

FURTIVE

ROBERT BOWMAN

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 Hendricks 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 looks out the massive windows overlooking Elliot Bay. He loves this city and today he'll love it even more. In a few hours he's going to 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’s seen him, which was 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 she 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 the things 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, but he didn't have much of a relationship with the old man and his death opens up a world of opportunities Kevin would never had if Gabriel Hendricks 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 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 that’s been 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, if you can determine the message they give, claim the millions.”

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. That money already belongs to me!”

He pounds his fist on the table.

“Technically, Mr. Hendricks, 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?”

This next part she isn’t looking forward to 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, 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 that 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 and not this kid! I’m going to hire my own lawyers. I’m going to fight this!”

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

“Mr. Hendricks,” 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 be trying 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 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.”

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

When Gilbert looks over at his alarm clock on the small nightstand, it reads six a.m. Though he'd tried to do 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 emotion. The fact that his dad had been alive and that neither his own father or mother had said anything was inexcusable. Add to that Gilbert's father being some sort of multi-billionaire and the situation is even more complicated. As if that isn't enough, there's now a hundred million dollar prize up for grabs. And what a life a hundred million could provide.

Gilbert walks out into 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 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 the way they look, but they’re a bit too big for him. At only five-foot-five, Gilbert

has a hard time 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, then the door.

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

Gilbert moves to the door and opens it slowly. Standing in front of him is an older man, perhaps in his late sixties. He wears a pair of blue jeans and a long sleeve black shirt. His face is a wrinkled mass of experience and age. As he smiles, the crow’s feet around his eyes become more pronounced. He’s clean-shaven, looks to be 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 suppose 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 lays flat, grunting as he stretches. "Oh, that's better. I've had the biggest kink in my lower back."

Gilbert looks at man curiously.

"So, what's the first clue?" Harris asks.

Gilbert looks to 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 that was 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 has an opportunity to 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, Gilbert Gomez 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, but the thought of 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 in 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’re going to need to do better.”

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

“What’s 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.”

CHAPTER 3
The North Cascades
Ross Lake Recreation Area
Saturday, July 8th - Noon

“So, what do you know so far?” Harris asks as he pulls into the Diablo Lake Overlook.

“Thank goodness,” Gilbert says, letting out a sigh. “This has been about the worst three hours of my life.”

“Hey,” Harris says, turning the car off, “this is just the beginning of your adventure. Now, tell me what you’ve learned.”

“What I’ve learned? I’ve been sitting in this car for what seems like forever, listening to you spout off crap about Washington that I don’t care about. I just want to get to the first clue.”

“A clue, may I remind you, that you have no idea about. The only reason *I do* is because I pay attention

to detail, something you need to learn to do.”

“Whatever,” Gilbert says, getting out the car and slamming the door shut.

The day is clear and he’s stunned by the overlook of Diablo Lake, created from Diablo Dam on the Skagit River. The deep green of the water captures him.

“Never been here before have you?” says Harris, walking up from behind.

“No,” Gilbert says. A light breeze brushes past him and it’s a welcome relief from the hot July sun.

“There’s a lot for you to learn and see. I’m going to push you to learn more. It’s important. But first, I have to hit the loo. When I return, it’ll be time for your first quiz.”

“The what?”

“The loo,” Harris says with a smile. “The toilet.”

Gilbert frowns. He has a feeling that this may be a longer trip than he’d hoped for. He turns around and looks at all the cars in the parking lot. He’s surprised by how many people are here. It’s obviously a popular place for people to stop and take pictures. He can see why. It’s beautiful.

As he stares at the deep green of the lake, his thoughts move to his father. What it would've been like to have a dad in his life, someone to look up to. Not that his mom had done a bad job. She's a good mom, he thinks, but the fact that his dad was alive all this time and no one ever told him burns him. They didn't have the right to hide that from him.

Much to Gilbert's dismay, Harris returns, ready to start his questions. "What is the difference between a primary and secondary source?" Harris asks.

Gilbert actually remembers this to some degree. "Primary is like a written document that was created at the time of the event."

"Give me an example . . ."

"The journals of Lewis and Clark."

"Good. So you do pay attention. And a secondary source?"

"A secondary source analyzes and interprets the primary source, like a history textbook."

"Very good," Harris says, stepping forward and looking out at the lake. "So what's elevation?"

