

FURTIVE

ROBERT BOWMAN

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

ALSO BY ROBERT BOWMAN

The Three Vests Series
North Pole Santa Patrol
Chase The Silver Ghost
Aisle 17

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ROBERT BOWMAN

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PROLOGUE

Seattle , Washington

Friday, July 7th

Kevin Hernandez walks into the conference room at Hoyt and Celaya, the firm that represents his billionaire father's holdings. It's a clear day in Seattle as he stares out the massive windows overlooking Elliot Bay. He loves this city, and today, he'll love it even more. In a few hours, he will be a very rich man.

Alicia Hoyt, senior partner of the firm, walks into the room alone. This surprises Kevin. He's accustomed to seeing her with an entourage of people. Not surprisingly, she's wearing her customary black business suit, with her gray hair pulled back into a tight bun. Her rectangular glasses add to her

look of professionalism. She carries a large, brown leather briefcase, which Kevin instantly recognizes. It belonged to his father.

“Good afternoon, Kevin,” Alicia says curtly. “Please . . .”

She motions to the closest of the twelve leather chairs lining the long, granite conference table. Kevin pulls out the nearest chair and sits down. Alicia chooses to sit across the table from him. Distance is needed for the next few minutes, she figures.

She looks at him with a smile. He’s grown since the last time she saw him, almost a year ago. He’s eighteen now, a rightful adult, though he doesn’t dress like a professional one, and certainly not like the heir to the multi-billion dollar company, Furtive Data. Ratty hair, a collared shirt that has never been ironed in its life, and loose-fitting jeans leads one to believe Kevin doesn’t care much for his appearance.

“Just you today?” Kevin asks.

Alicia opens the leather case slowly and pulls out a manila envelope. She opens it up and glances at the first page briefly. She knows what it specifies

but wants to do one more check. She's a thorough lawyer.

"Just me today," she answers, looking up at him. "As you know, your father was worth quite a lot of money, in excess of ten billion dollars."

Kevin's heart races as he thinks of all he can do with ten billion. This is the happiest moment of his life, which he admits is a bit cryptic given that his father's death is so recent. Still, he didn't have much of a relationship with the old man. His death opens up a world of opportunities Kevin would never have if Gabriel Hernandez was still alive.

"The majority of your father's estate is to be given to the University of Washington." Alicia pauses here. She sees Kevin's vein on the left side of his temple begin to pound. His face grows red as he grits his teeth.

"What?" he whispers in an instant rage.

"The majority of your father's estate is to be given . . ." she begins to repeat but he's quick to cut her off.

"To the University of Washington? THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON!"

“It is the largest university in the state, and it’s where your father graduated.”

“I know it is! I don’t need you to tell me that! That’s all I heard growing up was how great the university is. It’s like he didn’t realize there are other universities in the state, too, not just precious UW.”

“But this one . . .”

“Is getting all of my money!” Kevin rages. “Figures. It’s the old man’s way of getting back at me, the fat a...”

“Kevin!” Alicia raises her voice. The eighteen-year-old runs his hands through his thick black mop of hair in frustration.

“I said the majority of the estate,” Alicia says, now in a much calmer tone. “He’s given you the Suburban, the mansion at Alki Beach, and the opportunity for a hundred million.”

“What are you talking about?”

The lawyer reaches into the envelope and pulls out an even smaller business envelope sealed with the Furtive Data symbol.

“This is your first clue to the hundred million.”

“Clue?”

“I knew your father for almost thirty years. He was one of the most creative people I’ve ever worked with. It’s one of the reasons why Furtive has been so successful. He was also very eccentric and did things that didn’t always make a lot of sense to me. This is one of them.”

“You know what this clue is?”

“Not exactly, but I do know what you are to do.”

“For the hundred million?”

Alicia nods.

“What?”

“Your father has placed clues throughout the state. You are to find these clues and claim the millions if you can determine the message they give.”

Kevin grunts. “A treasure hunt? Really?”

