

THE LINUX MYSTERIES



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The Linux Mysteries

A Short Story Series

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I'm dedicating this short story series to my father, John Constantin. My dad has been very supportive and motivated me to become a writer, and he is the first person I turn to for bouncing story ideas around. Dad has helped me create the main protagonist, Detective Stuart Linux, in my new murder mystery series "The Linux Mysteries."

"The Linux Mysteries" can be read on Coffee House Writers, but I have collected all of the parts I have written so far for all my readers to read.

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Acknowledgement

Thank you for reading my new cozy mystery series! I hope you have enjoyed reading the story and following Stuart Linux's journey of finding out what truly happened to his grandmother.

The next part of "The Linux Mysteries" will be published soon on Coffee House Writers.

1

The Mysterious Key

THE LINUX MYSTERIES



Photo by Kristina Paukshtite via Pexels

Blood covers the concrete sidewalk; it's spilling over into the street—a bullet wound in the chest and head. A black leather purse is torn apart at the end of West Avenue. *How can a person be so cruel as to kill an elderly woman? A sweet older woman who was probably a loving grandmother who made cookies for her grandkids every Sunday after church. I don't understand criminals.*

“Are they that desperate?” Detective Linux shrieked.

He can't look at the victim anymore. She reminds him too much of his grandmother, and being on West Avenue brings back many childhood memories.

All through grammar and high school, Stuart Linux and his two best friends, Copper, and Riley, would meet at Riverside Park at seven in the morning. They would play a quick game of football and then ride their bikes to school. Copper always thought if they rode their bikes to school together, no one would pick on them. They would use one hand to eat their Pop-Tarts for breakfast and the other hand to ride their bikes.

It was a tradition of ours for so long, until that night at the park. I often think about them but never pick up the phone to call.

“Detective, I have the forensic team coming down here to collect evidence.”

“Stuart, did you hear me? Stuart, is everything okay?”

“Yes, sorry, Harry, I lost focus.”

“Did you have another dream last night?” says Harry.

“Yeah, the one where she is drowning on the beach and calling my name.”

“You will solve the mystery; I have faith in you, bro.”

“These dreams feel so real—like she needs me to rescue her,” says Detective Linux with his arms crossed.

Officer Harry Bell says, “Go home, buddy. I will stay with the forensic team and leave a report on your desk.”

Stuart padded Harry on the back and slowly walked back to his car. He remembered eating grilled cheese sandwiches at Albert’s Restaurant around the corner when he was about eight years old. *Being back home in Riverside feels refreshing and overwhelming at the same time.* The restaurants and shops Stuart visited as a small boy has disappeared, and the city he once loved looks like a deteriorating neighborhood. Plastic bottles and cigarette butts littered the decaying grass, and there were houses with boarded-up windows and broken metal gates. *Wow, everything has changed.*

Detective Linux unbuttons his caramel trenchcoat to reach the inside pocket. He grabs his car keys and pushes the unlock button. The keys are in the ignition, and he turns up the radio, blasting “Hurricane” by Luke Combs through the car windows. He’s driving down the road with a *don’t care* kind of attitude.

Thirty minutes later.

Detective Linux arrives at his mother’s house. He quietly shuts the front door behind him. He hangs up his coat on the wooden hooks above the entryway storage bench and walks into the kitchen. A yellow sticky note catches his eyes as he walks up to the refrigerator.

The note read, “I made your favorite food for dinner; it’s in the fridge. Microwave for three minutes, love Mom.”

His face lights up like fireworks on the Fourth of July when he takes off the storage container’s red lid and sees meatloaf and mashed potatoes. Stuart grabs a fork out of the drawer underneath the coffee pot and sits at the kitchen table. He places his elbow on the table and leans his head on his left hand. Grandma was lying still on the tile floor of the bathroom.

Her skin was pale as a ghost, and her body cold as ice when he kissed her forehead goodbye. Stuart was very close to his grandmother, and her death was sudden. For the last month, he has seen her calling out for help. She is in the ocean, trying to keep her head above water. The sky is bright blue like, on a summer day. There's a white sandy beach, and it feels so real to Stuart, like he is actually on the beach, like it's not a dream. Something in his gut tells him his grandmother dying wasn't out of the blue. Stuart places his dishes in the kitchen sink and goes into the garage. The family has been clearing out grandma's house and figuring out what they should keep and sell. Seeing grandma's brown recliner without her sitting in it makes everything a reality.

Yesterday, Stuart's mother was labeling the boxes to keep everything organized, but this one large cardboard box had a piece of paper in it. The paper was yellowed and wrinkled and had the following numbers "4,8,2,1,9,0," written in smooth black ink.

"Where did Momma leave that paper?" Stuart says, itching his head.

He checked the industrial shelving unit against the wall next to the doorway. The paper is peaking out of the cardboard box label "Keepsakes." Stuart lifts the entire box and brings it with him back to the kitchen. He flips the switch to light the chandelier that hangs above the kitchen table on the way back in. Stuart opens the cardboard box, and there's nothing. He turns the box around, and a medium-sized box pops up. Again, there's nothing inside the box. He spins the box counterclockwise, and a small box appears. Something silver peaks out of the box. He rips the top open and finds an antique metallic jewelry box. The jewelry box is unique, with floral markings engraved.

“I wonder what trinkets grandma stored in here.”

He flip-flops the jewelry box and sees a combination lock on the box, typically where someone would insert a key. Stuart moves the multiple cardboard boxes onto the floor and takes a seat. He stares at the numbers written on the fragile paper. It took Stuart six times to unlock the jewelry box. It turns out the combination was his birthday, but Grandma wrote the numbers on the paper backward. Finally, with Stuart grinning from ear to ear and his eyes wide open, he lifts the cover-up and finds a brass barrel key.

“What does this key go to? I have never seen grandma with this key before.”

Stuart sits at the kitchen table with a dumbfounded look on his face trying to figure out what the key could open. *Does it go to a bank deposit box? Or a safe? Does Grandma have a secret?* He places the key back into the jewelry box and locks it. Stuart turns on the dishwasher before heading upstairs. Throbbing pain rumble in his feet with each step he takes. In the morning, Stuart attended a webinar about what type of protocols to use when someone’s information has been explicitly stolen. After the webinar, he did his reports from an earlier investigation. Then, the murder on West Avenue happened.

It’s been a long day; I’m ready to take off my work clothes, put on cozy sweatpants and a muscle t-shirt, and crawl into bed. Stuart’s head hits the pillow, and a cold breeze scurries across his shoulders. Instantly, he reaches for his fluffy steel gray blanket with his college’s mascot on it: Tim the beaver, the mascot of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Stuart majored in computer science and minored in computer forensics. The hit television show CSI and his friend, Riley, inspired him to get into criminal investigations. However, he never pictured

himself going to the police academy and taking a course at FBI headquarters to become a detective because of the way his grandmother left earth.

The blanket is up to Stuart's neck, and he still feels chilly with goosebumps on his arms. All he wants to do is go to sleep. His eyes feel heavy. A whistling sound wakens Stuart shortly after he drifts off to sleep. His body jerks awake as the sound becomes louder. *I guess I have to get out of my warm bed to see where that noise is coming from.*

He throws the blanket off and swings his legs over to the edge of the bed. Stuart's bedroom window is wide open. *I don't remember opening the window today.* He gazes out the window looking at the stars twinkling in the clear night sky.

