both of those things and just might even have women all figured out by the time he reached 110.

Yapa chuckled to himself about the little joke he had provided just for his own entertainment and waited as the elevator doors closed, leaving them each alone in their private worlds.

* * *

Adam came through the apartment door at four fifteen, chattering the way he usually made his entrances.

“Allyson's last name is Miller,” he began. “She pointed out that if we got married she wouldn't have to change her last initial. That would be cool, I guess.”

“Talking marriage already, are you?”

“Oh, no. It was just a passing observation, I'm sure – wasn't it?”

“I’m sure you’re right. Just pulling your leg a bit. ‘Miller’, you say?”

It had been a question intended to keep the conversation going – as if that were really ever necessary with Adam who continued.

“Her dad lost his job a few months ago, and they had to move into less expensive quarters. That turned out to be apartment 707 here at Green Terrace. She didn’t ask me about my legs. It’s usually one of the first things out of people’s mouths. I opened up the topic and explained, hoping she might feel less bothered by it. ‘Bothered’ is the wrong word, but I can’t come up with a better one.”

“Worried, upset, anxious, on edge, troubled, embarrassed, uncomfortable – there’s a set for you to choose from.”

“Some of all of those, I suppose. ‘Uneasy’ maybe is what I was really going for. Once I made it a legitimate topic she did have some questions. I think it made us closer. I guess I showed off a bit – doing my handstand thing on my crutches.”

“What I hear you saying was that things went well.”

“Yes. At least I think they did. I’ll corner her little brother later and find out what she really thought – thinks.”

“I take it you found that you liked her.”

“Oh, my, yes. She has long brown hair and blue eyes and very soft hands.”

“Ah! Hands. On just the second get-together? Moving pretty fast, there, Romeo.”

“Not really. When I got ready to leave I offered her my hand like for a shake – probably the dumbest thing a boy ever did with a girl. Anyway, she took it – in both of hers and just held it for a while patting it as we talked for another minute or so. I must admit I tried to think of more things to talk about so she’d keep holding it. It was a very nice thing – her soft hands and standing close, face to face like that.”

“I’m glad you seem compatible (well-matched) and found it comfortable to be with one another.”

Adam offered a smile and nod and was ready to move

on. He took his usual seat at the table in the kitchen, leaned his crutches up against the counter behind him and adjusted his knee braces. He removed his laptop from his backpack, which Yapa had placed on the floor beside his chair.

“I have to review something. I seem to suffer from an incomplete memory about an important piece of information.

Yapa smiled.

“That may be the first time that phrase – suffer from an incomplete memory – has ever been used in the entire history of man, you understand. What information?”

“I need to find the photograph of that cemetery I found on Google. Something about it didn’t fit with what we experienced down there.”

He poked keys and clicked the mouse for several moments as the screen quickly opened and shed dozens of pages as he searched.

“Here it is. Let’s see.”

Yapa moved in and stood behind him so he could also take a look.

“You probably see it, too, don’t you,” Adam said, nodding, thinking it was obvious.

“Oh, yes. Of course. Absolutely. Right there is it. How could anybody miss it? . . . No, not really.”

It was Adam’s turn to smile.

“This picture shows a smaller cemetery – the same one just smaller. I assume this was taken before the last two rows of burials were made along the right side – the west side.”

“I see,” Yapa said. “Well, that does change things. It means that when we thought we were starting to follow the code we were actually beginning two rows of headstones to the west from where that edge of the cemetery would have been at the time the German Agents stashed the loot – at the time this picture of the narrower cemetery was taken. The code would have been based on that, not how it appears today.”

“Stashed the loot?” Adam said. “You sound like some gangster out of the 1930s.”

“You have a better way of saying it – communicating

it?”

“Well, no. It just seemed so out of place for Dr. Karl Nelson to be talking like that.”

“We’ve been through that a dozen times. At home I’m your Yapa, not a professor.”

“And then why am I not unokája (grandson in Hungarian) here?”

“Because you were born American and I have always been very proud of that – not that your Hungarian heritage should be set aside, but that being an American means you have freedoms and privileges I could have never envisioned when I was a boy your age.”

“Got your message. Heritage, great. Citizenship, great. Now shut up kid and get back to work on the mystery.”

Adam looked up over his shoulder and offered a long grin. Yapa ruffled his hair. It had been an important moment between them.

“Let me circle the two newest rows of headstones (the ones he blackened in) on my drawing to exclude them and we can retrace the directions from code on it,” Adam said.

Yapa pulled a chair up close beside Adam and took a seat so they could work side by side.

“Okay. Here we go,” Adam said. “From the old northwest corner headstone, we go east four large stones, then turn south counting eight large headstones, then back west for three small ones and finally south for two large ones.”

He had traced the path on the drawing as he spoke.

“You see where that puts us, right?” Yapa said/asked.

“Right at that hole, two spots east of the monument we just went over inch by inch.”

“That raises questions about the hole,” Yapa said.

“Like?”

“Like how was it made, for starters,” Yapa explained.

“Okay. Let’s see. Two possibilities come to mind immediately,” Adam said clearly loving the mental exercise. “Something under the ground could have given way – like a huge wooden box could have rotted away so it could no longer

support the dirt on top of it. Or, perhaps there had been a sizeable headstone there and it was removed leaving the hole from where it had been dug up.”

“Or,” Yapa went on, “somebody beat us to the loot and already dug it up.”

“I don’t like that possibility,” Adam said putting on a frown.

“Wishing it away won’t change it if that is what happened.”

“I wish we’d have paid more attention to the hole while we were there,” Adam said. “I guess it means a second trip. At least we know how to get inside the building and locate things now. No worries about alarms and such.”

“Or SWAT teams projecting poke-a-dots across our chests,” Yapa said clearly reliving the degree of discomfort he had experienced before. “I don’t feel up to another adventure still today. How about we plan on first thing in the morning.”

Adam heard the suggestion and offered a faint nod. His hope was to only reassure Yapa that he had heard his suggestion. His intention was something very different. He’d wait until after Yapa had turned in for the night.

CHAPTER SIX

Yapa was a creature of habit and always headed to his bedroom at nine thirty. He never returned until after six thirty the following morning. Adam figured it was his grandfather's way of assuring him that he would have complete privacy in the living room at night. He appreciated that.

Although Adam knew there was an understanding that he was to remain in the apartment at night, it had never been stated like an actual rule. He knew he would feel a bit guilty about what he was planning to do, but at his age he found it probably too easy to bury those kinds of feelings so they really weren't ever very bothersome. He smiled at the unintended little joke – burying feelings about visiting a cemetery. At least it had seemed humorous to him.

It was still early in the evening. He had school work to complete and began working on it. Yapa read. That was their usual after dinner routine. They had no TV although they could receive most of the programs that were of interest to them on the laptop.

Adam's school work was divided into two parts on a weekly basis. First, within each subject, Yapa set down a few essential topics the boy was to cover. Then, once those had been handled, Adam could study any other thing related to the subject that he wanted to. In history, he was currently studying the Spanish American War. For kicks he was studying the historical development of certain slang expressions in the English language.

He had just learned, for example, that the term, 'OK', was first used generally in the United States (but not in Europe or England) during the early 1800s. There were lots of stories about how it started, but Adam's favorite was that it traveled to the United States along with the slaves from West Africa – some form of the term was a part of several languages from that area. Next, he planned to research the origin of the phrase, 'fit as a fiddle'.

Right on schedule – at 9:29 – Yapa put down his book, removed his glasses, walked to where Adam was sitting at the table, and planted a lingering kiss on the boy's forehead. It was a left-over part of their routine from when he had been tucked into bed at night as a very young boy. That kiss, Yapa had told him, would keep him safe all night long so no goblins or monsters could harm him. (It wasn't that Adam had not believed his grandfather back then, but each night he had positioned his crutches within easy reach just in case he might need a weapon – even at that early age he had learned that a crutch made a really great weapon.)

He gave Yapa fifteen minutes to get settled in before he left the apartment. He rode the elevator to the basement – one floor below the lobby, which was his usual place of exiting onto the sidewalk out front. The basement was generally unused and unlit so he needed his flashlight to make his way. He proceeded to the side of the building opposite from the alley where the 'men' had been hanging out. There was a door at the top of a long ramp there that had once been used for deliveries. It opened onto a narrow side street. Most tenants in the building didn't know of its existence, but it had been on Adam's radar since he was a preschooler. There wasn't much about the old structure he hadn't known by then.

He left the building and went directly to the bus stop, taking care to stay in the shadows, out of sight of anyone in the vicinity of the apartment building. Once on the bus he removed a book from his back pack and settled in for the ride. There were few other riders at that time of night.

He couldn't concentrate on the book – biology (science of living things). He had been wondering if the large man he had seen at the other end of the bus run had been an

accomplice of the Alley Men, and how he could have known they would be there at the bank building at that time. Also, and more basically he supposed, how were the Alley Men going to know when the code had been deciphered? In his mind that question fused (joined) in a most odd way with a picture he had just seen in the book on his lap. "A bug," he said out loud.

He then continued to think silently. 'Nobody but he and Yapa would know when the code had been broken and the only way somebody else could also come to know that was if they overheard the two of them discussing it – in private. Therefore, he concluded, their apartment had to have been bugged with a listening device. It could have been installed at the same time the Alley Man did his thing with the book on the shelf.

