

**ADDISON
COOKE**

**AND THE
TREASURE
OF THE
INCAS**

Chapter One

Fear of Heights



ADDISON COOKE SAT CROSS-LEGGED in the school library, engrossed in an Incan history book. Under the spell of a decent read, Addison could forget meals, forget sleep, and even forget to go to class. He could forget to go to school or, once at school, forget to go home. This was, in fact, the current situation.

The school bell had rung ages ago, and Addison had missed it entirely.

Addison's little sister, Molly, sprinted into the library. She was still wearing soccer cleats and shin guards from intramural practice.

"Addison!" she hissed.

Addison perked up, looked around for the source of the whisper, and spotted his sister.

"Molly, what are you doing down there?"

"Me? What are you doing on top of the bookshelf?"

Addison was, at present, perched on top of a six-foot bookshelf.

"Overcoming my fear of heights. And reading up on Incan history. It's called multitasking."

Addison, like any seventh grader at Public School 141, sported a tidy uniform: a sharp blazer, power tie, and khaki pants. Never wanting to blend in, he topped off his uniform with a smart Ivy cap perched on his head at a rakish angle.

Molly, a sixth grader, had more than a decade of solid experience with Addison's odd behavior. She was more or less used to it. "I ran to your classroom to find you, but Ms. Johnson said you weren't in class all afternoon."

"I got a nurse's pass."

"But you're not sick."

"Naturally. I got the nurse's pass from Eddie Chang," Addison explained. "He was sick last week. I traded him his nurse's pass for an owl pellet."

"What's an owl pellet?"

"You ask too many questions. You should consider a career in tabloid reporting, or criminal investigation."

"Addison, skipping all these classes could catch up to you."

"I've gotten by so far. Besides, I'm only skipping class to further my education."

Addison Cooke possessed infinite confidence in all things Addison Cooke.

Molly Cooke, however, did not share this same feeling. "Well, hurry up," she said, whispering as loudly as the library allowed. "We have two strikes with Aunt Delia already. If we miss the bus again, she'll kill us!"

Even Addison saw the truth in this. He sighed, gathered his library books into his messenger bag, and began climbing down the tall bookshelf.

"No need to panic, Molly."

"I'm not panicking!"

"Sooner or later, you are going to learn that I have everything under control."

Addison stepped on a loose shelf. It overturned, flipping all the books—and Addison—onto the ground.

He landed hard on his back.

"I'm all right."

Molly looked down at him, knuckles on her hips. "And you're supposed to be a good influence on me."

Addison hurriedly reshelved the books before sprinting after Molly.

.....

Addison and Molly burst out of the front doors of PS 141, Theodore Roosevelt Middle School, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. They watched the last school bus disappear, turning right on 72nd Street toward Central Park.

"C'mon, Molly. We'll catch them at Columbus Avenue!"

"We're supposed to outrun a school bus?"

"I could use the exercise—I skipped PE today. Besides, you already have your running shoes on."

"These are soccer cleats!"

But Addison had already taken off running. Molly chased after him, her cleats clacking like maracas on the pavement.

They dashed past the hot-dog vendor with his rolling cart. Past the cook-fire smells of the pretzel vendor. They sprinted past Mr. Karabidian's ice cream cart.

"Missed the bus again, Addison?" called Mr. Karabidian.

"Time waits for no man," replied Addison as he flew by, "and neither does the bus." Addison put on a fresh burst of speed, now struggling to keep pace with Molly.

"The shortcut!" she called, ducking down a service alley. They bolted along loading docks and leapt over shipping flats, Addison desperate not to lose any of his Incan library books.

Turbaned men reclining on blankets played chess in the shade of the alleyway. Women with machetes shaved ice behind the Thai restaurant. Addison and Molly swept past them with the speed of two scalded squirrels.

They emerged from the alley at full tilt, upsetting a flock of warbling pigeons on Central Park West. "There it is!" Addison called, pointing.

Molly watched in dismay as their school bus chugged uptown, passing the 79th Street Transverse. It trundled into the distance, disappearing in the afternoon traffic.

"Great." Molly squatted down to retie her cleats.

"Never fear, young relative. We will catch a taxi."

"We're not allowed to take taxis."

"I'm glad you mentioned that. Because I cannot afford a taxi."

"We've got to hurry. Aunt Delia will be home any minute!"

Addison surveyed the bustling Manhattan street traffic. "The important thing is to remain levelheaded and to make use of one's environment."

