

# CHAPTER 1

## Not What You Expected

Wenatchee, Washington

Friday, July 7th

Gilbert Gomez loves his trampoline. It's the largest kind you can buy for home use and takes up nearly a quarter of the backyard. After three years, he's become quite adept at just about any move one can do in the air — flip, spin, gainer. He can do them all.

It's seven o'clock in the evening and the sun hides beyond the canyon wall that borders his neighborhood. The shade is a welcome relief from the hot July sun. Gilbert hasn't been jumping more than a half hour when his mother calls him from the small wood porch.

"Gilbert, come in!" she shouts.

“Why?” he asks, just as he executes a double front flip.

“There’s someone here to see you. You need to come in.”

Gilbert sticks the landing and continuing bouncing. “Who is it?”

“Just come,” his mother says before going back into the house.

Gilbert sighs. “Fine,” he says to himself.

When he walks into the house, there’s a man sitting at the kitchen table in a very expensive looking suit. Gilbert has never seen this man before. His mother sits across the table.

“Hello, Gilbert,” says the stranger.

“Hi,” Gilbert answers.

“Sit down, Gilly,” his mother says.

Gilbert comes next to her and takes a seat, looking at the man across from him. He has thinning white hair that exposes most of the top of his head. He wears circular glasses that appear too small for his nose as they press against his face. Gilbert instantly thinks nerd, but has to admit this nerd is in very expensive attire.

“Gilbert, my name is Isaac Celaya. I’m a lawyer. I represent Gabriel Hendricks. Do you know who he was?”

Gilbert shakes his head.

“He died almost three weeks ago. He was the founder and president of Furtive Data Corporation. Have you heard of that company?”

“No,” Gilbert says.

“Furtive is one of the largest software manufacturers in the world. Mr. Hendricks was worth well into the billions of dollars. When he died, he left a will. I am one of the people charged with making sure that will is carried out.”

Gilbert turns to his mother with a frown. He has no idea who this guy is nor why he’s telling them this.

The lawyer continues. “The reason I’m here this evening is because you’re named specifically in the will.”

“Me?” Gilbert says, leaning back in his chair.

“Yes,” Isaac says. The old man looks at Gilbert’s mom as if asking for permission.

She turns to Gilbert. “Gilbert, your father . . .”

“Died before I was born,” Gilbert finishes.

His mother sighs, shutting her eyes. “That’s not actually true.”

Gilbert frowns. “What are you talking about? He died in a car crash. We even have the newspaper article. You showed it to me,” he says, pointing to the cabinet that houses the photo albums and cut out article of the accident.

“I know, Gilly. But I lied to you, to protect you.”

“Protect me? From what?”

“From a life you couldn’t have,” she says quietly.

“What are you talking about Mom? So Dad is alive then?”

She shakes her head. “No.”

“I don’t understand,” Gilbert says, looking to the lawyer.

“Gilbert, your father was Gabriel Hendricks.”

Gilbert sucks in a large breath, then turns to his mother again. “Is that true?”

“Yes,” his mother answers meekly.

“I’ve been believing a lie all this time? You’re telling me that my real dad was this guy?”

“It was complicated, son. We felt it best not to

tell anyone.”

“Not even me!” Gilbert shouts. “Your own son!”

“No. Not even you.”

“How messed up is that?” Gilbert says angrily, standing up.

“Please, Gilly, sit back down.”

“You’re a liar!”

“Gilbert, if I may,” the lawyer interjects quietly, “I understand how upsetting this is to you.”

“Oh, do you now?”

“Yes, but I’m here because your father left you something.”

“And what’s that?” Gilbert asks.

The lawyer slides the envelope across the table.

“What is it?”

“A clue, I believe,” the lawyer says.

“A clue? For what?”

“For a hundred million dollars.”

Gilbert stares in disbelief. Did man-in-a-suit just say a hundred million?

“You’re kidding me, right?” Gilbert says.

“No, sir, I am not. Your father left a hundred million dollars to the person that solves the mys-

tery.”

“What mystery?”

“I have no idea. All I know is that Mr. Hendricks has placed clues all across this state. He told me that the person that’s able to find them will be able to solve whatever mystery he’s put out there to solve.