He was eager to get back to the apartment and go searching for bugs. He figured that would make him an entomologist (a bug scientist). Or maybe to be more accurate an electro-digital-entomologist. It gave him a private smile even though he knew he had another mission to complete first. He did, however, begin thinking of ways to use that bug to his advantage – sending false information, perhaps.

Once off the bus, he made his way along the same path he and Yapa had taken earlier. He used his lock picks and was soon inside. He hoped he would be able to force the final door open – the rusted one that allowed entrance to the lower floor – the cemetery. It had taken his grandfather a good amount of effort to force it the first time and Adam weighed far less than Yapa.

He unlocked the door and backed into it, using what force he could muster between his muscular arms and the leverage he could create with his crutches. To his surprise, it opened with relative ease and he was soon down the steps to the damp, bare earth below. He had brought his forehead lamp to free his hands.

He made the necessary adjustment in his mind between the old and newer versions of the cemetery map and approached the head stone that would have been sitting at the Northwest corner of the plot at the time the German Agents

would have been doing whatever they had done. He stepped off the clues right there on the ground to make sure the map was accurate and in the end, found himself looking down into the hole he and Yapa had more or less discounted and overlooked earlier.

He moved in close and discovered it was significantly different from what it had appeared to be at first glance. It was not merely a hole in the dirt. He found that the ground around a set of ancient stone steps had fallen in on them, hiding them from casual view giving it the appearance of – well, just a plain old, run of the mill, generic hole.

Using one crutch as a probe, he inserted it down through the dirt in several places. He discovered that at their center, the steps were covered by no more than a few inches of debris. He began the descent with great caution. There were fifteen steps, each about ten inches high. They appeared to have been made from quarried rock – flat on top, a foot front to back and eight feet wide. It seemed very wide if it were merely an outside entrance into the old church basement.

At the bottom was a door – a double door – constructed from wide, thick, wooden planks – probably oak, he figured – arranged vertically (up and down) and held together by horizontal (across) iron strips bolted in place. He examined the doors and determined they opened in – a fortunate thing since he could not have opened them out against the pile of fallen dirt there at his feet. There was a large padlock in place, rusted in layers of flakey scales like the other metal there underground. His heart sank. How would he open a lock that required a huge, old fashioned, key? His bag of tricks was not prepared for that.

He reached out to examine the lock and rattled it just a bit for no better reason than just to rattle it a bit. The Rusty Old Lock Gods seemed to be with him. The entire mechanism loosened and fell to the ground.

“Oh! That’s how I open it,” he said out loud – even if only to himself.

He turned around and tried the back-first technique he had used successfully before. It took a good deal of effort, but

finally screeched open far enough to allow his slender figure to slip inside. It was pitch dark in there, as well. He took out a regular flashlight.

The room was filled with a musty, pungent (bitter) smell that hurt his eyes and the inside of his nose. The old cement floor, the stone walls and the ceiling were damp. The air was very humid. It was some twenty degrees cooler in there than it had been up on the street, not entirely unpleasant for a hot, summer evening. He found that the regular flashlight offered better illumination. The beam easily reached all four walls from where he stood. The walls to his left and right were lined with granite boxes – eight feet long, and three feet in the other two dimensions.

“Stone crypts (tombs),” he said, again out loud.

He counted them and determined there were five along the length of each wall and they were stacked three high. That came to thirty – thirty dead guys. He shivered, but smiled to himself thinking they probably would not be up to telling him the history of the place. Actually, Adam most certainly hoped that none of them would begin telling him anything at all. That was worth another shiver.

He moved closer to those on his left. Each crypt looked to open in front. Each had names and dates chiseled into them and most also had a twelve inch, rectangular, brass plate that probably contained additional information. They were so corroded he couldn't make out what was written on them and he wasn't yet ready to spend the necessary time to clean them off.

Something brushed across his foot. He stiffened and didn't move a muscle. He stopped breathing. He moved the beam of his flashlight and caught something moving across the floor into the shadows of the corner to his right.

“Just stay calm,” he said to himself. “I doubt if I would have felt a ghost – even if I believed in them, which I don't, and anyway why would ghosts be hanging low against the floor playing with my ankles? Maybe they, like I, appreciate bright red sox. I'm babbling so I should stop now.”

He moved the beam from place to place and came upon . . . something. Two green discs the size of dimes

reflected the light back at him. At first, neither he nor they moved. He gripped his right crutch making ready to use it for protection if that were to be needed.

Then it happened. 'It' moved to Adam's right so he could make out its profile – the largest rat the boy had ever seen – ever imagined would better describe it. It was eighteen inches long without counting the tail. Its long sharp teeth glistened in the light, which clearly bothered it – the rat being a creature of the dark. It scurried away to escape the light. It was good to have it gone. It was not so good not knowing where it had gone. Regardless, his breathing became regular again and he relaxed a bit.

He tried to refocus his attention on the crypts without thinking about what they contained. He figured if the clues in the code had directed him to that place, then it was at that place he should find what he was looking for. It was at that moment he realized he had no idea what he was looking for and there were no more clues provided. He was surrounded by thirty corpses and at least one irritating rat, and he had no idea what next step he should take. It would probably make a good story to tell his grandkids someday, but at that moment he found very little humor attached to it.

He investigated what he had – thirty ancient granite crypts. They varied in hues from dark to light gray and medium to dark shades of rose. He moved from one to another confining his examination to what he could easily see because they were wet, too slimy to touch, and offered a terrible odor up close. That would be nothing to get on his clothes and carry with him. He couldn't explain it away to Yapa as Alyson's new perfume unless she led a secret life as 'Swamp Girl'.

He reined in his imagination, and read the names and the dates in the granite. Many of the names had a foreign ring confirming the major influx (entry) of people from Europe during the early years of the 20th century. The crypts had been placed in the room according to date – the earliest on the bottom row near the entrance to the left of the door and on around the room to the top row on the other side of the door.

He continued to read the names and wondered what

story each of them had. Where had they been born? What had they done in life? Had they been good people or bad people? Were there still people who remembered them? Things like that.

He moved on and focused on those that bore death dates between 1910 and 1913 – the span in which it had been reported the German Agents had been committing the robberies in the area.

There were just two crypts bearing dates during that time period. That suggested to him that to have a crypt had probably been a very expensive thing that most families could not afford.

One was inscribed with the name Walter Koslouski. The other Geschenk Deutch.

“There it is!” Adam said out into the darkness, speaking to no one in particular – well, perhaps the shiny eyed rat. “Deutch from Deutschland – the word for ‘Germany’ in German – and geschenk, which is not really a first name, but is the word for ‘gift’ or ‘present’ in German. It shouts out ‘a present for Germany’.”

It was one of those things that told one nothing at all unless he knew what he was looking for. In that sense, he supposed it was more like a very quiet whisper than a shout. Regardless, Adam was certain he had found the container that held the ‘loot’ as he and Yapa had come to refer to it.

It brought a number of questions to mind. How did one open a crypt that had been closed up for over one hundred years? Would it be necessary to receive permission from someone to open it? How would the loot be handled – disposed of – to whom – things like that? Was it known from whom the ‘merchandise’ had been stolen. They, of course, would be long dead, but what about relatives? It suddenly seemed far more complicated than it had at first appeared to be.

Adam figured his grandfather had already been considering such things. He had observed that older folks tended to look way into the future while kids his age pretty much just considered today and tomorrow.

And, there was also one other very important question.

How was he going to explain to Yapa what he had been up to that night? He wouldn't lie, but wasn't beyond putting the best possible spin on it.

He made his way back to the bus stop. The large, red and gray vehicle soon pulled to a stop. As he waited to enter through the front door, one of the Alley Men was getting off through the rear door. They spied each other at the same moment. The man looked both surprised and angry and hurried toward Adam, kicking at his left crutch in an attempt to unbalance him.

Instinctively, Adam reestablished the crutch on the sidewalk and moved into a handstand from the hand grips. With his legs pointing straight up, he allowed his body to swing down in a powerful arc from the rear, knocked the man off his feet. The man hit his head on the edge of the sidewalk as he fell and then rolled under the bus.

As Adam reoriented himself into a standing position, making ready to stand on one crutch and defend himself with the other, a huge figure approached on the trot. In the darkness, it was impossible to make out his face, but his actions were clear; he pulled the man out from under the bus and back onto the sidewalk. He continued with him in a choke hold well back into the shadows. Just who that mystery man may have been or why he had come to his rescue Adam had no idea. Or, perhaps, he had come to the Alley Man's rescue.

During the attack and ensuing (following) defense by Adam, the driver had called 911. As Adam boarded the bus the half dozen riders gave him a standing round of applause. Not knowing how to react he slid into a seat near the front and slumped down. Presently the police arrived and took statements from Adam, the driver and the other passengers. Adam provided no indication that he knew anything about the man or with whom he might be affiliated. Later, he would not be sure why he had done that, but at the moment it seemed like the best course of action.

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when, all quite silently, he closed the door to the apartment behind him and placed his backpack on the kitchen counter. He knew he wouldn't be able to sleep until he had talked it out with his

grandfather so he approached the bedroom door and knocked.

“I did something really dumb tonight, Yapa.”

“Are you alright – no broken bones or blood gushing from wounds? You still have all your teeth? You’re not pregnant, are you?”

Yapa’s sense of humor could always put things into perspective. Adam’s wellbeing came way before any, ‘something really dumb’, that he could have ever done.

“I think it’s ‘put on your robe while I make hot chocolate time’, Yapa,” Adam said, indicating it would probably be a lengthy conversation.