"The height of something, like above sea level. Look, I'm not going to stand here all day and have

to be quizzed about this junk. I don't care. I've already told you that."

"Yes, I'm aware, however, if you want my help, you're going to indulge an old man."

Gilbert grunts in disgust. "This is stupid. This whole thing — find out I have a dead rich dad and now I'm on some chase. . ."

"A chase for a hundred million."

"That's the only reason I'm here."

"And I thought it was my charming personality," Harris quips.

Gilbert smiles. "Right."

"Just look around you, though. Can you imagine trying to make your way over this pass two hundred years ago as the explorer Ross did? It would've been insane to attempt and yet Native American tribes had been doing it for years — tribes like the Skagit and Chelan used what was called, Stehekin."

"Stehekin?" Gilbert wonders.

"It means a way through. The whites called it Cascade Pass. A lot different than what we have today, with the nice highway we drive over. Railroads didn't even get through the Cascades until the late

1800s. It's believed that the pass was used as a trade route, especially in the spring and summer. Living up here in the wintertime would've been nearly impossible.

"Come on back into the car. We'll head to Sedro-Woolley and have some lunch there."

"Sedro what?"

"Sedro-Woolley. It's a city along Highway 20 west of here. It's got a interesting history, given that back in the late 1800s the city's name could've been bug."

"Bug? They were going to name the city, bug? Why?"

Harris gets in the car. Gilbert follows on the passenger side. "Because of the large mosquito population. People didn't like that name though. You can you imagine . . . *Hi, I'm from Bug, Washington.*"

Gilbert smiles. "So now it's Sedro-Woolley?"

"Basically they were rival towns that came together but didn't want to give up their respective names, so today it's Sedro-Woolley, though Sedro is actually a distorted spelling for the actual name Mortimer Cook gave it."

“Which was what?”

“C-e-d-r-o. Spanish for cedar. The spelling over time morphed into Sedro.”

“How did you learn all this?” Gilbert asks Harris backs the Charger out of the parking lot.

“I’ve studied this state for twenty years, remember? That’s why your father sent me to help you.”

“You think we’re going to be able to find out all the clues?”

“I have no idea, but I must admit I do like a good chase, and I fully suspect Gabriel will have us gallivanting around this entire state before it’s all over.”

Harris looks over at the young boy for a moment. “You want to drive?” he asks.

Gilbert turns quickly. “What? Really?”

“You have your permit right? You’ve driven before?”

“Yeah, kinda . . . sorta.”

“I’m not sure that instills one with a lot of confidence, especially on this highway.”

“This is such a sweet ride, I really would love to, but . . .”

“But . . .” Harris prompts.

Gilbert shakes his head. “I’m not that good. I almost took out a shopper in the supermarket parking lot last week.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. I was only going five miles an hour.”

“When we get to Sedro-Woolley, and after we eat because I’m starving, I’ll take you to a few of the back roads and you can practice. How often does one get to drive your favorite car at such a young age? I can remember my car when I was fifteen and it was nothing compared to this beast.”

“What’d you have?” Gilbert asks, looking out the window at the rapidly passing forest.

“A bicycle.”

Gilbert chuckles. “Got one of those too.”

“You’ll notice as we descend along this highway we’ll be leaving the Cascades region and moving into the Puget Sound lowlands. This area is called the Skagit Valley. You’ve probably seen pictures of the daffodils and tulip farms this region is famous for.”

Gilbert nods. “It looks rural.”

Harris looks over at the boy again, impressed.

“I’m surprised you know that word.”

“Once and a while I do pay attention in class,” Gilbert quips.

“It’s definitely not urban like the south of us, of course, with Seattle and those other big cities, like Tacoma and Bellevue. And the ridiculous traffic, though I will say it’s better than London. I love Seattle but I hate the traffic.”

“So the Cascades we just passed through . . . people had to cross over that in the old times?”

Harris smiles. “Yes, and it was quite dangerous, I suspect, given the elevation and tough terrain. Plus taking into account the massive volcanoes. We just passed Glacier Peak, though you can’t see it from this highway. You have Mount Baker north of us and if it’s a clear day, you’ll see it easily. Then there’s Rainier, St. Helens, and Adams south of us.”

“Didn’t one erupt recently?”