"That's two things. And you sound just like Uncle Nigel."

"Thank you." Addison beamed. "You know, the taxi is not the fastest animal in the concrete jungle. That honor belongs to the bike messenger." Addison knew there were few creatures in any jungle more quick, daring, and potentially lethal than a New York City bike messenger. "I will just flag one down."

For Addison, having an idea was the same thing as acting on it. He jumped in front of the speeding path of a passing bike messenger. The cyclist spotted Addison flapping his arms and swerved hard at the last moment, brakes squealing.

"Watch it, kid!" shouted the bike messenger, skidding to a stop.

"Sir, I apologize, but I require your services."

"You could have gotten me killed!"

"A small price to pay for what is at stake," Addison calmly replied.

"You need a delivery?"

"In a word, yes."

"Got any money?"

"I do."

"I'm listening," said the bike messenger.

"I need you to take me and my sister home."

"I deliver packages, not kids."

"What's the difference?"

The bike messenger considered this question, probably for the first time in his life. "Size, mostly."

"If you take us home, I can pay you when we get there," suggested Addison.

"If you grow wings, I won't need to take you," the bike messenger replied.

"Fair enough." Addison slipped off his school dress shoe and peeled five crumpled one-dollar bills from under his insole. "I keep emergency funds for just such scenarios. How far uptown will five dollars get me?"

"73rd Street," said the bike messenger.

"We're on 73rd Street," Addison observed.

"All right, 76th."

"Make it 86th Street, and you've got yourself a deal."

"79th and not one inch farther."

"I'll take it."

Addison climbed on the bicycle seat, which was pretty high off the ground for him. Molly balanced her cleats on the rear wheel axle, her hands on Addison's shoulders. The bike messenger rode seatless, huffing and puffing to get the cycle moving.

Soon they careened through the Manhattan streets at breakneck speed. Pedestrians yelped and leapt out of their speeding path. Molly clung to Addison, who clung to the bike messenger. Addison's tie flapped behind him; Molly squinted her eyes in the headwind. They wove through traffic, slicing within inches of passing cars.

"I could get used to this," said Addison.

"We're there," said the bike messenger, squeaking to a stop.

Molly dismounted, looking grateful to be alive. Addison straightened his windblown hair and thanked the bike messenger.

"Truth is, I was going this direction anyway," said the messenger. "But I figured I might as well get paid for it."

"I respect your entrepreneurial spirit," said Addison.

"Kid, here's my card if you ever need anything."

Addison gratefully accepted the bike messenger's business card and offered his own in exchange. In impeccable felt-tipped penmanship, Addison's card read:

Addison Cooke
ARCHAEOLOGIST
Rates negotiable

The bike messenger cocked his knuckles to his cap, saluting Addison. He set foot to pedal, ready to cycle north. "Got a tip?"

"Absolutely," Addison replied. "You shouldn't let kids ride without helmets."

.....

Addison and Molly raced the final seven blocks to their apartment building on West 86th Street. Addison skidded to a halt, his jaw dropped in horror. Aunt Delia was already climbing the front steps of their brownstone apartment building.

"We're so busted!" Molly exclaimed.

"We can't afford another grounding. Let's try the back door."

"Addison—we live on the fifth floor—there is no back door."

"True. But there *is* a fire escape."

Molly and Addison dashed into the back alley, frightening a skulking cat. The siblings clambered on top of the alley Dumpster to reach the wrought-iron rungs of the fire-escape ladder. Addison began climbing.

"C'mon, hurry up," urged Molly.

Halfway up the ladder, Addison froze. He stared down at the pavement far below, entranced.

"Could you go any slower?"

"Just give me a sec," said Addison.

Molly sighed. "It's your fear of heights, isn't it?"

"I'll be fine."

"Let's call for Raj or Eddie. If their windows are open, they'll come out and help you."

"If you shout for them, Aunt Delia will hear you."

Molly caught up to Addison on the ladder. "Just don't look down. Take deep breaths. You'll be okay."

"I don't need help. I'm fine!"

"Fine."

Addison's legs shook. His heart beat against his ribs like a gorilla rattling the bars of its cage.

"Addison?"

He sighed and shut his eyes, realizing he couldn't possibly climb to the fifth floor. Slowly, Addison climbed back down to the Dumpster, defeated. He carefully lowered himself to the pavement. Feet on solid earth again, Addison took a moment to collect his breath.

"I don't understand it," said Molly. "When are you going to get over this phobia?"