They sat in their usual places across from each other at the kitchen table.

“Sometimes I wonder why we have a sofa and recliner in the living room, they get used so seldom,” Yapa said, not pressing the issue of the moment with Adam – whatever it was going to be.

“I went back to the cemetery alone tonight. Can’t fully explain why, but the urge was overwhelming. I knew you were too tired and I knew I was too impatient to wait until later. It was a dilemma that seemed to only have one solution. Things went just fine until it was time to get back on the bus to come home. The taller of the two Alley Men got off the bus and attacked me.”

“How badly did you hurt him?”

It had been a serious question. Adam offered the quick indication of a smile. His grandfather was, of course, aware of the Crutch Karate System that Adam had perfected over the years.

“Not sure how badly, but somebody came to my rescue – a really big man. I saw him out there in that neighborhood earlier. At that time, it was like he was trying to keep out of sight – hide from us. I figured he was one of the bad guys who had followed us. Tonight, he made no effort to hide himself although in the darkness I couldn’t make him out well enough to describe him to the police. The others on the bus couldn’t either. He just barreled in and took over after I had

knocked the man out and forced him under the bus.”

Yapa chuckled.

“This was serious, Yapa! No laughing matter!”

“I wasn’t laughing at the ‘matter’, son. I was laughing that the kid who most people see as helplessly handicapped just cleaned the plow of a bad guy three times his size. My vision of it really is quite humorous.”

Adam broke a grin and nodded.

“I suppose put in that perspective you’re right. Little does he know, but he’s down right lucky the big man rescued him from me. My next move was going to be a crutch chop across the throat – if needed to further protect myself.”

They nodded into each other’s faces. They both hated violence and neither would ever resort to it first. But, they would defend themselves and others who were being unfairly put upon (attacked).

They sipped the hot chocolate. They dipped the toast into their drink and then wiped their chins as it drizzled down their faces. It left a dark streak on Yapa’s beard. Adam wondered when those whiskers were going to begin showing up on his face.

Dabbing at his beard with a napkin, Yapa spoke.

“Well, so much for the subplot. Tell me about the main event.”

“Main event, oh, you mean what I found at the cemetery. I figured that before I got to that I deserved a bawling out for leaving.”

“And what would you have me say during that bawling out?”

Adam was ready for the question.

“That it was a juvenile, unthinking, dangerous, inane, stupid, irresponsible thing to have done.”

“Okay! It was a juvenile, unthinking, dangerous, inane, stupid, irresponsible thing to have done. You feel better now?”

“I guess. You always do that?”

“That?”

“What you’re really saying is that since I already knew all of the things you would tell me, no purpose would be served by having you say them.”

“And you’d rather have me raise my voice and scream those things at you?”

“Of course, not. Well, maybe. I don’t know. Can I get back to you on that?”

“I’m sure you can and will. Now, ready to spill your guts about your nocturnal (night time) caper?”

It was Adam’s turn to chuckle. He was the luckiest boy in the world to have Yapa as the special adult in his life.

He ‘spilled his guts’ for nearly an hour. It was filled with information, a good deal of conjecture (speculation), and numerous questions.

“In the morning – that is later in the morning – I’ll give Oscar Cutler a ring – he’s an old friend who is now an attorney. He’ll be able to guide us through the legal maze we have created.”

“We can’t afford a lawyer, Yapa.”

“I’m sure he won’t take our money. I sort of did him a couple of favors when he was my student a few years back.”

“You didn’t give him better grades than he had earned, did you?”

It was the only thing that came to Adam’s mind where a favor from a teacher was concerned – even though it didn’t sound like anything his grandfather would have done.

“Quite the contrary. I returned his senior thesis (formal paper required for graduation) to him five times before I accepted it.”

“I don’t get it. I’d think that would have just made him angry.”

“In the end that paper was judged the best of the year and earned him a very nice scholarship to law school.”

“You seldom return papers to me like that. Guess I’m not as special as I thought.”

Adam offered a broad smile to emphasize it had been a joke.

“If Oscar’s paper had been yours, I’d have returned it ten times because I’d have known that’s how much better you could have made it.”

Adam nodded through a suddenly serious expression. Like he had said, he was the luckiest boy in the world to have Yapa as the special adult in his life.

Eventually, Yapa returned to his room. Adam double-locked the front door and pushed the couch in front of it – just in case that earlier kiss to his forehead wasn’t really enough to keep all the bad things at bay (away) now that he had reached the advanced age of thirteen.

The electro-digital-entomologist decided he was tired and would wait until morning to go bug hunting.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The following morning Adam was up well before his Grandfather. He searched the apartment for electronic listening devices – bugs. He found what he was looking for – in fact, he found two. One was in the light fixture that hung over the kitchen table. It would have been positioned to pick up 90% of the conversations there in the apartment. The second was on the underneath part of the window sill, outside at the fire escape. It would pick up much of the remaining ten percent.

Adam had a note prepared for Yapa when he arrived – a half hour later than usual, which still cut his night's sleep shorter than he was used to. The coffee was brewed. The bacon was sizzling and the eggs scrambled, ready to be poured into the skillet. He pushed down the lever on the side of the toaster as he greeted his grandfather.

“Morning, Yapa. Sleep well, I hope. Out of Cheerios so you'll have to settle for bacon and eggs. Coffee's ready.”

Yapa gave him a strange look. He hated Cheerios and truly preferred bacon and eggs. He understood something strange was in the air, but couldn't be sure what it might be. Adam pointed to the message on the yellow pad.

‘Read this silently. I found two electronic bugs – kitchen light and fire escape. I have a plan but for breakfast let's just be normal – nothing about the case.’

Yapa nodded, put down the pad and took a seat.

Adam served breakfast. They maintained a conversation that was so boring it should have put the Alley Men to sleep.

At the table during breakfast the two of them exchanged a few notes in and among the senseless discussion.

Adam's note: 'I need a tape of songs from the old days. I'll set up the old tape recorder here on the table and play it after we've finished eating. Then, we can talk quietly in the living room – see, the furniture in there just may come in handy after all. (He added a smiley face).'

Yapa nodded and pointed to the bottom drawer in a kitchen cabinet. The contrived (fake) conversation continued.

"Remember, I have to go the YMCA and work out later on."

"I remember. I think I'll go along and take a few laps around the indoor walking track."

Yapa understood Adam's comment was meant to set a deceptive destination for when they left the apartment building later in the morning.

He turned in his chair and opened the cabinet drawer, removing several tapes and the little tape player. He pushed them across the table. Years before, Adam had wired his side of the table with a strip of electrical outlets to power his laptop and such. He plugged in the tape player and inserted the tape, then addressed Yapa.

"You were wondering where your old music tapes were. I found them in the cabinet. Why don't we have your kind of music this morning? I really don't hate it as much as I let on."

"Thanks. That would be very nice. We haven't played them for a long time. What do you have?"

"Here's one called Blue Moon – a selection of love songs by Lawrence Welk and his orchestra. We can listen while we do up the dishes."

Adam started the player and they moved into the living room where they spoke in low tones, undoubtedly being drowned out by the music. They agreed on ways to send the 'listeners' false information, but that would have to come later. They had things that needed to be done. They remained in

the living room.

Yapa contacted the attorney and they spoke on the phone for a long time. Their phone worked through the laptop so Adam was able to listen in and ask questions from time to time. There seemed to be several considerations about the stolen money – if, in fact, that was what they would find inside the crypt.

Just as Yapa had figured in the beginning, it all boiled down to finders-keepers since there would be no relatives, no body to consider, and the fact that so much time had elapsed. A notice could be published to the attention of individuals and families that had been robbed, but after such a long time the attorney was certain no legitimate claims would be forthcoming. He would arrange the necessary legal papers so they could gain access to the sealed crypt. An official from the States Attorney's Office would be on hand to witness the operation and verify their rights as the 'finders'.

Adam became excited at the prospect. After the call was completed he and his grandfather talked about how they would handle the money. First, they would need to set up a trust fund with the two of them as executors (a nonprofit organization with them in charge of it). That would handle the income taxes and fees that otherwise would be assessed on the find. They spent some time drafting a document outlining the purpose of the fund and other matters related to it. The attorney would take what they wrote and fix it up so it would be legal. It was soon off in an email.

(Although Adam would never admit it, he actually came to enjoy the 'old fashioned' tunes that continued to blast forth from the tape player.)

They had been so busy that the status of the Alley Men had slipped their minds. Yapa glanced down as he went into the kitchen to refill his coffee cup.

Back in the living room he spoke about what he had seen.

"Only one bad guy down there this morning, Adam. What do you make of that?"

"I wouldn't doubt if the other one slept the night away in a dumpster near the old bank building. I hope he survived. It

had not been my intention to do anything further than protect myself. I can't speak for the big man who came to my rescue, however. There was nothing kind or gentle about the way he was handling the guy. I have to wonder who he was."

"If you really begin thinking it through, I believe you will come up with a reasonable candidate, son."

"What? Somebody I know, you mean. I hadn't been thinking in that direction. In fact, the first time I noticed him I figured he was one of the bad guys in all this. Let's see, then. A big man who for some reason sees his job as protecting me. Not really such a difficult question when set in that context – Old Jim."

"That would be my bet," Yapa said. "It wouldn't be the first time he's come to your rescue, you will recall."