“Yes, back in 1980. I wasn’t here at the time actually, but Mt. St. Helens blew its top on May, 18. Quite spectacular. I remember seeing it on the news. Did massive damage.”

“But no others have erupted?” Gilbert asks.

“No, not recently. Can you image if Mount Rainier were to erupt?”

“It would be bad, right?”

“It wouldn’t just be bad, it would be catastrophic. The mud slides alone could wipe out entire cities.”

“But that’s not gonna happen?”

“No.” Harris shakes his head. “I don’t believe so. At least, not in our futures.”

“So the Cascades run all up and down the state then?”

“Right. They essentially divide the state into two. Everything west of them is Western Washington and just about everything east, Eastern Washington. The two are very different. Western Washington is a much more temperate climate, it tends to rain a lot, and is much more populated. Eastern is a bit of desert really. It’s hot in summer, doesn’t get a lot of rain, and is much more agricultural than the west side.”

“But the clue doesn’t have anything to do with the Cascades . . .”

“No. We must go north.”

CHAPTER 4

Plans

Seattle, Washington

Saturday, July 8th - 2 pm

“Oh, it figures!” Kevin slams his hands down on the kitchen table. “My old man sending Harris to help that little twit.”

Kevin’s friend, Nathan looks on, shoving a Twinkie in his mouth. “What kid?” he asks.

“This Gilbert kid, my half brother. My father sent Mr. British to help him find the clues. Yeah, that’s real fair. Harris is like a walking flippin’ encyclopedia. The dude is crazy smart with remembering stuff. They’ll find the clues before we do.”

“Do a web search on that clue,” Nathan suggests, opening another package of Twinkies. Food restraint isn’t one of the Nathan’s strengths.

“That’s one of the first things I did. I got nothin’.

I have no idea what this clue means,” Kevin says, shaking the three-by-five card in his right hand.

“What’s it say again?”

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

“I got nothin’,” says Nathan, pushing another golden sponge cake into his mouth.

“That’s why I’ve hired a team.”

“What team?” Nathan asks as tiny pieces of yellow float out of his mouth.

“Three of them. Guy named Fisk — professor from Seattle Pacific University, taught Washington state history. He’s *my* Harris. Then I’ve got two other guys that did a few jobs for my dad over the years. They’re utility men.”

“Utility men?”

“They’ll get me the results I need. My trust fund won’t last forever so I need this hundred million,” Kevin says.

“What about me? You can use me,” says Nathan.

“What good are you?”

“Hey, I’m a good . . . friend,” Nathan manages

to finish.

“True,” Kevin admits. “You want to come with us?”

“Why not? Though you don’t even know where you’re going.”

“You’re right, I have no idea. My dad went all over this state on business. We used to camp at the state and national parks. He was obsessed.”

“Then you should know something about it all,” Nathan says, going to the frig and taking out a gallon of milk.

“Use a glass. Don’t even think of drinking out of the carton,” warns Kevin.

“Yeah, yeah,” says Nathan, moving to the cupboard and grabbing a glass. “Seriously, you don’t know anything about the state after all those trips?”

“Not really. I saw cool stuff but I really don’t *know* anything. That’s why I hired Fisk.”

“What about Seattle? You’ve lived here your whole life.”

“So have you,” says Kevin.

“I asked you first,” Nathan says, taking a drink of milk.

“I know it’s named after Chief Sealth.”

“Who’s that?”

“I think he was some important Indian Chief,” answers Kevin with a shrug.

“That’s it? That’s all you got?”

“What do you know, Nathan?” Kevin shoots back.

Nathan shakes his head. “Nothin’ really.”

“Then don’t give me a hard time about it.”

“Sir,” the two boys are interrupted by the butler, Hagas, a massive man that doubled as a bodyguard for Kevin’s father. He weighs nearly two-hundred-ninety pounds, is close to six-five and completely bald. “One of your guests has arrived.”

“Send him in,” Kevin says.

The butler disappears and it’s only a few moments before he returns, followed by a man dressed in jeans and a short sleeve shirt. He carries a black briefcase and nods to Kevin when he sees him. The butler presents the man and leaves quietly.

“Hello, Scorn,” says Kevin.

The man, Scorn, puts the briefcase down on the counter and pulls up a stool, sitting down. “I read

everything you sent me, including the clue. I have no idea what it means so if you're looking for me to be able to . . ."