“Like I said, your father was eccentric.”

“A hundred million dollar treasure hunt isn’t just eccentric. It’s insane! I shouldn’t have to go search for a bunch of idiotic clues. All his money already belongs to me!”

He pounds his fist on the table.

“Technically, Mr. Hernandez, the majority of money doesn’t belong to you. You have this oppor-

tunity. I would suggest not blowing it.”

“You know where it is, don’t you?”

“I do not,” Alicia answers truthfully. She reaches across the table, giving him the envelope.

“There is something more I am obligated to tell you,” Alicia says as he takes the envelope from her.

“What?”

She isn’t looking forward to this next part, and she curses the dead man’s name silently for making her do this. “You are not the sole heir.”

Kevin instantly frowns. “What are you talking about?”

“Your father had another child fifteen years ago.”

Kevin feels like he just got hit in the face.

“What do you mean? You’re just playing with me. Another one of my father’s stupid games.”

“I’m afraid I’m not.”

“How the . . .”

“His name is Gilbert.”

Kevin’s breathing is heavy and erratic. “This can’t be right. This can’t be . . .”

“It was two years after your mother died. I don’t know why your father didn’t tell you about him.”

“My dad kept this from me for all this time? Who is this kid? Where does he live? He better not be getting a cent . . .”

“I’m not at liberty to tell you where he lives. But he’s been given an envelope too, a clue, like you.”

“You’re telling me this kid has a chance at the hundred million also?”

“Yes,” Alicia answers.

“This is total garbage! I AM the heir. I should be getting all of it, not the University of Washington or this kid! I’m going to hire my own lawyers. I’m going to fight this!”

Kevin stands up, his left fist clenched white, his right hand holding the envelope.

“Mr. Hernandez,” Alicia continues in a professional tone, “I assure you, we are the most thorough firm in this state. Your father’s last will and testament is going to hold up in court should you waste the time and money to challenge it. And while you fight, this other boy, this Gilbert, will most assuredly try to find the clues your father left.”

“So this boy got the same clue I have?”

“I don’t know if it’s the exact same, but he’s going to get one.”

“But . . .”

“My partner, Isaac, is meeting with him this evening.”

“This is wrong!” Kevin shouts. “All of it! That money is mine!”

CHAPTER 1

Not What You Expected

Wenatchee, Washington

Friday, July 7th

Gilbert Goodwin 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 for more than a half hour when his mother calls him from the small wood porch.

"Gilbert, come in!" she shouts.

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

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

Gilbert sticks the landing and continues 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, a man is 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 sits, 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 Hernandez. 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. Hernandez was worth well into the billions of dollars. When he died, he left a will. I am one of the people charged with ensuring 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. "I'm here this evening 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 articles 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 Hernandez.”

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 mystery.”

“What mystery?”

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

“I realize 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 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 undoubtedly beginning his search.”

Gilbert looks at his mother, hoping that she can give him some perspective, some help in under-

standing 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 Goodwin, 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 by 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 Goodwin.”

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, and have money for your college tuition. I could stop work-

ing at the hotel.”

Gilbert doesn't know how he's supposed 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. 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 if it was just a 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.”

CHAPTER 2
The Search Begins
Wenatchee, Washington
Saturday, July 8th

When Gilbert looks at his alarm clock on the small nightstand, it reads six a.m. Though he'd tried his best to get a good night's sleep, it had eluded him. He figures he might as well get up since he can never go back to sleep once he's awake. The night had been a mix of emotions. The fact that his dad had been alive and that neither his own father nor mother had said anything was inexcusable. Add to that Gilbert's father is a multi-billionaire, and the situation is even more complicated. As if that isn't enough, a hundred million dollar prize is now up for grabs. And what a life a hundred million could provide.

Gilbert enters the kitchen and finds his mother at the table, drinking a cup of coffee.

“How long have you been up?” Gilbert asks.