"Like when I was five and decided to set out on my own to find my mother. He followed me all day to keep me safe and when I fell asleep that night he carried me back here to you. And when that gang of kids from the west side tried to rough me up back when I was ten, he stood by ready to intervene in case he was needed."

"Let's see," Yapa began, remembering out loud, "As I recall, by the time that encounter was over there were five of them laid out on the street and we had to repair one of your crutches that had been broken during the fracas (fight)."

"Whenever I think back to that time I feel the adrenaline rush all over again," Adam said. "It's hard to think one scrawny kid with a couple of crutches could wipe out two dozen gang members like that."

"Two dozen???"

"The story grows in my memory the way stories like that will grow each time they are recounted."

"I'm sure there were other times Old Jim was looking after you that we will never even know about."

"I wonder how he came to think he needed to do that – look out for me?"

"No idea. Maybe you could ask him."

"Maybe. Or just thank him. I suppose his motivation is a private thing I shouldn't pry into."

Yapa nodded and smiled. His boy was growing into a wise young man.

There was a knock at the door. Both of them visibly tensed. Considering recent events, their first inclinations were to consider it might be somebody wanting to do them harm – especially in light of the openness with which the one Alley Man had attacked Adam the night before. Perhaps the second Alley Man was coming to collect the solved code or settle the score for the encounter at the bus stop. Adam briefly hoped it was Allyson, but figured the force of the knuckles against the door suggested it was someone else.

Adam adjusted his knee braces so he was in a standing position and “put on’ his crutches, standing just to the right of the door. Yapa looked through the peep hole and smiled.

“The cops, the fuzz, the police,” he joked clearly relieved. “I think you can relax.”

He opened the door to a uniformed policeman who appeared to be in his early sixties.

“I’m Officer Duncan. We received an anonymous report of an attack on a young man named Adam Nelson and were given this address.

Adam moved out into the open where the officer could see him.

“I’m Adam Martin. My grandfather’s last name is Nelson. That may have caused somebody some confusion since we live here together. The report was not from me. I’m fine. I was involved in a physical confrontation early this morning, but I already made a statement to the police – as Adam Martin.”

“I wondered if that might not be the case. Quite a show you put on I hear. May I ask, though, what a boy your age was doing out at 1:30 in the morning?”

Yapa answered before Adam could spin his own tale and be forced into an untruth.

“He had gone to visit his grandfather Deutch on the east side of the city and got a late start back. You know how grandfathers and grandsons can talk on for an eternity.”

“I do. My daughter has raked me over the coals for

doing the same thing with my grandson on several occasions. Glad to see you're alright, son."

"Thanks for your concern, Officer," Adam said.

That ended the conversation and the policeman turned and left. Adam closed the door.

"I think you stretched the truth there, Yapa."

"Fortunately, the truth is usually very flexible. We hurt nobody and saved the officer from having to endure listening to the detailed story and filling out another lengthy police report."

"Suppose Old Jim filed that Adam Nelson report?" Adam said.

"Most likely. I suppose he may not know that you use your father's last name – as it should be. I doubt if that has ever come up between us."

"I wish I'd have known my dad, you know. It stinks that he got killed when he was in the army."

"Yes. It certainly stinks. It's not fair. It's a terrible shame, but things are how things are. You are making a wonderful life for yourself. He'd have been very proud of you."

"You've said all that before and it's not that I don't believe you. It's often just nearly impossible to accept 'unfair things' at my age."

"It's hard at any age. We change what we can change and we adapt (adjust) to what we can't. We both also lost your mother and grandmother and even though we are sad about the unfairness of those things we do seem to be getting on with life in a pretty darned good fashion."

Adam broke a broad grin.

"I didn't intend that to seem humorous, son."

"Oh, it wasn't. It was the word you used – darned. That's as close to swearing as I've ever heard you come."

"You know what I think about swearing."

"Yes, that using swear words represents extreme laziness on the part of the speaker – taking the easy route and swearing rather than thinking about what he really wants or needs to say, and then saying it so people know what's truly on his mind."

“Seems you just may have been listening to the old man all these years after all.”

“Miracles never cease, as it’s been said,” Adam said with a smile.

Yapa refilled his coffee, draining the pot to the last drop. He took a sip and made an awful face.

“And just why is it that a smart man like you, forces that terrible-tasting liquid into his mouth, time after time?”

“I suppose I could say so you’ll have something to contemplate and pester me about. Being puzzled often produces wonderful intellectual growth, you know.”

“Would that come under the category of stretching the truth?”

“No. That would just be an out and out lie.”

They exchanged a smile. Adam moved to his place back at the table and prepared to adjust his knee braces and sit.

“Before you do that, you need to come and take a look at some of your handiwork.”

“Handiwork? I don’t understand.”

It had been code so anyone listening would not understand if, in fact, they could hear over the music.

Yapa pointed out the window. Adam went and stood by his side.

“Oh, my,” Adam whispered. “He’s back. Alley man number two – arm in a sling and his forehead bandaged like a mummy.”

“And he walked with a limp as he approached his colleague down there.”

“I just imagine I didn’t make a new friend last night, did I?”

“I suppose not,” Yapa said. “I haven’t seen Old Jim all morning. I hope he’s alright.”

“Figuring that he made that anonymous police report suggests he is fine,” Adam said. “He may just be avoiding the Alley guys this morning. I’m sure he didn’t make a new friend last night, either. I’m wondering which one of us did the

damage to the man?”

“And which one are you hoping did it?”

“I’m a thirteen-year-old boy, Yapa. You know I hope it all came from me.”

Yapa nodded, not approving of the wish, but fully understanding it.

Back at the table, Adam put his finger to his lips, reached up and removed the tiny bugging device that was stuck inside the glass shade of the kitchen light. He placed it on the table and picked up the tape player, which he carried with him to the sink. There, he held up one hand indicating Yapa should not be concerned as he picked up an empty glass jar dropping it into the sink breaking it into many pieces. He immediately clicked off the tape player stopping the music and spoke for the benefit of the listeners.

“Oh, grampa! I’m so sorry! I just broke the light fixture with my crutch. Here, let me clean it up.”

Yapa went right along with the ruse (scam, trick) putting on an angry tone.

“How many times have I cautioned you to be careful with those things? You’ll bet you’ll clean it up! Put it all in the trash.”

With his finger back to his lips, Adam picked up the bug and took it into the living room, placing it under a cushion and adding the pillow from his bed on top of that.

“Very clever. The potential success of your plan might have been more certain if you had let me in on it ahead of time.”

“We’ve always been pretty good at innovating (making things up) as we go.”

“I guess we have. Anyway, let’s hope they buy it. You know they may try to plant another one.”

“We’ll handle that later. We have stuff to do.”

While Adam got set up at the table the two of them continued talking.

“So, what need be our next steps?” Adam asked, opening his laptop and making ready to do any research that might be necessary.

“How to open a century old granite crypt, for starters, I suppose.”

“I noticed two things that will present problems,” Adam said. “First, there is a key lock in the center along the top edge of the side section that looks to be the opening – the door – the whatever. I may be able to pick it – I imagine I can if it isn’t filled up with crud. It’s the old-fashioned kind that uses a big key. I have a set of the only three different styles they had back then – the master keys you might say. Second, is how that crypt works. Does that front section roll out somehow or is it like a door that swings down or can be pushed up? All the granite and the walls down there are dripping in slime. The crack around that section on the front is filled with years of grime.”

“If we just knew the manufacturer maybe you could learn something helpful from a website,” Yapa said.

“Good thought and I think I may have that. I noticed something at the bottom of one of the copper plates. They appear to be engraved with information. I didn’t take time to clean one up and read it, but I did notice part of what is probably just that – the manufacturer’s name at the very bottom.”

He closed his eyes as if trying to reconstruct the image in his mind.

“Johnson Gran - - - - - ks. I couldn’t make out what looked to be about six letters in there. They were corroded over.”

“That should give you a starting place. You could search something like crypt manufacturers early 20th century”

“Already ahead of you. Didn’t like what Google offered so I’m switching to Bing. Let’s see. Here’s a suggestion that looks promising. Mouse click, work your magic!”

The laptop brought up the page and he described its contents to Yapa who continued to stand by the window, apparently more concerned about Old Jim than he had let on.

“I think I may have found it,” Adam said at last. “The Johnson Granite Works. It’s still in operation if you can believe that. It’s just up in Springfield. That’s certainly close enough

for that church to have used it back then, don't you think?"

"Seems reasonable. Any historic information that will be useful?"

"Just a general history. It's a family company. They began operation in 1879 and they did and still do manufacture granite headstones and crypts. There are some pictures of their current offerings. Crypts haven't changed much in a century. Perhaps I need to send them some suggestions."

Yapa smiled and spoke without replying to Adams comment.

"I assume they suggest a way to contact them."

"Yes. Phone numbers, email and Skype. How about I Skype them? I prefer talking face to face."

"Fine. Probably want to slip into a shirt first, then."

Yapa tossed him a T shirt that had been draped over the back of a chair from the night before.

He was soon speaking with a woman who was clearly well versed in most things about the company. He explained they needed to gain access to a granite burial vault built by the company back in the early 1900s. She explained how they were constructed. In general, it was how Adam had figured: after being unlocked, the front section could be dropped on internal hinges, which were located in the sides, revealing whatever was inside. She said the crack might need to be cleared of the accumulated grime and suggested a slender, flat head screwdriver or the end of the blade of a hacksaw. The door would be two inches thick. It would snap out open when pressed in at the top. That would allow the door to be pulled down and hang below the opening. She had several other suggestions, which indicated to Adam that his request had not been such a rare one. She cautioned him that the door might weigh as much as three hundred pounds. A crypt was manufactured to just sit in one place and last forever – not be played with.