Kevin shakes his head. "I'm not looking for you to figure out the clues. I'm looking to you for help with tracking."

Scorn, who looks like he hasn't slept in a few days with large circles under his eyes, nods. "That I can do, if you want to tell me what exactly I'm tracking."

"That would be Harris," Kevin says.

"Harris . . . as in the old guy, your dad's friend?"

"Right. He's already got a head start and I don't know if he has the same clue I do so I figure it would be wise to see where he's headed."

"That's easy, but I need something to actually track. You know his location yet?" asks the fifty-year-old.

"No," answers Kevin, "but I think we can get it."

"Good. You mentioned in your email that you had someone else coming."

"Yeah. Two guys. Fisk. He's a history dude that's going to help with the clue and Bucker."

“Bucker? The logger?” Scorn asks.

“Logger?” Nathan wonders.

“Used to be a logger, back in the eighties, before the spotted owl stuff,” Scorn says.

“Spotted owl stuff?”

“Back in 1990 the state declared the spotted owl as endangered and it crippled the lumber industry. Because the bird was protected, some forests became off limits to logging and mills shut down, people lost their jobs,” answers Scorn, running his hand through his thin gray hair. “People were angry. The timber industry had been a huge resource for over a hundred years in Washington. Seattle even started as a sawmill town, with Puget Sound so close, it made it easy to ship out the logs.”

“What’s this Bucker guy do?” asks Nathan.

“They gave him the Bucker nickname when he was logging. It’s basically a guy who cut trees into smaller pieces after the tree has been chopped down,” says Scorn.

“So why did you call him?” Nathan asks. “We gonna be cuttin’ down trees?”

“Because when cutting logs didn’t work out, he

went to racing cars and he's really good at it. I need a driver. He's our driver," adds Kevin.

"We're driving? I thought we'd be flying in the company chopper," says Scorn.

Kevin shakes his head. "No way. Did you forget, I hate flying. I get sick, especially in a helicopter."

"Great," mumbles Scorn. "Just what I want to do, drive around the state."

"Hey," Kevin says in a low tone, "I'm paying you a lot of money. If I say we're driving, we're driving."

"It's your dime."

"Sir," enters Hagas again. "Excuse me, but your other guests have arrived. Would you like me to bring them in?"

"Yes, thank you, Hagas."

The butler nods.

Kevin turns and looks out the sliding glass windows that overlook Lake Washington. He had the complete downstairs of his father's mansion to himself, a downstairs larger than most people's homes. The day is cloudless and he soaks in the warm sun filtering through the thick glass panes.

"Your guests, sir . . ." Hagas says.

Kevin turns and sees two men. The first, Fisk, is in his late sixties. He's bald, except for puffs of gray bulging out on the sides. His thick, black spectacles cast him as the history teacher perfectly.

The other man, Bucker, isn't as old. Kevin guesses fifty-five by the lines on his face but he's a stark contrast to the historian who stands to his left. Bucker wears a white T-shirt that looks like it's three sizes too small for him. His muscular arms bulge and his chest looks like it's going to rip through the thin fibers of the shirt.

"Fisk, Bucker," says Kevin with a nod.

The two men look at the others around the room and Kevin feels introductions are in order. "That's Nathan, my friend."

He points to Nathan who again shoves a Twinkie in his mouth while giving a half-hearted wave.

"This is Scorn. He's the one that's going to get a tracking system set up for us hopefully."

Scorn nods.

"And you two have met already?" Kevin asks, referring to Fisk and Bucker.

"Yes, we got acquainted on the way here," says

Fisk. “I must say that is highly irregular. You pulled me away from some serious research I’ve been doing on the . . .”

“Is the money not enough for you, Doctor Fisk?” interrupts Kevin.

The older man pauses, mouth open. “No. The money is quite generous.”

“Then I take it we won’t have any conflicts?”

The professor shakes his head.

“Money’s fine with me,” adds Bucker. “I just want to be clear, any damage or repercussions from this is on you . . .”

“That’s right,” Kevin concurs.

“What’s he talking about?” Fisk asks, looking at the large man to his right.

The ex-logger turns. “It means if I get a ticket, arrested, or any damage comes to my custom rig outside, it’s covered by him.” Bucker points to Kevin without taking his eyes off the professor.