He crosses his arms and says, "It's a chilly cold night."

Stuart closes the window instantaneously and jumps back into the bed. He fluffs his pillow and rolls over on his left side. Sweet harmonious music plays softly in his ears. He rolls over onto his back and blinks twice. An African American man is playing the trumpet; the smell of tobacco is in the air. Men and women are dancing on the ballroom floor. A woman wearing a champagne sequin fringe dress with a feather in her hair points her finger at me. Her eyes are blue, like the sea, and her facial features look very familiar. *I think I'm dreaming about my grandma attending a party.* I walk through the dancing people like I'm a ghost. She is dancing with a gentleman wearing a sharp suit like Mr. Jay Gatsby in the book written by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

She is holding something in her hand. *What's in your hand, grandma?* Something shiny with a curvaceous top. "I see it, I see it," Stuart shouted, and then the room went pitch black.

Grandma gave the key from the jewelry box to a man I have never seen before. What was the reason?

“Help me, Stuey,” a voice cried out!

Stuart knew his grandmother was calling out to him immediately. She is the only person who calls him Stuey. He keeps his eyes on the gentleman wearing the sharp pinstriped gray suit. The gentleman pushes his way through the crowd with one hand remaining inside his pocket, holding onto grandma’s key. Stuart turns left and heads down a narrow hallway. Green velvet wallpaper splatters the walls in the hallway. At the end of the hall, gold molding hangs on the wall cut in a rectangular shape like a picture. *There must be a door hidden inside this wall.*

Stuart looks around to see if there is anyone around. He rubs his hand over the wallpaper between the gold molding — Stuart taps on the wall, and a circle pops through the velvet. *Ah, there’s a door behind here, but it requires a key. Of course, it does; nothing is ever simple.* The lights go out, and all Stuart can see is a white glow coming straight at him. A loud, beeping noise occurs. The sound is similar to the beeping noise that happens when a smoke detector goes off. The white light swallows Stuart, and he awakens in his bed, covered in sweat. The sweat drips off his forehead and onto his sheets. Then, his body shakes when the noise reoccurs, and he rolls over onto his side. He realizes the sound is coming from his alarm clock.

“It’s five in the morning already,” Stuart speaks out loud.

He slowly swings his legs over the bed, sitting upright and thinking about what he saw. *Grandma must have been involved in something. Could she have worked for a private investigator? Or is it that she was at the wrong place at the wrong time kind of deal?*

Stuart rubs his eyes and walks towards the bathroom, stopping for a second to gaze out the window. The sun is rising, and the town is coming alive. Stuart takes off his clothes and jumps into the shower. Warm water runs down his back, relieving some of

the muscle aches that occur every morning.

Four years ago, Stuart worked as a security guard on the weekends for Buck's Private Security Firm to earn extra money. He was saving up to buy an engagement ring for his high school sweetheart. Buck, Stuart's boss, assigned him to guard Hilton Park Bank downtown. During his shift, a six-foot-tall guy wearing a ski mask came in to rob the bank. The robber held the bank manager at gunpoint while she pulled out stacks of cash from the safe. Stuart sneaked behind the counter to taser the robber. He didn't know the robber had a partner. The robber's partner shot a bullet across the bank as Stuart got the guy with the ski mask down to the floor. The bullet bounced off a coffee mug and cut through Stuart's lower back like a scalpel.

Stuart handcuffed the bad guy just before passing out, and no one in the bank was hurt. Even to this day, Buck calls Stuart a hero. The bullet did not harm any organs, but he faces some nerve and muscle damage from the accident. He had the bullet removed surgically, but the wound bothers him once in a while.

Stuart turns off the water and sticks his arm out from the shower curtain to reach for a towel hanging on the towel rack next to the bathroom sink. Stuart dries his body, rubs his feet against the mat, and then wraps the towel around his waist. He stares at himself in the mirror, running his finger through his beard. *I think it's time for a shave.*

He opens the medicine cabinet and pulls out his blue razor and Barbasol shaving cream. Stuart covers his entire chin in shaving cream and strokes the blade up and down, leaving a small patch of hair below his lower lip.

He splashes cold water on his face, rinsing the shaving cream, and then dries his face. Next, he squirts toothpaste on his toothbrush and scrubs his teeth until they are shining bright.

Before he leaves the bathroom, he sprays Old Spice deodorant. He turns off the bathroom fan and opens his closet. He pulls out a navy-blue button shirt and black pants and gets dressed quickly. The smell of coffee creeps upon him as he walks down the stairs making his way to the kitchen.

“Good morning, Mom. ”

“Good morning, honey. How did you sleep? ”

“Okay, I guess. I had another dream with grandma in it. ”

“She’s revisiting you.”

“Yes, I saw her wearing a dress from the roaring twenties.”

“Grandma told me a story once about dancing in a ballroom.”

“Yeah, can you tell me the story?”

“I don’t remember everything, but grandma used to keep a journal. She probably wrote about that night.”

“Did we take the journal while packing grandma’s belongings?”

“I haven’t found it yet, honey, but we can go to grandma’s house after your shift today.”

“That would be great, Mom. Do you think grandma has photos from that night, too?”

“Most likely, I packed some photo albums from grandma’s armoire.”

Stuart’s mom pours coffee into his travel mug while he goes into the garage and grabs the cardboard box labeled “photo albums.” He places the box on the kitchen table, and his mom looks through the photos while he eats scrambled eggs, sausage, and toast. Stuart usually doesn’t eat breakfast but does when he stays at his mother’s house. She won’t let him leave the house without eating first.

“I found a photo of grandma dancing with a man in a suit.”

“Can I see it, Mom?”

Grandma is wearing a dress with fringes in the photo. She is holding hands with a man in a suit. People dance in the background and in the corner of the picture, and I can see part of a musical instrument.

“This might be the gentleman in the pinstriped gray suit.”

“What, man?”

“I will explain later, Mom. I have to get to the precinct.”

Stuart kisses his mom on the cheek and runs out the front door, placing the photo into his jacket pocket. He runs down the porch steps so quickly that his jacket flies in the air. His heart is racing with the idea in his head that he can identify this mystery man using the database at the precinct.

The Mysterious Man in Grandma's Photo



Photo by Soumil Kumar via Pexels

He presses the unlock button on the car key and hops in. Then, he places his cell phone in the place holder

on the dashboard and dials his friend, Harry's phone number.

"Hey Harry, are you at the precinct?"

"No, not yet. I am at Tim Horton's. Why - is something up?"

"Yea. I need your help enhancing an old photo."

"Okay. Meet me at my desk. I will be there shortly."

"See you soon, buddy."

Stuart hangs up the phone and turns on the radio to the country music station. Something inside him makes him feel anxious, and sweat starts to appear on his forehead even though the temperature outside is in his mid-thirties. The clouds look a little gray, like snow is in the forecast for the evening. Traveling down Fairfield Avenue, the sun peeks out from the shadows, and Stuart has to put his visor down to see the road better. He stares at the photo once more before getting out of his car — beep beep as he locks the car.