“I realize that you didn’t know him, but I did, and he had his quirks. One of those was a good mystery. It appears he’s created his own for the two of you to solve.”

“The two of us?” Gilbert says, taking the envelope off the table.

“You and your brother.”

“I’m sorry . . . did you just say brother?”

“Yes.”

“My brother? I have a brother now?” Gilbert says, reeling from information that seems to be changing his life by the second.

“Yes, a half brother. He didn’t know he had a sibling either. He’s just learned as you have. But the hundred million isn’t for the both of you. It’s only for one, the one who solves whatever this mystery is. Like you, Kevin received his clue today and is un-

doubtedly beginning his search.”

Gilbert looks at his mother, hoping that she can give him some perspective, some help in understanding what’s happening, but all she can offer is a hollow stare.

“A half brother? A dad?” Gilbert whispers, his anger now subsiding.

“I know it’s a lot to take in, Gilbert, but time is of the essence if you are going to pursue the millions.”

Gilbert says nothing.

“I understand you have your driver’s permit?”

“What?” Gilbert says, his mind in a fog as he stares at the envelope in his hand.

“Driver’s permit. You have one?”

“Yeah, I got it.”

“Good. You may need to drive.”

“Drive?”

“That clue,” Isaac says, pointing at the envelope, “is the first of many I suspect, and if you’re going to be traveling all over the state, you’re going to need transportation. That’s why there’s a car waiting outside for you with a driver that will take you anywhere you wish to go. His name is Harris. He will

also be an invaluable source of information. I also have a corporate credit card for anything you may need to purchase on your trip.”

The lawyer reaches into the briefcase that’s propped open on the table and hands the gold Mastercard to Gilbert.

“I don’t understand . . .” Gilbert starts.

“Go after the clues, Gilbert. If and when you finish this little quest, you need to call me right away.”

The lawyer hands Gilbert a business card as he stands up. He then shuts his briefcase and smiles at Gilbert’s mother. “My apologies for barging in without an appointment. You look well, Brenda.”

Brenda, Gilbert’s mother, smiles sheepishly. “Thank you.”

“And to you, young man, the best of luck. I’ll see myself out.”

Isaac moves to the front door and opens it. Gilbert and his mother stare at him, still flabbergasted in what they’ve just heard.

“One last thing,” the lawyer says. “He must do it alone, Brenda. You cannot go with him if he chooses to go. He will have his driver, but that’s all. You

cannot accompany him. If you do, you will negate the chance for the hundred million.”

Brenda nods.

“Best of luck to you, Gilbert Gomez.”

As soon as the man leaves, Gilbert turns to his mother. “You should’ve told me!”

“I know,” his mother pleads. “I’m sorry, Gilly. I’ve wanted to for years but Gabriel convinced me that it would be detrimental to you.”

“To know I had a Dad . . .”

“No, to have *him* as your dad. His life was incredibly complicated. He’s from a world we don’t know anything about.”

“You mean, because he was rich and we’re not.”

“That’s part of it,” she answers.

“That’s stupid! I had the right to know!” Gilbert says, anger rising in him again.

“There’s nothing we can do about it now,” his mother replies.

“No, he’s dead. Pretty much nothing now except this clue thing.”

“It’s a hundred million.”

“So what,” Gilbert says.

“It could change our lives. We could move out of this neighborhood, get a better place, have money for your college tuition. I could stop working at the hotel.”

Gilbert doesn't know how he's suppose to feel at this point. A bombshell of information was just dropped on him. He looks over at the front door and the adjacent window next to it. He walks over slowly and opens the blinds. Parked on the sidewalk is a black Dodge Charger, his favorite car. Gilbert wonders if Gabriel knew that or was it just coincidence.

“There's a car outside, just like the lawyer said. And it looks like there's a driver.”

His mother comes up behind and looks out as well. “What are you going to do?”

“I'm going to see what's inside this envelope.”

Gilbert carefully tears it open and pulls out a three-by-five note card. It reads:

*Partnership. Go and find the children of a common mother. There you will discover your next clue.*

“I have no idea what this means, Mom.”