"You got all that," Adam said to Yapa once he had thanked her and signed off.

"Yes. It was far easier than I thought. I'm not sure that you young folks fully appreciate the fact that right there in your

laptop – and in most of today’s cellphones – you have immediate access to almost all of the accumulated knowledge of mankind. It would probably take a library the size of several football stadiums just to house the books necessary to hold all that information.”

“It is amazing when you put it that way. I suppose it is more amazing to those of you who grew up without such technology than it is to those of us who have never known anything different.”

Yapa just nodded. Adam had been right. The younger generation probably never would be able to fully appreciate the wonder associated with such things. It was a universal human trait – not appreciating the value of something until you found yourself without it.

Adam emailed their Trust Document to the Attorney who had already sent them the necessary contact information for the States Attorney’s office. There was also a document from the owners of the old bank building, which gave them the legal right to enter and remove the contents of the crypt.

“You know what would be really funny, Yapa?”

“What’s that?”

“If, once we open that crypt, instead of the loot, we find old Geschenk Deutch stretched out inside.”

“Not sure funny is the word I’d use.”

“I guess that’s another generational thing. Kids my age – well boys, at least – would all think it was a really hilarious find. Then we’d wet our pants and make a beeline for the nearest cop.”

“I guess we need to set up a time to get this thing done,” Yapa said.

“Wetting our pants?” Adam joked.

Yapa offered a smile, but in all other ways ignored it. He was ready to get down to the serious business at hand.

“I guess the only other schedule we have to consider is the States Attorney,” Adam said. “Should we email, call or Skype?”

“It appears that Oscar has already alerted that office to what will be happening,” Yapa said. “I suppose we just need to

work out a time that is convenient for them.” “Probably a phone call would be most efficient.”

“You should handle that, I think – grown up to grown up, you know.”

Yapa made the arrangements. A driver from the States Attorney’s office would pick them up at one o’clock that afternoon.

“This is beginning to get exciting,” Adam said.

“Just beginning?”

“Well, just beginning to get exciteder, I guess.”

“Call Webster’s and have them add that word to their dictionary.”

Another set of smiles.

“Think we should check on Old Jim?” Adam asked.

“What I think is that you need to take a shower – you smell like the undercroft we will be visiting.”

“Really? It’s interesting how after just a short time a person really can’t smell his own stick. Like the deodorant talk we had last year. Thanks for that, by the way. I’m sure girls wouldn’t want to get within ten yards of me without that double whammy you suggested.”

“Double whammy?”

“Yeah – daily showers followed by daily deodorant.”

“You’re welcome, then. What an uplifting chat we’ve just had.”

“Truth is often not pleasant, but it’s always worth talking about,” Adam said.

Yapa let the conversation end there because to pursue Adam’s last comment would have taken hour/days/years/decades to complete.

Shower taken.

Old Jim located by Yapa during shower (Adam’s not Jim’s!)

Lunch eaten.

Elevator ridden.

Sidewalk accessed.

Car and driver pulled to a stop along the sidewalk.

Adam rode up front with the driver. Yapa sat in back with the man from the States Attorney's office. He filled him in on what was going on and supplied him with printouts of the material the attorney had prepared for them.

"Very well organized," the man said nodding.

He appeared to be the 'all business' sort. Yapa responded to his comment.

"When you spend your life riding herd on a boy genius with a wild imagination and inexhaustible energy you either become very well organized or you are left in his dust."

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CHAPTER EIGHT

At the rear door to the old bank building the representative from the States Attorney's office – Willis – removed a key from a small brown envelope and slipped it into the lock. It turned. He opened the door and they entered.

Adam whispered to his grandfather: "I guess that's another way to do it."

The shared a smile. Willis didn't ask. Adam and Yapa lit the way with flashlights.

When they arrived at the door to the cemetery they stopped. Yapa and Adam expected Willis to produce another key. He didn't. Instead he looked puzzled and then back and forth between the other two. He tried the door but it wouldn't open.

"I was only given one key. Does the same one work for both doors?"

Without waiting for a response, he tried the only key he had. It would not even slip into the opening.

"I was led to believe you had already been downstairs," Willis said.

"You were not misled," Yapa said.

"I can assist you if you want," Adam said removing his pick set from his shirt pocket and waiting.

"What you are suggesting is not legal – picking a lock," Willis said.

“How could it be illegal to be assisting the State’s Attorney’s office on official business?” he asked.

“I’ll accept that rationalization, but still the mere fact you have . . . oh, forget it.”

Adam bent over and went to work. Click! Click! Click! He moved back and with a sweep of his hand offered Willis the knob.

The door was soon open. At that point Adam handed Willis a flashlight for his own use. They made their way down the steps. The ground below was strewn with debris so Adam pointed out to Willis that he needed to be cautious as they crossed the cemetery.

They stopped beside the hole.

“After you, young man,” Willis said mimicking the sweep of the hand Adam had offered to him a few minutes earlier.

Adam carefully descended the steps pointing out several hazards the others should be aware of.

“This may not be good, guys,” he said. “I know I closed these doors tight down here, but now they are open a good three inches. Unless one green eyed rat is a lot stronger and smarter than he looks, somebody else has been here.”

He hesitated just a moment before pushing them on open.

The three of them did a quick search of the large area with their lights. Nobody was inside. There really was no place for anyone to hide in there – that is, if they were larger than Adam’s new friend, the river rat.

With his light, Adam indicated the crypt of interest. It was to their immediate right on the second row, about four feet off the floor. They went to it. Adam lit the name that was cut into the granite and then the round, brass, lock near the top center of the dark rose ‘door’.

“You have a key for this?” he asked, turning to Willis.

“No. Have you opened it before?”

“No, sir. The lock was filled with dirt and I had no way of removing it.”

“So where does that leave us?” Willis asked.

Adam removed a vial the size of an eye drop bottle from his pocket. It had a built-in glass dropper tube and a rubber suction bulb on top.

“Peroxide. We force the liquid into the hard-caked dirt. The peroxide bubbles up and dislodges the particles. A few treatments like that and the lock should be clean enough to work – at least that’s my theory.”

“Theory?” Willis asked, looking over at Yapa, clearly uneasy.

“The boy’s theories are typically as good as proven science. I’d suggest we just relax and let him have at it.”

“I must say that so far he seems to have a very good track record. Like your grandfather said, Adam, have at it.”

It took six treatments before Adam was finally satisfied he could insert a key.

He slid the first of the three master keys into the lock. It would not turn. He repositioned it further in and then closer to the front. It still would not turn.

He removed it and inserted the second. He repeated the same routine with the same result – that key would not turn.

“We’re getting a bit anxious here,” Yapa said.

“Not to worry. I just like to keep my audiences in suspense, you know. Give me another second here.

He inserted the final master key and worked it side to side in and out, and up and down.

Click!

He straightened up and moved back, speaking.

“The next step is to press in on the very top edge of this slab I’ve been calling the door. There is supposed to be a spring-loaded pressure release mechanism of some kind that should push the top back toward us.”

Yapa approached one end and pointed to the other indicating for Willis to move to it.

“Press in on three, I guess,” Yapa said.

“One, two, three.”

Even knowing what was supposed to happen they were

all clearly amazed when it did.

“Okay,” Adam said. “Now pull it out toward you and lower it. It may weigh three hundred pounds so don’t bust a gut. I’d let it swing on its own if it gets too heavy.”

“Actually, it’s not the least bit heavy,” Willis said.

Adam nodded and pointed.

“See the little chain there. Must be counterweights at the rear that offset a large part of the weight. Somebody knew what they were doing when they designed this thing.”

“I’m sure they would be happy you approve,” Yapa said.

The men had put down their flashlights so it was only Adam’s beam that lit the area inside. He began at the left and slowly proceeded across the area toward the right.

“One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven small suitcases standing side by side,” Adam said.

The others turned on their lights.

“Look more closely,” Yapa said. “They are not your run of the mill suitcases – they are made of metal, apparently heavy metal. They not only have a handle on top like most suitcases, but there is one on this side, also – I assume there is one on the opposite side, as well. For two-man handling, I suppose, so we can expect them to be very heavy.”

“Ten are the same size and silver in color and one smaller one, which is brass or gold in color,” Adam observed. “Color coded for some reason, do you suppose?”

“I guess we have no way of knowing until we get a look inside them,” Yapa said.

“And each one is outfitted with a lock of its own,” Willis added, pointing.

He tried to remove a case from the crypt.

“Wow. Heavier than currency for sure. Much heavier. What do you suppose?”

Adam had an answer ready (of course!).

“What I suppose is that what the German Agents stole they converted into some precious metal. US dollars would have been of little use to them and could have been traced

through their serial numbers, but gold or silver would have been good anywhere and fully untraceable if melted down.”

The two men nodded.

“Let’s remove one and see if I can open it,” Adam suggested. “See if the two of you can lug it over to that granite slab in the center of the room. It’s about counter height and I can reach to work on it there.”

Each man grasped one of the side handles and with only moderate effort they moved it to the slab. It was one of the larger, silver colored cases.

“That probably weighs about 100 pounds,” Yapa said.