Stuart walks up the stairs to the second floor, where his friend, Harry, works. He analyzes photos, security footage, and deep internet searches on victims and criminals.

"Hey, I thought I would beat you here."

"Traffic wasn't bad, and I was leaving the coffee shop when you called."

"What do you need me to do?" says Harry with a smirk on his face.

"I need to make this photo more translucent so that we can scan the man's face for facial recognition."

"Are you working on a cold case?"

"No, I had another dream about my grandmother. She was dancing with this man wearing the pinstriped gray suit, and then she gave him a key. I found the key in an antique jewelry box but don't know where it goes."

“Okay, we can figure this out, bro.”

Harry takes a photo of Stuart’s grandmother’s vintage photo with his cell phone and then connects his phone to the computer using a USB cable. Once the picture is uploaded to the computer, Harry can enhance the image using Photoshop. Stuart watches Harry use the eyedropper tool to brighten the background. He stares in amazement as he watches the photo come back to life like Stuart is inside the dream, watching a reenactment. A dazzling reflection from the gold tiles on the ceiling hits the wine glasses on the bar. The room smells like tobacco and flowers from the men smoking and the women wearing perfume. There she is, my grandmother, looking like a teenager in a fancy dress having the time of her life, but what is she doing with the brass barrel key?

“Stuart, are you okay?” Harry asks.

“Oh, sorry. I must have been daydreaming. You know what is so strange?”

“What’s strange?”

“These dreams feel so real, like I’m time traveling. This whole experience is so out of the ordinary.”

“Maybe when you opened the antique box where you found the key, you unlock something like the tesseract.”

“What are you talking about?” Stuart asks with a confused look on his face.

“Sorry, bro. Holly and I were watching *A Wrinkle in Time* last weekend.”

“Oh, okay,” Stuart laughs. *What if Harry is on to something? Can time-traveling exist, or am I going crazy?*

Harry places his hand on Stuart’s shoulder and says, “Come back later. This is going to take me a while.”

“Okay, I will go to my office and check in on the West Side

case and come back in a couple of hours.”

Stuart slowly goes downstairs and goes into the locker room to hang up his coat and use the restroom. He splashes cold water on his face before leaving the bathroom. Stuart smiles when he sees a cup of coffee sitting on his desk.

“Thanks for the coffee, Chief,” Stuart shouts in the room next door.

“Detective Linux, I have completed my examination of the victim,” the medical examiner hands him the folder.

“Thank you. Did you find anything out of the ordinary?”

“No, not really. The victim had defensive wounds on the wrist, and she died instantly with a gunshot to the head. I would say a robbery gone wrong.”

“Thanks for the report, Steve.”

Steve shakes Stuart’s hand and says, “No, problem, Detective.”

Stuart walks over to the Chief’s office and explains what the medical examiner found, and they both sign the case folder. Then, Stuart places the folder onto a metal cart for it to be filed away. *I feel so bad an innocent lady got killed. Now, someone else in the world has lost their grandmother, just like me.*

Stuart’s pants pocket begins vibrating before he could sit in his office chair. *It can’t be him already. I have only been gone for an hour and a half.* He looks down at the screen and sees a text message from Harry. Stuart picks up his keys, locks his office door, and runs upstairs, but stops at the water cooler to fill up his water bottle. Being anxious has caused him to be extremely thirsty and fidgety today.

“Hey, I enlarged the gentleman’s face and made a photo of him alone.”

“How did you do that?” Stuart asks with his arms crossed.

“I used an element in Photoshop called Face-Aware-Liquidity to adjust the man’s facial features and brighten the picture as well.”

“That’s amazing. I’m buying you beer and wings tonight!”

“Sounds good to me, dude.”

Harry opens the police department database to conduct facial recognition. Stuart enters his badge ID number, and then they watch the circle spin on the computer. Stuart paces back and forth for a little bit, but they found a match. The gentleman is named Arthur Watson. Harry got up from his chair so that Stuart could take a closer look at the computer. He clicked on the name, and documents pulled up, but it was unreadable. There was information blacked out, and on the very last page, it says, “Federal Bureau Investigation.”

Stuart slams the keyboard on the desk in frustration and places his head in the palms of his hands.

“I’m sorry, but we could go get the file.”

“How do we get confidential, sealed documents from the FBI?”

“Danny was working on a murder case a couple of months ago, and he needed sealed documents to match the killer’s DNA to the weapon. He got permission to go down to the FBI headquarters to get the files.”

“I don’t know, Harry - If they will let me go down there if I am not working on a case.”

“Go into the boss’s office and ask for the weekend off. Tell him you need to be with your mom to finish up arrangements for your grandmother’s house.”

“Good idea, Harry. You’re brilliant!” Stuart hugs his buddy.

Stuart went downstairs and knocks on his boss’s office door.

“Hello, Sir, do you have a moment to talk?”

“Sure thing, Linux. Take a seat.”

Stuart sits down in the gray plush chair and bounces his left leg up and down.

“What’s going on?”

“I hate to ask, but I was wondering if I could take a few days off. My mom is going to need help finishing up the arrangements for my grandmother.”

“Oh, I see. When do you need the time off?” says the Chief with his right fist placed under his chin.

“I was hoping for this weekend.”

“Well, you know the policy for time-off Linux,” Chief sternly says.

“I’m sorry for the short notice.”

“Okay, Linux, you can have time off. See you Monday morning.”

Stuart shakes his hand and says, “Thank you so much.” A huge smile appears on his face as he closes the door behind him. Stuart texts his buddy when he gets back to his desk and tells him he got approved for the time off.

Harry replies, “It looks like we are off to New York City this weekend.”

3

Packing for New York



Photo by Craig Adderley via Pexels

Stuart grabs his navy blue suitcase out of the hallway closet and places it on his bed. He slowly walks to his dresser as he mumbles under his breath what he should pack. Three pairs of boxers, socks, and tank tops go on the left side of his suitcase. *I wonder what the weather will be like this weekend.* He trudges over to his nightstand and grabs the remote to turn on the television to watch the evening news. He shoves his suitcase over to sit down on the bed and takes his phone off the charger to text Harry.

“Hey Harry, Do you want me to pick you up or meet you at the bar?”

“Do you want to go to Buffalo Wild Wings? There’s a hockey game tonight,” Harry replied.

“Sounds good. The news just announced that the Las Vegas Knights are playing against the Buffalo Sabres.”

“I’ll meet you there at eight. I’m helping Holly with her homework.”

“Give her a hug for me. See you tonight, bro!”

Harry replies with a smiley face emoji. He places his phone down on the nightstand and steers to the closet. He grabs a light blue button shirt, black dress pants, a green polo shirt, and a tee. He sweeps through his closet, looking for a pair of jeans to pack. *My jeans must be in the laundry room.* He takes his hockey jersey off the hanger before closing the closet door and tosses it on the bed. He glares at the television and listens to the weather before heading downstairs. *Ooh, nice, it’s going to be in the mid-fifties this weekend. Yea. It’s getting warmer, with no low thirties and snow like last week.*

The smell of garlic and onions scours up his nose as he travels into the kitchen.

“Hi honey, I didn’t know you were home,” Stuart’s mother

says while stirring the pot.