"Forget it. Let's just go in the front door before Aunt Delia calls in the National Guard. We're in deep enough already."

Furious with himself, Addison quietly led Molly out of the alleyway.

.....

Aunt Delia shook her head back and forth so that her ponytail wagged. She had the frazzled look of a person with three days' worth of work to do and only three hours to do it. She folded her tortoiseshell glasses and set them loudly on the counter.

Addison and Molly stared meekly at the black and white tiles of the kitchen floor.

"Addison, it's like you never *listen*," said Aunt Delia, wringing her hands.

"I do listen. I just never follow instructions," Addison corrected.

Aunt Delia held up one palm, silencing Addison. "I don't want to hear it."

Addison pursed his lips and did his best to hold his peace.

"You're grounded," said Aunt Delia. "Again," she added. "No television, no sleepovers . . ." Aunt Delia wound up for her knockout punch. "And, Addison—no visits to Bruno's Fossil Emporium for a month."

"Oh, c'mon!"

"No lip, Addison. This is about more than following instructions. When you give me your word, I need to know

I can trust you. You need to start accepting some responsibility. Traveling the city by yourself—what if something had happened to you?"

"I *wish* something would happen to me," Addison blurted out. "School is unimaginably, inconceivably, impossibly boring. You and Uncle Nigel are always leaving the country. Flying to excavations. Seeing the world. If I could leave school, I might actually learn something."

"Is that why you keep getting into trouble? Because your uncle and I have to work?"

"Every time you fly out of the country, you leave Molly and me behind."

"Only during the school year," Aunt Delia countered.

"Well, I'm ready for more. I'm almost thirteen. In some countries, I'd be married by now!"

"Addison missed all his afternoon classes to hide in the library and read about Incan treasure," Molly put in helpfully.

"Molly!" hissed Addison.

"Incan treasure?" cried Aunt Delia.

"Molly wants to get out of here, too. We're tired of being cooped up in school while you and Uncle Nigel trot around the globe."

"Don't drag your sister into this, Addison. Molly—unlike you—has never broken a rule in her life. I refuse to believe she is longing for a life of adventure, when she

can't even take the garbage down to the trash chute by herself."

"Can't, or won't?" Addison replied.

Aunt Delia stepped out of her high heels, hung her coat in the closet, and set her briefcase down on the table with a clatter. She took a deep breath and ran a hand across her forehead. "Addison, I will spend more time with you when the museum gets back on its feet. Until then, your uncle and I need to work hard so you and Molly have a roof to eat and food to sleep under."

"I think you got that backward," Molly suggested.

Aunt Delia rubbed the dark bags under her eyes and sighed, exhausted. "Addison, I don't have time to pick you up from after-school detentions. I don't have time for more soul-draining teacher meetings about you getting into trouble with Eddie and Raj."

Aunt Delia took Addison by his wrists and looked him in the eyes. "There is only one of you, and only one of Molly. That makes each of you more rare and valuable than Incan gold. Do you understand why I'm upset?"

Addison nodded.

"I don't make rules just to be mean. I make rules to prevent you from being—I don't know—kidnapped."

Addison nodded again, seeing the sense in this.

"We have to stick together, all right?"

"All right," said Addison. "Stick together. I promise."

.....

Addison and Molly shared a bunk bed in their room of Aunt Delia's two-bedroom apartment. Molly's half of the room was strewn with mismatched socks, grass-stained soccer shorts, and mud-caked sports jerseys. Addison's half of the room was as pristine and immaculate as a NASA science lab.

Roosting pigeons cooed on the window ledge, watching the afternoon descend into night. Rising wind and brooding gray clouds betrayed a gathering storm.

"Why do we have to stay with Uncle Nigel this weekend?" Molly asked.

Addison packed clothes and books into his backpack. "Because Aunt Delia's working."

"But why do we have to stay with Uncle Nigel at the museum?"

"Because Uncle Nigel's working."

"Why are they always working?"

"Like Aunt Delia said—to take care of us."

"By ignoring us?"

"More or less," said Addison.

He carefully packed his microscope and calligraphy pens. He swiped a pocket notebook off his desk and tucked it in his jacket. His notebooks contained sketches of birds and mammals he observed in the park, as well as pressed

leaves and beetles. Addison's uncle always needled him on the first rule of archaeology: record everything.

Molly collected socks from the floor and tossed them across the room, making three-point shots into her laundry hamper. "I don't want them to get divorced. It will be like losing our parents a second time."