The two men lit the lock with their flashlights. It was as clean as the day it had been placed inside the sealed crypt. Adam went to work and soon felt the top pop loose. He placed his fingers underneath the lip and raised it open.

“Silver bars,” he reported out loud even though the others were seeing exactly what he was seeing.

“Got a calculation on its worth, son,” Yapa asked.

“Close to \$26,000 if it is a hundred pounds. That would be less than \$300,000 if all eleven cases contain silver. My calculations based on the historical reports, suggest there should be a lot more that – in current day value.”

Adam sounded both puzzled and disappointed.

“Relock this one and let’s open that brass colored case,” Yapa suggested.”

“What are you thinking, Yapa?”

“Color coded? What does your idea really suggest?”

“I see. Silver cases, silver bars. Gold cases, gold, maybe?”

It came out a question.

Adam closed and locked the case and the men set it on the floor. They moved the brass colored case to the granite slab. Adam soon had it open.

“Well, I’ll be!” Willis said. “Like you suggested, silver in silver and gold in gold. What’s that worth?”

“You estimate it weighs a hundred pounds, also?”

The men looked at each other and nodded.

“Smaller, but certainly just as heavy, I’d say,” Yapa said.

Adam did some quick calculations.

“Let’s be conservative here; at a little over a thousand dollars an ounce we’re talking \$16,000 a pound, times one hundred pounds, would put the worth of the gold in this one case at right around 1.6 million dollars. Add in the worth of the silver and it’s close to two million dollars.

Willis spoke.

“I had no idea you were talking about this amount of money. We need to get some security down here right away.”

“And some help to cart it off to the bank,” Adam added.

At that moment, the two wooden doors to the room slammed closed – pulled tight from the outside. A moment later a shot was fired through one of them from the other side.

“A suggestion from somebody that we don’t get close enough to the doors to try and open them, I assume,” Yapa said.

The three of them moved to the side, away from the center of the room.

“That’s a powerful weapon,” Willis said, “being able to penetrate two inches of seasoned oak.”

Adam and Yapa nodded, suddenly sensing the seriousness of the rapidly unfolding new situation.

“I suppose we need to let Mr. Willis in on the whole story – Alley Guys and all, Yapa.”

“I’m sure you’re right.”

First, let me call my driver,” Willis said. “He can muster the cavalry in no time flat.”

He placed the call. Nothing happened.

“Looks like I have no bars – no reception down here two stories underground. That’s not good.”

“May I see your phone?” Adam asked.

Willis handed it to him, by that time having learned not to question the boy. Adam examined it outside and inside.

“Okay. I have an idea. First, we should cut back to only one flashlight to save the other batteries in case this turns

into a long stay.”

The two men doused their lights and Adam continued as he walked toward the door making sure not to get directly in front of it. With his light, he searched the wall beside it.

“There it is. An old fashioned, rotation type, wall switch just like I figured. The wires run on the outside of the walls like they did back in the old days.”

“But I’m sure this room hasn’t been connected to electricity for over fifty years,” Willis said. “In fact, I’m surprised it was ever connected considering how long ago this was in use.”

“We’re not after electricity, Sir. I count ten light fixtures in the ceiling of this room. The room is some forty feet square. That’s a lot of good old fashioned copper wire up there on the ceiling. All we need to do is attach the antenna plate in the phone to one end of all that wire in this room and we should have one heck of an antenna.”

“You said ‘should have’. Aren’t you sure?” Willis asked clearly becoming more and more agitated (upset).

“Few things are sure things in this life other than death, taxes, and, if my Yapa is to be believed, countless rejections by the female of our species. Hold my light while I get to work.”

Five minutes later he spoke again.

“Okay, now, let’s power up the phone. Looks like one bar, which according to my calculations is a billion percent more than you had before. I suggest you text because that uses a far simpler radio wave setup than voice transmission.”

Adam held the phone with the wire attached. Yapa held the flashlight. Willis poked in the numbers and began the message.

“There. I’m done.”

“Watch for a response.”

“I failed to ask for a response.”

“Let’s try it again, then.”

“He repeated the message.”

A minute passed; then two, then three.

“Doesn’t look like there is going to be a response,” Adam said. “That doesn’t mean the driver didn’t receive it. Just that this phone didn’t receive a response. I’m thinking this antenna alignment just might transmit better in than it receives.”

“How about calling 911?” Yapa suggested.

It needed no response. Willis went right back to the phone.

“Maybe you should try doing that through voice transmission,” Adam suggested. “Electronics is really not one of my strongest areas.”

Yapa spoke directly to Willis.

“That means he only knows 300 percent more about it than the rest of us.”

Willis managed a very faint smile as he placed a voice call.

“Remember you may not hear a response, but just keep talking,” Adam said. “Give them all the necessary information several times.”

It went on for a full minute before Adam waved him to a halt.

“I’ve been thinking. Those double doors open in. If the bad guys can’t get in here, we will be safe – for a while at least. Let’s pile those cases up against the inside of the doors. That will add half a ton of dead weight. Two guys can’t push that. The added extra is that no bullet is going to penetrate two feet of solid metal.”

It took fifteen minutes, but presently all eleven cases were stacked against the center crack between the doors. That way the full weight was at work against each of them. There were still several feet of wooden doors left uncovered on each side.

They stood back and turned off the flashlight.

“I wonder why they are waiting,” Willis asked. “You think they’ve left?”

“You want to take a peek through the crack?” Yapa asked.

No response was needed. There would be no peek.

Check your inbox, Mr. Willis!” Adam suggested – well, it was more like an order, actually. Willis checked it without hesitation.

“Nothing.”

There was noise again just outside the doors. Adam turned on his flashlight and lit them as they watched. It was obvious that somebody was trying to force them open. The doors vibrated, but didn’t budge. Since they opened in, the hinges were on the inside so they couldn’t just remove them and then slide out the doors.

Adam held up one finger, the longtime signal between Adam and Yapa that an idea was brewing.

Adam whispered.

“Just go with me, here, Yapa.”

Yapa nodded and moved to a place beside him close to the doors.

Adam spoke in a louder than normal voice.

“How many rounds (bullets) do you have left in your old pistol, grandfather?”

Yapa understood.

“Let’s see, looks like five.”

“That should be more than enough for a sharpshooter like you. We’ll just sit tight until they come through that door.”

It grew silent again – outside and inside.

Willis whispered a question to Yapa.

“You have a hand gun?”

“Of course, not.”

“Oh. . . . OH!”

He got the idea of what was going on. He nodded. Give the man a few more years and he just might begin to catch on to how Adam and Yapa did things.

Ten minutes later they heard muffled voices outside. Again, Adam lit the doors.

“This is definitely not good, gentlemen,” he said pointing. “They apparently have wrenches and are turning the bolts that hold the iron strips in place that hold the planks

together to form the doors. Once the nuts fall off inside, here, they can pull out the bolts and the doors will literally fall apart. Not a very smart way to build a door, I'd say."

"Remind us to send the architect a nasty email about it later," Yapa said.

The two of them chuckled.

"You guys joke around like nothing's wrong. I don't get you two," Willis said.

"You belong to a very large club of folks who don't get us, Sir," Adam said. "We'll take questions after we get this present dilemma rectified (problem solved).

The first plank fell away. Light entered the room. Adam turned off the flashlight and suggested Yapa and Willis move into the shadow-filled corner at the left of the door. He took a position to its right and readied a crutch, holding it high like a batter preparing to hit a homerun – score tied, in the bottom of the ninth.

Yapa had to pull Willis with him to get him out of the potential line of fire.

After a few more minutes, the second plank fell. They would need to remove two more before the opening would be large enough for an adult body to enter. They had some sort of a powerful light source outside. As the planks fell away it began to provide a good deal of light, straight ahead, into the room. Adam was somewhat surprised they didn't seem to be taking the loaded gun ruse (trick, con) seriously. Perhaps their greed was overpowering good common sense. Perhaps they were armed with automatic weapons so didn't take the idea of an old pistol very seriously.

The third plank fell to the ground. It grew silent on the other side of the doors as if they were waiting for the three inside to make a move.

Adam remained at the ready even though the opening was still too small for either of the men to gain entry.

Suddenly, there it was – a face peering tentatively inside. The three of them moved so their backs were flat against the front wall in the hope they would be impossible to see there in the shadows. From where the man's face was

placed he really couldn't see anywhere but straight ahead.

Adam spoke to himself, silently, the way he often did.

'Come on Alley Man. Just stick that head in here another ten inches. All I need is ten little inches.'

The face disappeared. A fourth plank was removed.

"We know you're in there," came a voice with a heavy accent. It was the one Adam recognized from his encounter in the alley that first day. "Move to the center of the room with your hands in the air," the man commanded.

The lack of any response clearly upset him. Again, he approached the opening with his face. That time he made the mistake of his life – he gave Adam a full ten inches of target.

WHAM!

With a single blow of the crutch to the back of the man's head, he fell to the ground unconscious without so much as a peep, groan or gurgle. The other man called out in a foreign language. Soon, the unconscious man had been dragged back outside.

A fourth plank was removed. It became quiet for several minutes before the second man spoke directly to them.

"I'll give you thirty seconds to show yourselves and come out or I'll come in shooting."

Adam thought it sounded like a bad script from an old black and white late night movie, but it gave him an idea. He waved his arm to get Yapa's attention. He formed his two fingers into the shape of a 'V' and positioned them atop one crutch – the open part up. Then he pointed to a spot above the door. Yapa nodded and whispered something to Willis.