“I ran to my room as soon as I came home to pack.”

“What’s going on?”

“I have to go to New York this weekend for work. Chief needs me to get sealed files from headquarters for a cold case I have been assigned,” says Stuart with his pursed lips.

“I wish you well, son. Do you need help packing?”

“I got it, mom, but I can’t find my jeans.”

“I just took them out of the dryer. They’re in the white basket on top of the washer.”

“Thanks, mom. You’re the best.”

Stuart kisses his mom on the cheeks and goes into the laundry room. He grabs two pairs of jeans and presses them against his nose. The scent of lavender always puts a smile on his face.

“I’m going to finish packing.”

“Okay. Dinner will be ready in about twenty minutes,” Stuart’s mom called out.

“Save me a bowl of pasta. I’m going to Buffalo Wild Wings with Harry tonight.”

“Have fun with the boys. I’ll leave a container in the fridge for you.”

“Thanks, mom,” Stuart shouts as he heads back upstairs.

Stuart folds his jeans, places the rest of his clothes into his suitcase, and zippers it. In the morning, he will only need to add his personal care items and medications to his bag. He peeks at the clock on the cable box to check the time. *I have an hour before leaving, so I will look through grandma’s journal.* Stuart bends down and reaches under his bed for the cardboard box with his grandma’s belongings. He sets the box down on the bench in front of his bed and lifts the photo albums to get to the journal. He takes a deep breath and rubs his index finger over the blue

silk ribbon that encases the journal. He changes the television station to the NFL network before untying the journal. *What will this journal reveal about my grandmother's life?*

June 8th, 1956

When walking home from the factory, I noticed a tall, muscular man sitting on the bench on the corner of Pearl street. I tried not to stare at him, but I couldn't help it. He looked so handsome that he made my heart pump fast, and I began to blush. I started to speed walk to the bus stop so that he wouldn't notice me. I hope he didn't see me. I couldn't sit on the bus bench because it was wet. It must have rained when I was inside the factory. We must have made over five thousand pieces of candy, and George didn't say any dirty jokes today either. Thank God, because I am giving him a black eye the next time he does that. I look up at the sky, watching the birds fluttering by, and then the guy from the bench places his hand on my shoulder. My knee shook as he asked my name. We exchanged phone numbers, and he asked me out on a date. His eyes are blue like the ocean, and he has a charming smile. I can't wait to see him again. Arthur is going to meet me at the bus stop after work on Friday. I hope he is a gentleman like I think he is. I can't believe I am going on my first date. I don't know if I should tell my mother and father.

Goodnight, Diary.

Grandma's handwriting is so beautiful. It's hard to picture my grandmother, a young woman falling for a guy she met. But, the name Arthur is written down, so I must be on the right track. Stuart turns off the television and tied the ribbon back onto the journal. He goes into the bathroom, sprays body spray, and changes into his hockey jersey and jeans. Stuart places his wallet and phone into his pants pocket and closes his bedroom door.

"Mom, I'm leaving," Stuart shouts.

“Have a good time, and drive safely.”

Stuart puts his arms through the sleeves of his gray hoodie as he walks down the porch steps. He waves goodbye to his mom before driving away from the curb.

*** The smell of fried foods and hot sauce punches Stuart in the face as he enters the restaurant. A whole bunch of people were wearing hockey jerseys and dancing in their seats as music blares from the speakers on the ceilings.

“Welcome to Buffalo Wild Wings, Sir. How many people?” says a server with long curly brown hair.

“I’m good right now; I’m meeting some friends here.”

“Okay, let me know when you’re ready to be seated,” says the server.

“Thanks.” *I think the server just winked at me.* I try to see the game’s score, but too many people stand up to see the bottom of the screen from where I’m sitting.

“Hey, Stuart!” Harry shrieks.

“I’m glad you made it, bro. You ready to chow down on some wings.”

“Yea. I’m starving.”

“Me too. My mom was making homemade sauce and pasta, and I tried really hard not to eat any, but I told her to save me some.”

Harry’s body shakes as he laughs and says, “Do you think we can get a table? It’s crowded tonight.”

“We can always sit at the bar if we have to,” I wave my hand to gain a server’s attention.

The woman who winked at me says, “Are you ready to be seated?”

“Yes, can we have a table for three?”

“Oh, Danny’s not coming tonight. He’s working a double

shift.”

“Sorry, I need a table for two.”

The server pulled out two menus from the host’s station and looks around the room for an empty table. “Would you mind sitting at a booth?”

“No, we don’t mind. As long as we can see the game,” Stuart says with a smirk.

“Of course. We just turned on the bigger television because it’s jam-packed tonight.”

Stuart and Harry sit in a red leather booth next to the kitchen, and the smell of food makes them even more hungry.

“What can I get you guys to drink?”

“We will take two Miller Lites,” says Harry with a smile that could light up a thousand rooms.

“Be right back to take your order.”

Harry nudges Stuart’s arm and says, “Dude, did you see how pretty she is?”

Stuart scratches his head and says, “I don’t know. Umm... she’s cute.”

“You should ask for her phone number.”

“I’m not ready to date yet. I’m still trying to figure everything out.”

“Sorry, bro. I understand.”

The restaurant erupts when Jack Eichel scores a goal. Then, they order a bucket of barbeque chicken wings and mozzarella sticks to share and enjoy watching the rest of the hockey game. When Stuart finished eating, he left the table to use the restroom and wash his sticky fingers.

Harry says, “Oh, man, with a hand on his stomach. I am stuffed; I can’t take another bite.”

“Me too. I think I overate. Next time, we are not ordering that

many wings.”

“I agree.” Stuart’s fist bumps Harry.

“We need to figure out our traveling arrangements, says Stuart with his left hand over his mouth.”

“Can we talk about it in the morning? I feel sick too,” says Harry.

“No problem. Have a good night.”

“You too. Thanks for dinner, buddy.”

As soon as Stuart walks in the front door, he heads straight into the kitchen to pour himself a glass of ginger ale. His stomach was making all kinds of noises and full to the rim. He slowly strolls upstairs, and on the way to his bedroom, he knocks on his mother’s door to let her know that he is home. He empties his pockets, placing his keys and wallet on his dark walnut dresser. Stuart unzips his pants, changes into his loungewear, and pops onto the bed. He reaches for the television remote on his nightstand and flips through the TV guide, looking for something to watch. Stuart settles into bed, holding his stomach, and his eyes glue to Pawn Stars. Chum Lee is geeking out on a gentlemen’s collection of Marvel comic books.

With the remote starting to fall out of his hand, he pops his head off the pillow to turn the television off and places his glasses and remote onto the nightstand. Throughout the night, he tosses and turns, trapping himself in the bed with the blanket wrapped around his legs. *I see her. Grandma is sitting in a brown desk chair with her arms tied behind her back. She’s trapped in a dark room with one pendant light hanging above her head. Concrete floors, no natural light; I think she’s being held inside a closet or in a basement. A person wearing gray scala wool felt hat, which reminds me of a Sherlock Holmes hat, and a beige trench coat enters the room. I can’t tell if it’s a man or woman, their clothes cover their*

physique, and the hat covers their face.

They stare into my grandmother's ocean blue eyes and say, "Where's the journal, Dorothy?"