"It's just a trial separation." This was not Addison's favorite topic. "We've never counted on adults before. We take care of ourselves, right?"

Molly zipped up her backpack and sat on her bed. "Why is our family so weird?"

"Because being weird is better than being ordinary."

Molly looked at Addison and frowned. She blew a wisp of hair from her eyes. Somehow, there was always one wisp that managed to escape her ponytail.

Addison wedged a few more Incan books into his backpack, struggling to close the zipper. "Listen, Mo. What's the most important thing in the world?"

"Frank's Pizza on 23rd and Lexington."

"True," Addison admitted. "But the second-most important thing is a good attitude. We can't control what happens to us. But we can control how we feel about it."

Molly considered this. Outside, the clouds burst. She looked out at the first rivulets of rain, tracing tracks down the window, dividing the world into pieces. The tapping drops grew to a drumroll, announcing the storm's arrival with a crashing timpani of thunder.

Chapter Two

The Legend of Atahualpa



AUNT DELIA DROPPED ADDISON and Molly off in front of the New York Museum of Archaeology. It was a sprawling marble building, backlit by lightning strikes in the glowering night sky. Trees bent under the lash of a whipping wind. Addison and Molly dashed through the heavy raindrops of the growing storm, splashing their way through puddles to the basement entrance.

Aunt Delia and Uncle Nigel were museum curators, so Addison and Molly knew the wooded grounds by heart. They cut through a maze of hedges and ducked under an arched portico. Skimming rainwater from his face, Addison found the basement key hidden in a crack of loose

mortar. He unlocked the creaking iron door and hauled it open with all his strength. He and Molly slipped inside from the howling rainstorm, the great door booming shut behind them.

The New York Museum of Archaeology was Addison's favorite place in the world. Great echoing halls filled with Egyptian mummies, Mongolian battle armor, a Viking warship, and the eastern wing of an Aztec temple. Deep down in the musty, snaking passageways of the basement archives was a secret underground world the public never saw. A labyrinth of vaults where millions of specimens were filed and stored. This was their uncle's workplace.

Addison and Molly trotted through the dark corridors by feel, listening to the rising thunder rattling the cement walls above. They passed a long hallway crammed with crates of Ice Age bones for the Hall of Paleontology: saber-toothed tiger skulls with teeth curved like Arabian sickle swords, giant sloth femurs heavy as tree limbs, dire wolf claws sharp as switchblades. At last they spotted a light glowing from an office at the end of a dark passage.

"Uncle Nigel, we're here!" Molly called.

.....

Professor Nigel Cooke chewed on the stem of his antique calabash pipe, curved like a bull's horn. His eyes gleamed behind polished spectacles as he considered Addison and

Molly. He was the sort of man who knew almost everything about the year 1493, and almost nothing about the year he was currently living in. Today he greeted Addison and Molly in ancient Greek.

"Aspádzomai!"

"Khaíre," said Addison and Molly, heaving aside an elephant tusk so they could sit on the tattered leather couch by the filing cabinet.

"Ti práttete?" Uncle Nigel asked.

"Pretty good," said Molly. "Although Addison made us miss the bus again."

"Molly!"

"I bet your aunt was ecstatic." Uncle Nigel laughed gently. Like Addison's father, Uncle Nigel was from Surrey, England. He was Oxford-educated and spoke with a proper British accent. Addison loved his uncle's speech, each word so crisp it was like biting off a piece of fresh celery.

"'Ecstatic' is not the first word I would use to describe Aunt Delia," said Addison.

"Your aunt has a lot to worry about right now," explained Uncle Nigel. "People don't visit museums as often as they used to. So your aunt and I have to work incessantly, like Slinkies on an escalator. If we don't find a great exhibit that will draw visitors back to the museum our funding will be slashed and . . ." Uncle Nigel trailed off. Then, looking hard at Addison and Molly, he seemed to decide

that honesty was the best policy. "Well, we could lose our jobs."

Addison and Molly weren't sure how to respond. Molly busied herself picking bits of turf from her cleats. Addison drew in his notebook, sketching the Cherokee head-dress he saw draped over the filing cabinet.

"The point is," continued Uncle Nigel, "your aunt is on a short fuse. And you'd be wise to be model children for her until we sail through this rough patch."

"I take your point," said Addison.

"Model children," agreed Molly. A waft of Uncle Nigel's tobacco smoke made her crinkle up her eyes and sneeze loudly.

"*Benedicite!*" said Uncle Nigel, excusing her in Latin.