There in the darkness of the corner, using his powerful arms and chest, Adam slowly repositioned his body into the handstand position atop his crutches. That time his hands gripped them high, where his armpits usually rested. It was a very unstable position, but necessary to move him high enough for what he had in mind. His legs pointed directly upward, his feet brushing against the high ceiling. He carefully walked his crutches so they were straddling the narrow opening in the door below. He was facing into the

room and resting his back against the wall above the door for added steadiness.

“I’m coming in,” the man said at last.

His hand, holding a small automatic weapon, entered first, pointing one way and then another. Apparently, he assumed that would keep them away and establish his authority. Then his head and shoulders entered. He looked around still unable to make out the two men in the deep shadows to his left. Adam, of course, was as good as invisible from up above him.

The man entered and straightened up, beginning to sweep the room with the beam of his flashlight. It was then it became clear that he was wearing body armor answering the question about why he had felt safe about encroaching upon the territory of an armed man.

At that moment, Adam pushed his crutches aside and plummeted straight down on top of the man. He immediately had him in a headlock. His weight had toppled them forward, the man’s face down onto the floor. As he had attempted to break his fall with his hands, his gun had been jarred loose. It landed several feet away. Yapa rushed in and picked it up. Adam spoke to the man.

“Now, if you’ll make nice with us I’ll let you breathe again.”

The man nodded, gasping, and Adam eased his grip a bit – just enough.

The man made an effort to stand.

“Oh, no, my good man,” Yapa said brandishing (waving) the hand gun. “Nose on the floor until we say differently.”

Willis picked up the crutches and handed them back to Adam who was soon standing upright.

“Mr. Willis, why don’t you go outside and round up some help,” Adam said. “Take your phone. It looks like my grandfather has things under control in here. Anyway, I need some privacy so I can ask him about some boy/girl questions I have.”

“What?????”

“Just pulling your leg, Sir. It’s what we do. Surely by now you understand that. However, you may want to take my grandfather’s old pistol with you in case there are others out there.”

Willis looked puzzled for just a moment, then shook his head and left.

“You’re alright, I assume,” Yapa said/asked moving toward Adam.

“Me? I’m fine. You?”

“Way too old for this sort of carrying on, I’ll tell you that, son, but I’m fine, also – be better after a week-long nap.”

“How about you, Alley Man? You okay?” Adam asked. “Oh, no, that’s right you’ll probably be spending the rest of your life behind bars in a cell that will look a lot like this place. You know, it probably didn’t do your case any good by threatening the State’s Attorney’s life, and shooting at him through the door, like you did. In this country that’s attempted murder – three counts I’m thinking.”

From the floor, he muttered a long string of words in a foreign language.

“Swear words, I assume,” Adam said looking to Yapa for verification.

“I’m going to assume so, also, although I may have to have you help me understand them. I’m not aware just how one might go about doing what he’s requesting of us.”

“Seems only fair,” Adam said, “since it was you who explained the meaning of most of those words to me back when I was eight.”

“Oh, I can guarantee you these were NOT those words.”

It was worth a chuckle between them and prompted more of whatever it was spewing from the mouth of the man on the floor.

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CHAPTER NINE

The police arrived. The bad guys were carted off to jail. The gold and silver were taken to the bank in an armored Brinks truck and secured in the vault until decisions about how it was going to be used could be determined. Adam and his grandfather returned to their apartment.

“So, some big decisions for us, I guess,” Adam said.

“Like whether or not you should spend more time with Alyson you mean, of course.”

They chuckled.

“That decision was made the first time I saw her. You know I was referring to the gold.”

“I do. I need to have Oscar begin working on what the tax issues will be so we can know just what we will have left to work with. The bank will have an assay (metal purity test) done and determine how much it is worth. One thing at the top of my personal list is putting away enough to handle your college expenses. After that I can see nothing I want to use it for.”

“I thought Evergreen Academy, the college where you taught, had a free tuition deal for family of faculty members that I could use.”

“It does and you can, but to be fair to that powerful brain of yours, you really need to attend a better institution – Harvard, Yale, or one of the others that rank in that class.”

Adam nodded thoughtfully.

“I hadn’t given that aspect of college any thought, I guess. It’s still quite a way off for me. I’ll have to depend on you to point me in the right direction. Just so it’s a college with girls.”

“I’m sure we’ll be able to work that out together.”

Again, a series of thoughtful nods.

“I’ve been thinking about using most of my part of it to help orphans,” Adam said, thoughtfully. “If it weren’t for you, I’d probably be an orphan. I’ve thought about that a lot. Not sure what kind of help, just that I’d like to do something.”

“How about a better apartment in a better part of the city for us?” Yapa asked.

It had really been a test question and Yapa pretty well knew what the answer would be.

“Leave here? I don’t think so! This is home. We have everything that we need right here.”

It was Yapa’s turn to nod thoughtfully – and smile.

“There is still one big part of this mystery that I don’t understand,” Adam said, looking into the face of his grandfather who had taken a seat in his usual place across the kitchen table, sipping at his usual mug of coffee and making his usual face, which suggested the brew tasted terrible – like usual.

“How did your father – my great grandfather – come by the information about the German Agents and how did he know where they stashed the silver and gold?”

“Two good questions. I’ve been wondering, also. Let’s see if your two best friends can help us?”

Adam looked puzzled.

“Best friends? Two?”

“Yes, Google and Bing.”

Adam’s face lit up at his grandfather’s little joke. In some ways it was the sorry truth. He really had no close friends. There were a few guys at the YMCA where he swam and worked out, but they never socialized away from there. Once inside those YMCA walls, Adam was pretty much all business – maintaining and building his body. Although his legs were useless in the sense of walking and running and

kicking a ball or jumping hurdles on the track, he still did resistance training with them every time he exercised in order to maintain at least some muscle mass. His hope, of course, was that medical science would someday soon discover a way to make them useful again.

He couldn't remember back to the time when, as a toddler, he had been able to walk and scamper across the yard in pursuit of squirrels and robins. He had to depend on his Yapa to reconstruct those times for him. It would have been easy to be sad and even bitter about his condition – the unfairness of it all – but he had come to understand thinking that way just made him a sad and bitter person.

His Yapa was a very positive man who enjoyed and could laugh at his own foibles (quirks and imperfections). That had rubbed off on Adam and he was pleased that it had. He figured he had come by a very good set of tradeoffs. On the one hand, he couldn't use his legs – and that was a major bummer. On the other hand, he was smart, people liked him, he was developing great abs, biceps and chest, and although he really wasn't movie star handsome, he was certainly good enough looking to have girls turn their heads and look at him as he passed them on the sidewalk or in the library. All in all it seemed like there were a lot more things on the positive side of the ledger than on the negative. Still, there were times when he cried himself to sleep over it.

“Got any idea where to start searching for information?” Adam asked, opening his laptop and making it ready to crank out whatever they requested of it.

“I remember a few things that might hold some useful information,” Yapa went on. “My grandfather on my mother's side was some sort of Intelligence Officer (like the CIA) in France prior to World War One. That's all I really know about him. I know my father – your great grandfather – was very active in politics. He had been dragged off by the police on several occasions for controversial (unpopular) things he had said to his students at the school where he taught. It was a time when the officials in his defenseless little country didn't want anything done or said that might upset the rulers of powerful Germany.

“Got the name of your mother’s father?”

“Abelard Barbary – French through and through.”

“And your father’s name was, Kolos Nagy, like yours in Hungarian, right?”

“Right.”

“Let’s get after it. Abelard first.”

Before he could get the search underway, there was a knock at the door. It was more accurately described as a light rap, but went on and on.

Adam commented as Yapa stood and walked toward the door.

“Not strong enough for a man. Could be a woman – Alyson, maybe – except she would not go on and on like that. My guess is Burt, her little brother.”

Yapa opened the door. There he stood – young Burt. With the door open, he ducked under Yapa’s arms and entered without invitation, going immediately to Adam’s side.

“Something you guys gotta see, Adam. Go to greatstufflocal@local.org.”

“And hello to you, too,” Yapa said, closing the door and following him.

Burt turned and offered a smile up over his shoulder into the old gentleman’s face.

“I’m not familiar with the site,” Adam said as he typed in the URL. “Okay, we’re there. Now what? Oh, I see what.”

Yapa moved in behind them so he could also see what was going on. He read the headline out loud.

“Local Handicapped Youth Destroys Enemy Agents in Local Cemetery.”

He continued reading.

“The States Attorney’s office released a statement describing how a local thirteen-year-old boy on crutches single handedly captured two foreign agents here in the city to reclaim a stolen treasure stashed nearly 100 years ago in a long forgotten cemetery. The perpetrators, under armed guard, are recovering in a local hospital from injuries received during the encounter. An unspecified amount of an

unspecified precious metal was recovered. According to Assistant State's Attorney, William Willis, the capture was a performance worthy of a scene out of the best action adventure movie – too extraordinary to believe had he not witnessed it with his own eyes. The young man's name is not being released. We will post more as new information comes to light.”

“I figured that had to be you, right?” Burt asked. “Your handstand thing and the Karate stuff you told me about.”

“If it were me, could I count on you not to tell anybody?”

“Why? You're a hero. If I was a hero I'd sure want everybody to know about it.”

“Let's just say I have important reasons. Can you trust me and live with that?”

“I guess, but it would more fun to tell everybody.”

“We could pretend that I'm some kind of secret agent and you are my sidekick.”