"Somewhere hidden," says Grandma breathy.

"If you don't give me what I want, I will put a bullet in your head."

"You told me to go undercover to find out who is leaking FBI information to the CIA, so let me do my mission."

"You have two more days, and that's it."

Beep Beep! From the alarm clock startle, Stuart awake, finding himself drenched in sweat. He untangled himself and briskly walks to the bathroom. He leans over the sink splashing cold water on his face, trying to wake up. What if an old enemy of my grandmother made her death look like she died from natural causes? I think my grandmother was an undercover agent.

Stuart dries his face, sits down on the ottoman in front of his bed, and dials Harry's phone number.

"Harry, are you awake?"

"I am now silly. What time is it?"

"A little after six in the morning. I set an early alarm to make sure we could get a flight tonight."

"Alright. Did you find ticket information?"

"No, I haven't checked yet. I'm calling because I had another dream."

"What did you see this time?" Harry asks while yawning.

"She was being held against her will by someone wearing a detective-style hat and trench coat, but I think she was an undercover spy."

"What?" Harry's voice went higher than his usual tone.

"She said she was hired to find out who was leaking information to the CIA."

"It looks like we have a good lead and information to help us.

Call me back when you have booked us a flight. I need a little more sleep.”

“Okay, buddy. Talk to you later.”

Stuarts grabs his laptop out of his work bag and searches for flight times and hotel rooms for him and Harry. A cold breeze flows in the room from the window, and it brings natural light into the room as the sun rises. Stuart booked the last flight out to New York City for eight o'clock tonight for him and Harry and a Holiday Inn room for the weekend. He sends Harry a text message with all the details. Then, he jumps back into bed to get a few more hours of sleep before he needs to get ready for his weekend trip to NYC.

The vibration and chimes from the alarm clock on his cell phone echo into Stuart's ears and scare him awake from a deep sleep. Stuart uses his arms to push his body up. He leans against the headboard of his bed, rubbing the crusty particles out from the corner of his eyes. His heart ached at the thought of his grandmother being captured by someone many years ago, but the feeling of him losing his grandmother suddenly still lingers with him every time he thought about her. Stuart reaches for his glasses on the nightstand and slides them onto his face. He clicks on the weather app on his phone and enters the New York zip code to check the forecast for the weekend.

“Sunshine and mid-sixties are in the forecast,” Stuart says out loud to himself and then does a little dance on his way to the closet. He opens the walnut-stain double doors of his closet with one hand on his chin, thinking about how he could wear cargo shorts and polo shirts instead of sweaters and bulky coats. Stuart took a polo shirt and shorts off the hangers. He unzips the suitcase and places the neatly folded clothes inside. Now, Stuart has clothes for when it's cold and warm outside because

you never know when the weather might change again.

Knock Knock. “Do you need help packing, sweetie,” says Stuart’s mother holding a tea tray full of food.

Stuart kisses his mother on the cheek and says, “I think I’m good, Mom, but thanks for making lunch. My stomach is growling.”

“You’re very welcome. I made you a turkey and cheddar cheese sandwich with mayo on both sides of the bread, just the way you like it. There’s also a bowl of fruit salad and a fresh-baked chocolate chip cookie.”

“You have been a busy bee this afternoon, Mom.”

“Oh, yes! Today, I woke up feeling energetic. I already did a load of dishes and laundry. I also planted some purple pansies in the garden.”

“I’m so happy; spring is here. I can’t stand driving the police cruiser in the snow.”

“It’s going to be nice weather for your trip.”

“Why are you going to New York again?” Stuart’s mother asks with a concerned look on her face and her hands at her hips.

“I told you, mom. I am working on an old cold case, and the FBI has a confidential seal on the files I need.”

“What’s this case you’re working about?” Stuart’s mother says as she pushes up her auburn red glasses.

“It’s regarding a detective who was leaking information to a government agency, and I think it’s connected to....”

“What were you going to say, son?”

“I am afraid of what you may think if I tell you.”

“You know you can tell me anything,” says Stuart’s mother, and then she walked over to the bed and sat down, pushing the suitcase towards the bed pillows.

“Remember how I told you I had dreams about grandma over

breakfast a few days ago,” Stuart says, taking a bite of his sandwich.

“Yes, I do,” says Stuart’s mom while nodding her head.

“Well, the dreams haven’t stopped. Almost every night, the dreams become more vivid and lifelike. It’s like I am meant to see them. They are glimpses into Grandma’s life as a young adult.”

“Oh! What did you see?”

“Last night, I dreamt of Grandma being trapped in a basement or a closet. A man was demanding a journal, and then she said, let me find out who is sharing information with the CIA,” says Stuart, with his voice going higher in excitement.

“Are you sure you weren’t watching a movie last night?”

“No, Mom. I think Grandma worked for the government, and she didn’t die from natural causes.”

“What are you talking about, Stuart? I know you miss her dearly, but this is something else,” she yelled.

“Didn’t Grandma’s death feel uneasy to you? Like something was out of the ordinary.”

“Yes, but how else can we explain what happened,” Stuart’s mother says, then scratches her forehead.

“I have a theory,” Stuart says while wrapping his arm around his mother to comfort her.

“I am listening,” she says in a sarcastic tone.

“I think Grandma was an undercover agent from the government, and an old enemy murdered her to get revenge.”

“I don’t know about this, Stuart.”

“Remember the photo we found where Grandma was in a ballroom?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“Well, I had Harry help me restore the images to identify the

man in the picture. His name is Arthur Watson, and I found him in the police database.”

“I think I have heard his name before,” Stuart’s mom says with her eyes staring down at the hardwood floors.

“That’s great, Mom. What can you tell me about him?” Stuart says with excitement.

“I remember seeing a letter addressed to him in Grandma’s belongings. Finish eating and packing, and I will look through the boxes in the garage.”

“Okay, Mom. Get me if there’s a box too heavy for you to move. I don’t want you straining your back again like when we were cleaning out Grandma’s house.”

“Yes, I will,” Stuart’s mom says, then waves her hand at him.

Stuart scarfs down the food his mother made him and then looked at the time on his alarm clock.

“It’s five o’clock already. I have to be at the airport in about an hour,” he says out loud while pulling underwear, socks, and a tank top out of his dresser.

He dashes into the bathroom to brush his teeth and refresh himself. He quickly puts on jeans and a black tee. Once he finishes spraying deodorant and using his personal care items, he throws them in a Ziploc bag and places them into his suitcase. Before he zippers his suitcase closed, he grabs his laptop, chargers, and work bag. He places his computer and its charger with the files and his grandmother’s journal into his work bag and then tries to put the bag on top of his clothes inside the suitcase, but it wouldn’t close.

“Oh, sweet nibblets,” he says out loud as his underwear popped out of the suitcase.

“Are you okay, Stu?” his mother says while carrying a rustic chest that looked like a miniature treasure chest.

“Yes, I’m fine. I am just trying to hurry because I have to leave to pick up Harry in less than thirty minutes.”

“Oh, okay! I’ll have a look through Grandma’s belongings while you’re away, and I will call if I find anything about Mr. Watson.”

“Sounds good, Mom. Would you mind doing me a favor?”