Fisk cowers. This Bucker guy is intimidating and frightening. “I see,” he mumbles.

“Why are you here? What good are you?” Bucker asks, taking his attention away from the professor

and looking at Nathan.

Nathan swallows hard. “I . . . I . . .”

“He’s my friend,” says Kevin. “He gets to come along for the ride.”

“Great,” grunts Bucker.

“Is that going to be a problem?” Kevin asks.

“No, but my Camaro has four seats. Not five. And I’m countin’ five of us in this room.”

Kevin looks at Nathan apologetically.

“Hey, no problem. I’ll just hang here, you know, if that’s okay?” Nathan offers.

Kevin nods. “Yeah, that’s cool.”

“As I was saying, I’ve got to track Harris, but before I can, I need to get the actual tracker on his rig,” Scorn says.

“Harris, the history professor from PLU?” asks Fisk.

Kevin nods. “Yeah. Like I told you in the email, we’re in a race that my old man set up for millions. If we find the clue first, we get the money and you’ll get five million each on top of the mil I’ve already paid you.”

“This is chump change. You’re father was a bil-

lionaire. Why do you care about this?” asks Scorn.

Kevin grits his teeth in anger. Just thinking about it infuriates him. “My father left almost his entire estate to the University of Washington. I’ve got a legal team looking into it, but meantime, this might be my only shot at getting what’s rightfully mine. So, help me, and I help you.”

“You said something about a clue you received already?” Fisk asks.

“Yeah,” Kevin answers, pulling the note card from his back jeans pocket. He walks over to the professor, handing him the card, who pushes his glasses up before reading it.

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

“It’s the same one in the email I sent. You have any idea what it could mean?” Kevin asks.

The professor ponders the note for a few moments. “Perhaps.”

“Well, do you know where we should go?”

“I think we have to drive to Blaine.”

“Blaine? What’s Blaine?” asks Nathan.

“Not what,” answers the professor. “Where. Blaine is on the northern border of Washington and Canada. That’s where this clue is referring to.”

“Does Harris and your half brother have the same clue?” Scorn asks.

“I don’t know,” Kevin answers.

“Well, assuming they do, and we can somehow find them, I can get a tracker placed.”

CHAPTER 5

Peace

Blaine, Washington

Saturday, July 8th - 5:00 pm

“You haven’t said anything about how I did driving . . .” Gilbert says as Harris drives the Charger north along Interstate 5.

“Yes, I’ve been thinking . . .”

“About the clue?”

“No,” Harris says with a deep breath. “Actually, I was thinking how fortunate I feel to be alive after what we just went through on Highway 9.”

“I didn’t think it was that bad . . .”

“You went thirty miles an hour the entire way,” Harris noted.

“I was being cautious.”

“You mean scared. The speed limit was fifty-five. You drove scared.”

“I wasn’t . . . scared,” says Gilbert unconvincingly.

“Thirty minutes was enough for me. You said you took driver’s training, yes?” Harris asks.

“Yep.”

“You still have a lot to learn.”

“I haven’t had a lot of practice,” Gilbert says. “But you’ll let me drive again, right?”

“I suppose,” says Harris, though he’s not entirely sure he wants to take that chance again. Twice, Gilbert almost drove off the side of the road and once Harris had to reach over to actually pull the steering wheel hard right so that the car would return to the proper lane.

“Are we almost there? My butt is killing me.”

“Almost,” Harris answers.

“And where exactly is *there*? You still haven’t told me any information about the clue.”

“So what can you remember about this area, this upper northwest?”

“It’s in the Puget Sound lowlands region,” an-

swers Gilbert.

“I’ve already told you that. You don’t know anything else about this area?”

“We drove past Bellingham, that’s the biggest city in the area, and we saw Western Washington University.”

“That’s correct. Anything else?”

Gilbert shakes his head.

Harris sighs. “I love the coast of Washington. It’s not only stunningly gorgeous, it’s rich with history. From the Spanish to the English, to the native people, this area is amazing. Take the Lummi, for example. They’re a tribe that’s been here long before the Europeans came. They, like most of the coastal tribes, relied on the salmon for their main resource of food.

“If I were to say the one resource utilized by the coastal Indians more than anything else, it would be fish. They were a vital part of their lives. And it’s just not the Lummi. The Semiahmoo, the Samish, the Nooksack . . . all lived in this area and relied on salmon.”