“Like Batman and Robin?”

“Yeah. Like that, but without the fancy garb.”

“Garb?”

“Costumes – capes and masks and such.”

“Can I at least tell Alyson, since she's your girlfriend?”

“Girlfriend? Has she said that?”

“She gets all goofy looking when she talks about you and she talks about you like all the time. I'm thinking that means girlfriend//boyfriend. I personally can't see why anybody'd think she was good girlfriend material. Too bossy and you should see her first thing in the morning. Yuk!”

Adam looked back at Yapa. The boy's furrowed brow signaled the question he had. Yapa nodded in response. Adam turned back to Burt.

“Okay, you can tell just her, but I need to get your solemn promise of silence beyond her. Raise your right hand – no, the other one – that's left. Do you solemnly promise to keep our secret forever and ever and make sure your sister understands how important it is for her to do the same?”

“Yes, sir. I promise that, Secret agent.”

He was out the door at a full run. At least he had one person he could tell.

Yapa closed the door behind him, smiling, as he remembered that at Burt's age, Adam never closed doors either.

"The news will get out, you understand – that you are the boy."

"I suppose. I'm not sure how I feel about that; I mean on the one hand it would be great for people to think I'm some kind of hero, but the way I understand it, once a guy attains that status he's open for attacks from every hood around who wants to improve his reputation as the baddest of the bad guys."

"Yes, those things do tend to happen. The fact you have a different name from mine, which is really the only connection to this address, should allow you your privacy even after your name gets out."

Adam understood that their address was on both his library and YMCA memberships, but didn't mention it, not wanting to upset his grandfather.

Yapa understood that it really was not the local hoods that posed the biggest threat; it was any possible associates of the two Alley Men he had just disposed of, but he didn't mention it, not wanting to upset his grandson.

"Back to Google, now, I guess, right?" Adam said/asked with some hesitation.

"I'd suggest you give Alyson at least a half hour to digest the news before you go see her."

Adam nodded.

"I've always known you were a mind reader, Yapa. You just proved it again."

"Not so much a mind reader as an old guy who still remembers how it was to be a young guy."

Adam returned his attention to his laptop.

A few minutes later the printer shot out several pages. Adam handed them across to Yapa who had returned to his usual spot.

"Abelard Barbary was in charge of counterintelligence

for the French Government's spy organization. I looked up the full meaning of 'counterintelligence' and found this: organized activity of an intelligence (spy) service designed to block an enemy's sources of information, to deceive the enemy, to prevent sabotage, and to gather political and military information."

Yapa commented on the information trying to put it into proper context.

"It would certainly seem that any activities an enemy used to raise money for the purpose of waging war against one's country would be a part of such an agency's responsibilities. I hadn't realized how high up he was in that organization. It still doesn't really provide any solid link to my father."

"Read the center paragraph on the second page," Adam said. "It says Abelard traveled undercover to the United States in 1913. That puts him here during the proper time span. It even mentions the East Coast and this is the East Coast."

"The East Coast – Florida in the south to Maine in the north – is what, about two thousand miles? That doesn't exactly pinpoint where he was."

"Also," Adam said, "it doesn't provide any reason he would have passed information about his secret mission to great grandfather Nagy. Let me look up your father on the off chance there may be something. Where did he teach?"

"In the city of Szatmar. To be perfectly accurate it was a part of Transylvania back then and later Romania before becoming a part of Hungary. As many or more Romanians lived there as did what would have been considered Hungarians. A melting pot that often boiled over,"

"Hey! Did you know he was a member of the National Assembly for two years?"

"I did. It was just before I was born. He was the youngest member ever, up to that time. It was a period of extreme political turmoil when alliances with other countries were being broken and reformed. He didn't speak about it often. I think he felt he had been a failure in that position – too young to have the respect of the other members and too

inexperienced to know how to make the political system work.”

“Well, here’s something you probably don’t know about him, then. While he was a member of that body he was on the Intelligence Committee (oversaw the spy agency). That might provide a link to Abelard and the agent’s activities. All these random pieces of information are making a powerful argument that your father could have known about it all.”

“I have to agree. And, in fact, we know that he did know about it since he put it all in that coded message for me.”

“Here’s another tidbit,” Adam went on. “When the city of Szatmar was overrun by the German Army during World War I, they stole whatever they could get their hands on. That included the silver and gold reserves in the local banks. And, get this; that included a fortune that belonged to his – your – family. I do believe that sly old great grandfather Nagy found a way to return at least some of that back to the family. Did you know you came from a wealthy background?”

“No. I certainly never knew that – nor would I have ever suspected it. We lived a very frugal (thrifty, as if poor) life when I was a boy. My parents often took in children who had lost their parents until they could be placed permanently with other families, so what money we had was stretched pretty thin sometimes. More than once I gave up my supper for a newly arrived hungry kid.”

Adam tried to summarize what he figured they had discovered.

“So, it seems your father figured that since the enemy had taken his fortune he had the right to take part of their fortune – a part that really wasn’t the enemy’s in the first place. Knowing you were coming to build a new life here in the United States, he sent access to that fortune along with you on a slip of paper tucked into a book that held the history of a land and people that were very important to him.”

“Well said. Your great grandfather would be very proud of you, Adam.”

“Why would that be?”

“That using the fortune to help kids in need is more important to you than using it to get lots of stuff for yourself.”

“Since that’s probably not a genetic trait that I inherited directly from him, I’m thinking it came more from my interaction with his son than from him. Thanks for that, Yapa.”

The old gentleman’s eyes became damp. Having the responsibility to raise a boy like Adam had been far more difficult and wearing than Adam would ever know. Yapa was pleased things were working out so well – for both of them. That was well worth having gone to bed totally exhausted every night since the boy had been three years old.

“So, how did the Alley Men know about the coded note and you, and who are they working for?” Adam asked.

“They may, of course, tell all that to the authorities if we just wait and give them a chance.”

“I’m thirteen. I’m impatient. Let’s see if we can beat them to it.”

“Alright. Any suggestions?”

“You keep a diary – these days, guys call them journals. I’m wondering if your father kept one.”

“He did. All members of our family did. Before turning in at night we sat around the kitchen table and everybody wrote their entry for the day.”

“Privately, I assume,” Adam said.”

“Oh, yes. Privately. None of us would have ever considered looking into any of the others. What are you getting at?”

“Diaries of important people have a way of ending up in historical museums. Your father lived through a fascinating period as Europe reformed itself again and again. I’m thinking his diary would be a treasure trove of accurate information about that era if it still exists.”

“Worth a try. There are a number of such depositories (collections) in Europe. See if you can find a list.”

Adam looked for several minutes.

“How about the Szatmer Registry Történelmi Dokumentumok – that would translate as Szatmer Registry of Historical Documents, correct?”

“It would.”

“Now let me search for his last name. . . . There. What

do you know? There must be four dozen Nagys. What was his middle initial?"

"P."

"Here he is, alright. Now, let's see if there is a diary. . . . Bingo! And, it's been digitalized so it's searchable. I'll search Atherton. . . . Okay, seventy results! Let me add to that the year you left home for the US and see if that narrows it down."

"I'm not sure I'm comfortable reading my father's intimate thoughts, Adam."

"Okay. You don't have to. I guess all we are really interested in is whether or not there are clues in it that nefarious souls could use to their advantage."

"I suppose," Yapa said. "Yes. It makes me think that just before both world wars many people stashed their valuables in secret locations to keep them out of German hands. Documents like this from lots of those folks probably list those hiding places or at least give clues about them."

"So, savvy bad guys could refer to them to get rich."

"Perhaps, if what was left wasn't collected by the rightful owners after the wars."

"Well, for what it's worth, great grandfather's diary gives more than a hint. Want to hear?"

"Summarize for me."

"He indicated he knew about the Atherton stash by way of the Frenchman we already found out about and that he had coded a note about its location and gave it to you inside a copy of this book. That could certainly be the source of the Alley Men's information, but they wouldn't be working for the evil Germans in this day and age. Germans are our good friends and allies today. So, who might it be?"

"I'm thinking one of the Eastern European mafias (crime organizations)."

"How did you come to that conclusion – and so fast, Yapa?"

"That string of swear words Alley Man number 2 let fly after you captured him were not Hungarian, but Russian. Believe me if they had been Hungarian I'd have known them

right off – I didn't live a sheltered life as a boy.”

It was worth another smile between them. Yapa was satisfied they had tied up all the loose ends and was ready to move on. Not so for Adam with the brain that never slowed down.

Two mysteries remained for him. First, how would becoming a local hero affect his life – if in case it just happened to leak out that he was the Crutch Karate Kid? (An awkward name he had given his alter ego when he was much younger.) And second, how would it be to have a very special girlfriend in his life? (Little did he understand at that moment that it would be a mystery he would be working to solve for the rest of his life!)

* * *

It just may take a bunch of additional stories to solve those mysteries – and more. (Look for them! The Adam Martin Mysteries by author David Drake.)

If you enjoyed this book you may also like other books written by David Drake. You can find them on Amazon Paperbacks, on Kindle, as eBooks by searching the following *four-word* phrase:

David Drake Tom Gnagey (Always use all four.)

You can also look for 'The Orvie Mysteries (a 6 book series), 'Doc and Johnny's Old West Mysteries (a 6 book series), Tommy Powers (a teen superhero – four longer books) and Kevin Kress: teen detective (one book with many mini-mystery stories).