“Sure, what do you need, son?”

“A cup of coffee to go, please, and thank you.”

“No problem. I will have it ready by the time you come downstairs.”

“You’re the best, Mom,” Stuarts shouts as his mother walks downstairs to the kitchen.

Stuart slides a comb through his thick brown hair and takes one last look in the mirror. He glances inside his suitcase and leather work bag, making sure he has everything he needs for the trip. He closes his bedroom door and carries his luggage downstairs.

He grabs his car keys off the entryway table by the front door and shouts, “I’m putting my bags in the car. Be right back, Mom.”

Stuart’s mother stands on the porch with a fresh cup of coffee inside a blue traveling mug that says *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*.

“Thanks, Mom; I’ll be back Monday night.”

“Have a safe trip, sweetie,” Stuart’s mom says, then hugs him goodbye.

Stuarts places his mug into the cup holder and grabs his phone out of his pocket before putting the car key into the engine.

“Hey Harry, I am leaving my house right now.”

“Okay, buddy. I’ll grab my bags and wait outside on the porch for you.”

“Okay, see you in about fifteen minutes.”

Stuart hangs up the phone and puts the car in drive. He cruises down Main Street with the wind blowing in his hair and the country radio station playing all the way to Harry’s house loudly. Harry and Stuart have been friends ever since they met in college. It’s funny how they didn’t meet sooner because Harry lives a few streets away from Stuart. Harry lives in a beautiful cottage house with a royal blue metal roof and front door. The porch is white along with the house, except for the black around the windows. The porch wraps around Harry’s entire house. The front porch has five wicker patio chairs, one for each of the kids and then him and his wife, Taylor. There’s also a hanging plant in the middle of two ceiling fans. As soon as Lee Brice’s *Hard To Love* song ends, Stuart beeps the car horn to let Harry know he has arrived. Harry comes running down the steps, almost tripping over the wheels of his suitcase.

“Hi, buddy. Ready for a fun, crazy, adventurous weekend.”

“Oh, yeah. I’m ready,” Harry shouts with his hands up in the air.

4

Harry & Stuart Arriving in New York City



Photo by Craig Adderley via Pexels

Harry and Stuart are boarding the plane. They check their tickets for their seat numbers while squeezing past an older woman with a large leopard duffel bag. After passing five rows of seats, they find their places. Harry stuffs both their suitcases inside the compartment box above the row of seats.

Stuart watches Harry struggle with the suitcases and says, “Hey buddy, do you need help?”

“I got it. My arms are just a little sore from doing Zumba with Taylor last night.”

Stuart throws his head back, laughing, and says, “She’s got you exercising? I haven’t seen you work out since college.”

“We are trying to eat more healthily and get into shape.”

“That’s great. Maybe I should join you? I put on a few pounds eating fast food. It’s nice to be home and eat homemade food.”

“How do you like living in Philadelphia?”

“It’s okay. I live in a loft apartment. It’s small, but it’s perfect for me right now. I tell you one thing, though, I miss hanging out with you and weekly dinners with the family.”

“Are you thinking about moving back here to Buffalo?” Harry says with a grin on his face.

“I have been thinking about it a lot,” says Stuart, then he jerks up to the edge of his seat as the plane prepares for landing.

“It would be nice to have you home again, buddy,” Harry says with a hand on Stuart’s shoulder.

“Yea, I think it’s time to come home,” Stuart says while nodding his head.

The light goes off to remove their seatbelts. Harry stands up and stretches. Stuart glanced out the window, took in the scenery, and read a light-up sign saying, “Welcome to New York.”

“Thank you for flying with Delta. I hope you have a wonderful trip,” says a flight attendant with a big grin on her face.

Stuart waits to exit his seat as a big Italian family squeezes by Harry while trying to gather their things. Stuart grabs his suitcase from Harry, and they head towards the door. A tall gentleman with a leather coat steps in front of them, causing Stuart to drop his cell phone.

“Hey, what’s the rush?” Stuart shouts.

“Did that guy look familiar to you?” Harry asks.

“Not sure. Why?”

“Just a feeling I have in my gut.”

The smell of roasted coffee beans makes its way up to Stuart’s nose as he places down his luggage on a black metal chair in the airport waiting area.

“Hey, do you smell what I do?”

“I didn’t let one loose if that’s what you mean.”

Stuart laughs, then says, “No, freshly brewed coffee.”

“Oh yeah, I could use a cup.”

“How about you stay here with the bags, and I will go grab us coffee and sandwiches before we grab a taxi to the hotel?”

Harry nods his head and says, “Sounds good.”

Stuart starts walking towards the Tim Hortons, and his vision becomes blurry. He rubs his eyes, and a fog of smoke swallows him. He hears a voice calling out.

“Help! I am trapped.”

A wooden door comes into view. Stuart places his hand on the golden doorknob and turns it. A woman is confined to a chair with tape on her mouth. He turns his head back and forth to see if anyone is around. No one else is in the room. Just the woman and Stuart with an Edison lightbulb on a metal chain swinging from the ceiling. Stuart runs towards her and begins pulling the tape off her mouth slowly.

In disbelief, he blinks his eyes twice and says, “Grandma is that you?”

“Someone’s coming for you, Stuey. They know you are digging around for answers.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Sir, are you okay? How would you like your coffee?” The brown-haired woman at the counter asks.

“What did you say?” Stuarts says with his head feeling foggy.

“Do you want any sugar or cream in your coffees?”

“Sorry. I guess I am a little jet-lagged. Yes, three sugars and cream in both coffees, please.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes, two turkey club sandwiches and a twenty pack of as-sorted Timbits.”

“Is that everything?” She says while grabbing a donut box.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Okay, your total is \$21.74.”

Stuarts pulls out his bank card from his pants pocket and pays for his order. He leans against the counter, thinking about what he just experienced. *I have never seen my grandmother like this—only in my dreams. What’s happening to me? All I know is I have to find out what happened to her. The more I research and what I see in these dreams, her death was no accident.*

“Here’s your order, sir.”

“Thank you. Have a goodnight.”

“You too,” the woman says, then waves goodbye.

Stuart approaches the seating area at the airport and sees his buddy dozing off in the chair. Harry is rocking his head back and forth. Stuart shakes his arm.

“Hey! Wake up.”

“Oh, snap! Was I falling asleep?”

“Yea, you were. Here’s some coffee to wake you up.”

“Thanks. What time is it anyway?”

Stuart checks the time on his cell phone. “It’s almost four in the morning.”

“Wondering why I am so tired all of a sudden.”

“Let’s eat our food and call a taxi.”

“Good idea. I’m going to need some sleep before our mission

to the FBI building.”

Stuart places a finger over his mouth and says, “Shhh.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Don’t say where we are going. I think someone knows we are here.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I had a vision or dream. I don’t know what to call it, but I saw my grandmother tied up, and she told me someone is coming for me.”

“Are you sure, Dude?” Harry says with an incredulous look on his face.

“I’m serious.”

“All right. Do you think it’s the guy that bumped into you on the plane?”

“Possibly. All I know is I need to scarf down this food and get to the hotel for a nap.”

“Me too, bro. I got the Uber app on my phone. I will get us a ride to the hotel.”