“Salmon? Fish were that important back then?”

“Quite right.”

“There’s like hardly any salmon now compared to back then,” Gilbert says.

“True. Ever wonder why?”

Gilbert shrugs. “Maybe over-harvesting.”

“That’s one reason, but there are others. Dams built on rivers didn’t help the runs either.”

Harris pulls into the parking lot and stops the car. “We’re here.”

The two get out and are met with a cloudless late afternoon sky. Gilbert’s attention immediately goes to the large white arch that stands in the center, flanked by lanes of traffic on each side. “Where are we?” he asks.

“That’s the United States-Canadian border. The line of cars closest to us is going out of the U.S., and the line on the other side is coming in. What you see in the center is called the International Peace Arch, built in 1914. It’s nearly seventy feet high. It was built in honor of the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the war between the United States and Britain in 1814.”

“So you think this is where the first clue is?” Gil-

bert asks, looking at the gardens of flowers that surround the area.

“I’m hoping,” Harris says. “The clue said partnership. In this case, it was both the Canadians and Americans that worked together to have this built. The second part of the clue talked about children of a common mother. We’re going to walk over to the Arch and you’re going to see inscribed on the top portion the phrase, *children of a common mother*. When I thought about the clue, I figured it had to have something to do with the Arch.”

Gilbert looks at the old man with respect. “That’s crazy that you knew that.”

“Not really,” Harris says, rubbing his white goatee. “I just know this state very well.”

“But the clue itself. . .”

“Now that,” Harris says, pointing at the Arch, “is a different matter. I have no idea where the clue may be hidden, what it might be . . . it could be anything, anywhere.”

“So we search all around and try to find something?” Gilbert asks.

“I don’t have . . .”

Harris stops as he notices a man walking toward him out of the corner of his eye, dressed in an all-white suit. The only other color the man wears is a plain green tie.

He's older, close to Harris's age, Gilbert thinks, and nearly as tall. He's completely bald and walks with a significant limp on the left side.

"Excuse me," the man says. "You are Gilbert Gomez?"

Gilbert frowns. He's never seen this man before. Gilbert looks at Harris, who stares at the man intently.

"Who are you?" Harris asks.

"That's not your concern, Mr. Remington. I'm here for the boy."

"What do you mean?" Harris asks. It's a bit unnerving that the man knew Harris's last name.

The man reaches into his blazer and for a moment, Gilbert has the inclination to run. He's seen enough movies to know what can hide inside a blazer. But the old man simply takes out another envelope, exactly like the first one given by the lawyer at the house.

“This is for you,” the stranger says and hands the envelope to Gilbert. He looks at Harris, then turns, walking back to the white sedan he came from.

Harris watches as the stranger gets back into the car. He expects the man in white to drive away, but he doesn’t. He only looks on through the windshield.

“Should I open it?” Gilbert asks.

Harris turns back to the boy. “Yes. I believe that’s the next clue.”

“Do you know that guy?”

“No,” Harris answers, again turning to look. “Curious. I didn’t think there would be someone here giving out a clue. I fully expected Gabriel to have actually hid it.”

Gilbert looks down at the envelope and tears it open carefully. Like the last one, there’s a three-by-five card inside, written in the same handwriting. He takes out and reads: *“See the dirty hand to the north from the highest peak in the chain.”*

Harris takes in a large breath, squinting as he thinks. “See the dirty hand . . . to the north from the highest peak . . . in the chain.”

“Yeah, that’s what it says.”

Harris grunts. “What a clue, Gabriel.”

“You know it?” Gilbert asks with anticipation.

“What? You don’t?” Harris mocks.

“Not funny, Harris.”

The old man smiles. “I think I may know where we need to go, but it’s getting into the evening and I suspect we’ll need dinner soon. I told my brother I’d stop by, so we’ll call it a day.”

“You’re not going to tell me where we go next?”

“No. That’s for you to figure out.”

“How am I suppose to figure that out? I’m fifteen. You’re like . . . old.”

Harris raises an eyebrow.

“You know, been around, knows a lot.” Gilbert tries to recover.

“Yes, well, it’s time for you to study a bit before I just tell you where we should go. Plus, I’m not sure I’m entirely correct, but the dirty hand . . . that’s a good one.”