“All night,” his mother replies. “I couldn’t sleep. I feel so terrible for you. I’ve lived with this guilt for so long, and I’m afraid you’ll never forgive me.”

Gilbert’s anger still lingers, and he shakes his head in disgust. “You shouldn’t have done that, Mom. It was wrong to hold it from me.”

“I know, I know,” she pleads.

He looks at her, studying the bags under her eyes. She’s obviously been crying. Her brown hair hangs down to her shoulder in lumps. She looks old to him suddenly.

“There’s nothing I can change about it now,” he says, walking to the window and opening the blinds.

The early morning sun shines brightly through the glass, and it’s warm on his face. He figures the car that was parked there last night is going to be gone. To his surprise, it’s not.

“Still there, isn’t it?” his mom says. “I checked a few minutes ago.”

“But there’s no driver,” Gilbert adds, pulling his sweats up. He likes how they look, but they’re too big for him. At only five-foot-five, Gilbert has diffi-

culty finding clothes to fit his short, thin frame.

“There was a driver a few minutes ago when I looked,” his mother says.

“Well, there isn’t now.”

Not a second later, there’s a knock on the front door. Gilbert looks at his mom and then the door.

“Awful early to have someone visiting,” his mother says.

Gilbert moves to the door and opens it slowly. Standing before him is an older man, perhaps in his late sixties. He wears a pair of blue jeans and a long-sleeved black shirt. His face is a wrinkled mass of experience and age. As he smiles, the crow’s feet around his brown eyes become more pronounced. He’s clean-shaven, in somewhat good shape, and stands five inches taller than Gilbert.

“Gilbert?” the old man says in a deep, rich British accent.

“Yeah.”

“My name is Harris. As Isaac told you yesterday, I’m charged as your driver. No pun intended there, of course.”

Gilbert stares blankly.

“Charged . . . I’ll be driving the Charger . . .”

Gilbert nods his understanding, though he doesn’t think it’s all that funny.

“So, are you going to invite me in, or we’re just gonna talk out here?”

Gilbert pulls back, and the man steps into the mobile home. He sees Gilbert’s mother in her beige bathrobe at the table and nods appreciatively.

“Ma’am,” he says. “My name is Harris. I’m to drive your son around to the places he deems fit. I assure you his safety is my number one concern.”

Gilbert’s mother stands, pulling her robe tight around her. “I’m not sure Gilbert is going to be going anywhere. He hasn’t made a decision.”

Harris looks at Gilbert. “No decision, huh? A hundred million isn’t worth pursuing?”

“I don’t know,” Gilbert says.

“What don’t you know?”

“About any of this. The clue itself. I don’t have any idea where I’m supposed to go.”

“You mind?” the old man says, motioning to the couch. “It’s been a long night, and sleeping in a car isn’t the most comfortable at my age.”

"No, go ahead," Gilbert says.

Harris moves to the couch, slips off his loafers, and immediately lies flat, grunting as he stretches. "Oh, that's better. I've had the biggest kink in my lower back."

Gilbert looks at the man curiously.

"So, what's the first clue?" Harris asks. Gilbert looks at his mom.

"It says, *Partnership. Go and find the children of a common mother. There you will discover your next clue,*" Gilbert's mother reads the card left on the table from last night.

"Hmm, children of a common mother. That's a good one," Harris says, closing his eyes and yawning.

"You're going to be the one that drives me around in the Charger?"

"That's right. A Cadillac would've been better and more comfortable, but I suppose it's because of you, right?"

Gilbert frowns.

"The Charger? You like that kind of a car, don't you?"

Gilbert nods.

“Figures. Gabriel would’ve known that. A Charger it is then. I’m assuming you’ve packed.”

“Ah, no.”

“Time is of the most importance here,” the old man says, moving to a sitting position. “Surely, you know this. Your brother is probably on his way as I speak, and he’s angry. The fact he might not get what he figures is part of his inheritance isn’t something he’s taking lightly. This one hundred million is the only slice of your father’s pie he can get. Believe me, he’s motivated. You need to get motivated as well.”