“Okay. Tell the driver we are going to the Four Seasons Hotel on 27 Barclay Street,” says Stuart in a shallow voice, so no one else can hear them.

“Okay, got it. They will be here in about twenty-five to thirty minutes.”

Stuart throws his food wrappers in the trash can, drinks the last drop of coffee, and then tosses it in the trash can too. Harry and Stuart make their way to the airport’s front entrance, rolling their suitcases behind them.

A black SUV pulls up to the curb, and the driver asks, “Are you, Harry Parker?”

“Yes, Sir. My buddy and I need a ride to our hotel?” Harry says through the passenger’s window.

A Latino gentleman in his late forties wearing a New York Giants baseball cap gets out of the driver's seat to open the trunk of the vehicle to place Harry and Stuart's luggage in the car.

"What hotel are you going to?" says the driver while closing the trunk.

"The Four Seasons Hotel on Barclay Street?"

"Oh, I know exactly where that is," the driver says with a smile on his face.

"That's great. Do you know how long it will take us to get there?" Stuart asks, then yawns.

"About twenty minutes, Sir," The driver says with his lips pursed.

Stuart and his buddy hop into the back seat of the SUV and put their seatbelts on. Harry starts to feel warm, and his cheeks begin to turn pinkish-red.

"Excuse me, Sir. Could you please roll down the window a smidge for me? I'm feeling a bit overheated. I guess I shouldn't have worn a heavy sweater underneath my coat," says Harry.

"No problem. I completely understand. The weather has been crazy. One day it's below twenty degrees and snowy, and now it's breezy and almost sixty degrees."

"Yea. I guess that's the weather of Western New York."

The driver chuckles, and Harry gazes out the window, taking in the view. "Even though the sun hasn't risen yet, the city looks beautiful."

"I am sure it is, bro. My eyes are so heavy right now. I'm too tired to look out the window."

"Well, I see the tall trees and flowers in the park. The morning sun is shimmering on the natural stone on the exterior of some of the buildings."

"It sounds lovely. Maybe we can take a tour later after work,"

Stuart says groggily.

“I didn’t mean to listen to your conversation, but I have a friend who is a tour guide that can show you Central Park and the Zoo.”

“Oh. That would be very nice.”

“You’re welcome. I will give you Ricky’s business card when we arrive at your destination.”

“How much longer? My buddy is falling asleep.”

“We are almost there, Sir.”

Harry stares out the window with his mouth wide open, taking in his surroundings. He has always wanted to visit New York City and see all the landmarks and Times Square but has never had the opportunity to do so. Suddenly, the driver slams his foot on the break, and both Harry and Stuart hit their heads against the car window.

“What happened?” Harry and Stuart say simultaneously, holding their head.

“I don’t know. A yellow taxi came out of nowhere when I was about to make a left turn on to Barclay street,” shouts the driver as he waves his hands in the air.

“Harry, do you think that was a sign?”

“No, just probably a person was trying to get somewhere in a hurry,” says Harry, shrugging his shoulders.

“I’m so sorry. Are you guys alright?” says the driver with a concerned look on his face.

“We’re okay. I don’t think we hit our heads very hard, just a minor headache. Nothing Tylenol and a good night’s sleep won’t fix.”

“Are you sure you don’t need to go to the hospital or urgent care?”

“Yes, we are sure. We are not bleeding or anything. We want

to get checked in to our hotel. It's going to be a long day for us."

"Okay, I understand. Do you have something exciting planned?"

"Unfortunately, we are here for work."

"Oh, I see. Where do you guys work?"

"I am a detective, and my friend Harry is a special agent who works in the cyber-crime division at the Buffalo precinct."

"Try to have some fun while you're here in New York City."

"We will try. I definitely would like to try some classic New York-style pizza?"

"Go check out Joe's Pizza on Fulton St."

"Thanks for the recommendation. How much do we owe you for the ride?"

"You don't owe me anything—this one is on me due to the incident that happened earlier."

"Really? That's so nice of you."

"My pleasure. Let me help you with your bags."

The driver puts the vehicle in park and carries their luggage to the Four Seasons hotel's check-in desk.

"Thank you so much. Please take twenty dollars as a tip; you have done so much for us."

The gentleman shakes his hands and says, "Thank you. Here's Ricky's business card as promised."

Stuart waves goodbye and says, "Thanks again."

Harry stands still in front of the revolving door in amazement. Italian-inspired travertine tile on the floor, crisp white crown moldings, and a beautiful large chandelier with jewels hang in the center of the hotel's entrance.

"Come on, Harry, I have our hotel key," Stuart calls out.

"I'm coming. Sorry, I got distracted by the beauty of the hotel. I feel like I walked into one of the mansions Tamara Day

renovates on her show, *Bargain Mansions*.”

“It’s charming, and it fits with the city’s crowd,” says Stuart with a grin on his face as he looks around the hotel.

“Not to be nosy, but can we afford to stay here?”

“Don’t worry; I got the room covered. I had some money saved.”

“Okay. Thank you. I’ll pitch in for food and whatever else we may need.”

“Sounds good. I don’t know about you, but I don’t have enough energy to climb up the spiral staircase with metal railings, so I’m going over by the elevators.”

“Let’s go to the elevator.”

They roll their suitcases across the tile floor over to the elevators and patiently wait for the doors to open. In a blink of an eye, the doors opened after it made a chime noise. Stuart pressed the button for the fifth floor, and away they went. It is a large hotel room with two queen-size beds and an entertainment center with a mini-fridge stocked with candy and drinks. A spa-like bathroom with a walk-in shower with marble spread all over the walls and floors.

Stuart places his bags over by the window. He looks down below and watches the city come to life as people walk to work, chat on the phone, and hold their Starbucks coffee. He takes off his shoes, unbuttons his jeans, and jumps into bed.

“I’m going to use the bathroom. Do you need to go first?” Harry asks.

He turns around and sees Stuart already asleep—his head against two fluffy pillows and covered in a plush tan blanket. Harry sets the alarm on his cell phone for one o’clock, then places it on a charger.

“Good thing, we made an afternoon appointment because the

sun is already rising,” says Harry in a low voice while walking into the bathroom.

The twinkle alarm blaring from Harry’s cell phone awakens them both. Stuart pops his head up and glances around the room.

“Time to get up already?” asks Stuart, trying to untangle himself from the blankets.

“Yea, it’s one o’clock already. Sorry buddy, no time for snoozing,” Harry chuckles as he wanders to the mini-fridge.

Harry drags his feet across the hardwood floors and opens the mini-fridge. He bends over, scratches his head, and grabs a cold bottle of water.

“Can you toss me a bottle of water too? I have to take my medicine.”

“Yes, of course. How have you been doing with your diabetes?” says Harry with a concerned look on his face.

“Actually, I have been doing a lot better. My physician gave me a new medication that has been helping me control my blood sugars better.”

“That’s great!”

“I am no longer on insulin shots. Instead, I take a once-a-week shot to assist my pancreas in making the insulin I need to regulate my glucose.”

“That’s wonderful, Bro. The last time you were sick in the hospital, I was afraid of losing you,” says Harry with a teardrop forming in the corner of his eye.

Harry wraps his arms around his buddy to give him a sweet hug.