Harris goes back to car and gets in. Gilbert follows. They pass the man in white who sits in the car, staring out the windshield like a robot.

“Why is that guy still here?”

“I suspect he has to wait for your brother to arrive to get his clue. If that’s the case, it’s safe for us to assume that the clues are the same.”

“So we’re ahead of Kevin?” Gilbert asks.

“Maybe.”

“And now we’re going to see your brother?”

“Yes. His place is near the beach where we’re going to stay tonight. We’ll go south in the morning.”

Gilbert nods and stares down at the handwritten clue. He wonders how many of these he’s going to have to find before he gets the hundred million. He begins to imagine all the things he could do with that kind of money.

Fifteen minutes later, the car stops in front of a large home with a three car garage. In the driveway is a black truck being washed by a girl wearing shorts and a tank top. Her long brown hair is in a ponytail and she doesn’t have shoes on. When she notices the Charger pull up, she’s not sure who it is. She’s never seen the car before, but it only takes her a second to recognize the driver — her uncle Harris. Her eyes grow big, she smiles and drops the

hose, walking over. Harris turns off the car and gets out. Gilbert does as well.

“Miriam,” Harris says, embracing her.

“Uncle Harris,” she says, elated. “What are you doing here?”

“Your father didn’t tell you? We’re staying the night.” Harris motions to Gilbert, who feels suddenly very awkward. First, because he’s at a stranger’s home, and second, because he thinks the girl is pretty. “This is Gilbert. He’s my student that’s accompanying me on my journey.”

Miriam looks over at Gilbert and smiles. Gilbert instantly goes warm. She seems older than him, definitely taller, *which sucks*, he thinks to himself. Why does he have to be so short like his mother?

“Hi,” Miriam says.

Say something, a voice echoes through Gilbert’s head. “Hi,” he manages, putting up his hand in a half-hearted wave.

What was that? he chastises himself. *Total dork move there.*

“Do you have bags?” she asks.

“Yes, in the trunk,” Harris answers.

“Let’s get you set up.”

Getting set up consists of Gilbert dropping his bag in one of the three guest rooms and coming down to the kitchen where he meets Miriam’s father, Morris, and her mother, Claire. Harris is sitting with them and explains that he’s taking Gilbert on a trek through Washington as part of his school’s outreach to youth. Morris and Claire seems to buy it. At first, Gilbert wonders why Harris didn’t tell them the truth, but the truth of chasing a hundred million is probably best kept secret.

Gilbert sits uncomfortably for a few minutes at the kitchen table with the adults, staring out the sliding glass door to the deck and Puget Sound in the backdrop. He’s entranced. It must’ve showed because Claire says, “You can go out on the deck if you’d like.”

Gilbert smiles with relief, gets up, and opens the door, walking out onto the large deck. The smell of the ocean hits him and he closes his eyes, taking in the unique aroma. There’s hardly any wind, and the soft crashing of the waves below makes for a perfect moment.

“Great view, eh?”

Gilbert’s heart races. Miriam is standing beside him now. “Yeah,” he says.

“I come out here a lot and think,” she says, staring out at the calm water.

“You have a great house, great view.”

“Thanks. Lived here my whole life.”

Gilbert nods appreciatively. “You’re lucky,” he says, thinking that if he got a hundred million, he could afford a house like this for his mom easily.

“You like the ocean?” she asks.

“I guess,” Gilbert answers. “I’ve never seen it.”

She turns, looking at him curiously. “You’ve never seen the ocean?”

Great, he thinks. Shouldn’t have said that.

“No,” he concedes. “I live over on the east side. We don’t get out much.”

Miriam, in truth, doesn’t know what to say. The ocean is such a part of her life she can’t imagine what it would be like not to see it each day, let alone for the first time. “How old are you?” she wonders.

“Fifteen,” Gilbert answers. “And you?”

“I just turned sixteen last month.”

“Cool,” he replies.

“My uncle says you’re only staying one night.”

“I guess. He knows where we’re going. I don’t. I’m just along for the ride, really.”

Gilbert moves to one of the patio chairs and sits down. He hopes that she’ll do the same, but instead, he hears the sliding door open and shut, and he’s left alone.

Should’ve stayed standing, he thinks. He sighs, looking out at the water. He figures his mom is going to want a report of what’s been happening, so he takes out his phone and calls her.