“You can help me with the clues?”

“Of course. That’s why I was assigned this post, to help you. Now, go pack up for a trip.”

“How long a trip?” Gilbert asks.

“That depends on how fast we find the clues and how many there are. Could take a few days or a few months. I have no idea, but it’s summertime, and you don’t have school, so what better way to spend your time, right?”

This old man is entirely too chipper in the

morning, Gilbert thinks.

“I’m wondering, ma’am, if I might trouble you for a fried egg sandwich,” Harris says, leaning over the back of the couch to address her.

“Excuse me?” Gilbert’s mother says.

“I’m having a yearn for a hot egg sandwich on rye toast. I could cook it myself, but this isn’t my home, and that might be quite rude of me, actually.”

“You’re asking me to make you a fried egg sandwich?”

“Yes, on rye preferably,” Harris says, slipping his shoes back on and standing up. “And why are you still here?”

Gilbert stares blankly.

“You need to be packing. Now.”

One fried egg sandwich later, not on rye but wheat bread, Gilbert Goodwin gets in the passenger side of the new Charger. He’s packed enough clothes for about a week, he figures. His mother stands a few feet away, looking on worriedly. Everything has happened so quickly. She’s unsure letting her only child go with what amounts to be

a perfect stranger is the most logical thing to do. Gilbert shuts the door and rolls down the window.

“You’ve got your phone and charger?” she asks.

Gilbert nods. He’s even more apprehensive than his mother about this. Staying for an extended period of time with some British dude he’s never met before isn’t his idea of fun. Still, the thought of a hundred million dollars outweighs his apprehension.

“Ma’am, the sandwich was simply perfect. Thank you so much.”

“You’re welcome,” she says, wondering how she had been compelled to make the stranger his sandwich in the first place.

“Well, we’re off,” Harris proclaims.

With a roar, the Charger speeds away. Gilbert looks at the old man cautiously. He’s used to old people driving somewhat conservatively. Not the case with Harris here.

“So,” Harris begins, “you’ve got a lot of learning to do if you’ve got any hope in finding this money. You realize this?”

“No,” Gilbert says.

“I know you didn’t know him, but Gabriel loved this state. He grew up here in Washington. It was his passion, so it doesn’t surprise me that he cooked up some sort of goose chase for us to follow. My job is not only to drive you, but to educate you because there may be a time I won’t be around to help you figure out other clues.”

“You’re from England, right?” Gilbert asks.

“Yes. Northern Wales.”

“And you’re going to show me around Washington?”

“I’ve lived here nearly two decades,” Harris says. “Don’t let my accent fool you into thinking I don’t know anything about this great state we live in.”

“You know where we need to go, don’t you?” Gilbert asks.

“Maybe.”

“What did the clue mean?”

“First things first, Gilbert. What do you know of Washington?”

“What is this, school? It’s summer.”

“Oh yes, you’re in school. Believe me. You’re in school every moment you’re with me, young man.

Now, what do you know about Washington?”

“Ah, I live in it.”

Harris looks over scornfully. “Is that sarcasm? Because if it is, you will need to do better.”

“I don’t know. It’s the evergreen state,” Gilbert attempts.

“What does that mean?” Harris asks.

“I don’t really know. I suppose it’s called that because it’s so green?”

“Not a bad start. Though it’s not really green around here, where you live. It’s actually quite brown. It’s the western side of the state that’s mostly green. Why do you think that is?”

“Because . . . it rains a lot.”

“Not bad, Gilbert. What else do you have for me?”

“About Washington?”

“No, Idaho. Of course, Washington.”

“That was sarcasm,” says Gilbert, busting a smile.

“Indeed. Now, quit avoiding the question. What else do you know?”

“Not a lot,” Gilbert admits. He’s not interested in trivia. He’s more interested in checking out the

ride he's in.

“Well, we've got some time on our hands. Let's begin with where we're headed . . .”

“And where is that?”

“The North Cascades.”