“Don’t worry; you are not going to lose me. I’m still fighting like a warrior. The last two years have been challenging, but having the love and support from my family and friends keeps

me moving forward despite the obstacles I face.”

“I am so proud of you.”

“Okay, enough with this mushy talk. We have a case to solve.”

“Okay, but first, I need a shower, coffee, and a bagel breakfast sandwich.”

“Me too,” says Harry with a smirk on his face.

Stuart sits at the rustic corner desk next to the window, swallowing his pills one at a time until all twelve of them are down his throat. His multi-vitamin is almost as large as a peanut-butter cup, making him choke.

“Are you okay?” Harry shouts from the bathroom.

“Yes, I always have trouble swallowing my vitamins.”

“Oh, okay. Drink more water to get it down.”

“Yes, mother,” says Stuart in a jokey matter.

Stuart places his medication bottles back into his carry-on bag and picks up the retro-style desk phone. Everything changes to black and white as soon as he puts the phone to his ear. Stuart blinks twice in amazement. The large picture window with a million-dollar view of Central Park vanishes and turns into a library room with leather lounge chairs, and wood paneling covers all the walls.

The fluffy red carpet tickles Stuart’s feet as he wanders to the double doors encased in white crown molding. He places his right hand on the door, and his body floats through to the other side. Stuart catches the scent of cigars in the room, and the smell flows into his nostrils.

Stuart coughs into his arm and calls out, “Hello, is anyone here?”

No response. The more Stuart roams around the room; it comes alive like someone is playing a movie through a projector. A book labeled “Watson Mission 1945” lights up like a strand of

fairy lights surrounding the object.

The book is wrapped in the same ribbon as my grandmother's journal. There has to be some kind of message here for me to find.

“What do you need me to find, Grandma?” Stuarts calls out into the void.

A gust of wind whips through the room and opens the antique book to page thirty-five. Stuart wipes the dust particles off the top of the page and begins to read. Arthur and I found the double agent drinking a cold beer and wearing purple and gold beads around his neck like he hasn't committed any crimes. We are getting closer to gaining evidence to prove that Mr. Gaines is betraying his country by selling confidential information about our country's military tactics. Arthur contacted a friend who works from the CSI secret agency. He found a black leather ledger with financial transactions. Someone paid Mr. Gaines over one hundred thousand dollars for information on the United States' new chemical weapon from Japan. Who on earth has that kind of money? I don't know. I better not write down any more information; I can feel someone watching me even though Arthur and I are hiding in an abandoned building.

It seems like Arthur was my grandmother's partner, and they found incriminating evidence against this Mr. Gaines. I can hear someone calling my name and tapping my shoulder.

“Hey, buddy! Where did you go?” Harry calls out from the bathroom.

Stuart can hear Harry calling him, but he doesn't know how to respond. *How do I go back into the hotel room?* Stuart tears the journal entry from the book labeled “Watson Mission 1945” and ties the book's silky blue ribbon. He slowly places the book back on the dusty bookshelf, anticipating that something else will magically happen. An orange orb appears behind the books on

the rustic wood bookcase and slowly opens. He lingers around the room, frightened to go through the hidden bookcase. Stuart takes a deep breath and uses his finger to make a cross across his chest, praying to God to help him get out of this vision.

“Hello?” Stuart calls out.

“Stuart, is that you? I don’t see you.”

“Harry, I’m stuck in another vision.”

“What? How did that happen?”

“The telephone on the desk teleported me.”

“Follow my voice, and I will go near the desk,” Harry says in a shaky tone.

“Do you think I can get back if you pick up the phone?”

“Possibly, let’s try.”

“Alright, what do I got to lose?”

Stuart dashes towards the orange orb, hoping to see Harry at the end of the passageway. The orange glow evaporates, and Stuart faces a brick wall with a keypad randomly in the middle like there was once a door here.

“Harry, can you hear me?” Stuart shouts.

“Yes, I hear you. It sounds like you are in the hotel room next door or behind this wall.”

“Maybe I am. Can you try something for me?”

“Sure, whatever you need.”

“Pick up the phone and dial 1945.”

Harry sits at the desk and brings the rotary phone closer to him. He slowly spins the wheel and dials the numbers that Stuart suggested. The brick wall twitches, and bricks begin to collapse through the floor, opening another passageway.

“Oh, shoot!” Stuart says right before cascading down an old elevator shaft.

Harry is thrown from the desk chair onto the bed as a portal

opens up from under the desk. Stuart comes shooting out of the gateway like a clown in a cannon at the circus.

“Holy cow! I made it back,” Stuart cries out.

He immediately sees Harry hanging off the bed unconscious. Stuarts rolls him over and listens to his chest to make sure he’s breathing.

“Harry, wake up!”

Stuart shakes him a few times and calls his name but gets no response.

“Come on, buddy. Please wake up!”

Stuarts taps Harry’s shoulder a few times and calls out to him to try and wake him up, but no response. He grasps for his phone on the bedside table and calls 911.

“Hello, What’s your emergency?” a young woman says.

“My friend Harry fell in our hotel room, and he will not wake up,” Stuart says nervously.

“Help is on the way, Sir. Can you tell me what hotel you are staying at?”

“Yes, ma’am. The Four Seasons Hotel on Barclay Street. We are in room 311. Please come as fast as you can,” Stuart says in a crackling voice.

“We will. Help is on the way.”

Ten minutes later. A six-foot tall man with wavy brown hair in an EMT uniform is placing a brace over Harry’s neck and giving him oxygen. Two EMTs lift Harry onto the stretcher and head out the door, down the hall to the elevator. Stuart grabs his wallet and hotel key and follows them out the door. Stuart sits in the back of the ambulance, watching his buddy’s chest rise and fall. He lays his head on his lap and prays. *Please, Lord, I need you to watch over my best friend, my brother. It’s all my fault that he got hurt. I didn’t expect him to get thrown across the room*

when I came through the portal. He was trying to save me. Please, Lord, use your special gift and heal him.

Stuart takes a deep breath, trying to calm himself down, but he keeps tapping his fingers across his knee on the drive to the hospital. What felt like hours was only about a fifteen-minute ride to Presbyterian Downtown Hospital. As the ambulance pulls into the hospital parking lot, Stuart jumps up from his seat as the truck shakes, and a loud thump echoes in Stuart's ears. Stuart looks out the ambulance's back door and sees a man dressed in all black wearing a ski mask, holding a machine gun. Stuart's head thumps along with his heartbeat. He's not too sure what's going on except that he is being dragged out of the ambulance.

"Do not make any sudden moves, or I will shoot you," The ski-masked man says.

"Who are you? Where are you taking me? I have to stay with my buddy; he's injured," Stuart says while wheezing.

"I have orders to take you to the person you have been searching for. That's all I can tell you at the moment," says a man wearing a navy blue suit standing next to the trunk of the car, holding a black blindfold and handcuffs.

Within minutes, Stuart goes from lying on the asphalt looking at the birds flying through the fluffy white clouds to total blackness and the inability to move his hands and feet. Stuart lays in the trunk of a black Land Rover, waiting to meet his kidnapper and possibly the man he's been hunting down. The bigger mystery is who knew Stuart was looking into Agent Arthur Watson.