"*Gratias tibi,*" said Molly, thanking him automatically.

"Well, that's enough serious talk," said Uncle Nigel. "I just returned from a dig in the jungles of Bolivia and found the most improbable relic. An artifact that's not even supposed to exist! I don't suppose you'd like to see it?"

"I don't see why not," said Addison, who could think of nothing better than a strange relic from a distant country.

Uncle Nigel carefully repacked his pipe, using the desk magnifying glass he usually reserved for archeological specimens. As a professor he was absentminded in many tasks, but packing a pipe he treated with surgical precision. "You're familiar with Incan history?"

"That's all Addison's been reading about since you left for Bolivia," answered Molly.

"Then you must know how the Incan Empire fell."

"A bit," said Addison.

"I'd like to hear it," said Molly.

Uncle Nigel struck a match and carefully puffed his antique pipe to life. Aside from his clothes and spectacles, he really owned very little from this century. With thunder rumbling outside like a distant cannonade, Uncle Nigel cleared his throat and began.

"Five hundred years ago, there lived the last king of the Incas . . ."

"King Atahualpa," Addison piped in.

"Precisely," Uncle Nigel nodded. "King Atahualpa battled with his own family for the right to his throne. It was a destructive war. By the time the Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro invaded Peru, Atahualpa's army was exhausted. Atahualpa tried to fight Pizarro alone, without the help of his family's armies. But Pizarro easily conquered the divided Incas and threw Atahualpa in a great dungeon . . ."

As Uncle Nigel talked, Addison's eyes darted to the shadowy corners of the office, containing relics from every era of history. Ancient maps, papyrus scrolls, and decaying mummies. Blood-encrusted samurai swords from feudal Japan. Maasai spears decorated in ostrich feathers.

The fossil skeleton of an extinct dodo bird. Even the ten-foot tusk of a narwhal, spiraled like a unicorn's horn.

"King Atahualpa bargained with Pizarro," continued Uncle Nigel. "The king offered to fill his dungeon once over with gold, and twice over with silver, if Pizarro would set him free. Pizarro only wanted treasure, and so immediately agreed. The Incas prepared the enormous ransom: gold vases filled with emeralds, silver chalices overflowing with rubies, and intricately carved golden statues of animals, birds, and the Incan gods. It took sixty thousand Incas to haul the seven hundred and fifty tons of gold across the empire and into Peru."

"How much is seven hundred and fifty tons of gold?" asked Molly.

Uncle Nigel drew on his pipe so the embers glowed. "Picture a hundred and fifty school buses filled with treasure."

PS 141 only had ten school buses. So Addison pictured a nearly endless line of school buses, heavy laden with gold, parked down the entire length of Central Park.

"At the last moment," Uncle Nigel went on, "Atahualpa's bickering family failed him one more time. His brother's army attacked Pizarro before the ransom could be delivered. So the Spanish conquistadors sacked the Incan army and called off the deal. Pizarro burned Atahualpa alive at the stake."

Molly grimaced. Then crinkled up her nose and sneezed again.

"Lots of people were burned at the stake, Mo," said Addison. "It was a popular way to kill people during the Spanish Inquisition."

Uncle Nigel nodded and wound up his tale. "The Incas never delivered their treasure. Instead, they locked it away in a secret chamber and hid three keys across the Incan Empire. Each key contains a clue leading to the next. Locals believe Atahualpa's treasure is cursed . . . Fortune hunters have searched for it over the centuries, and none have returned alive. Legends say the treasure vault will open only for someone who has learned from King Atahualpa's mistakes."

Uncle Nigel gazed pensively at the red glow of his pipe. He blew thin curls of blue smoke from his nostrils that wafted slowly up to the shadowed recesses of the ceiling rafters.

"So what did you find on your dig in Bolivia?" Addison asked quietly.

"Oh, only this," replied Uncle Nigel, unlocking the safe behind his desk and removing a fragile wooden box. He pried open the mildewed lid and tilted it to the light.

Addison's jaw dropped in amazement. Molly's followed suit. Inside the box lay an intricately carved stone, roughly the size of a large chess piece.

"One of the three keys!" cried Addison.

More thunder broke outside the museum. It shook the walls, as if giants upstairs were rearranging their furniture, and repeatedly changing their mind on where to set the couch.

The wind howled so fiercely it could be heard even in the basement. Molly shivered. "Is it real?"

Uncle Nigel allowed himself a smile. "I'm pretty sure it is Atahualpa's first key," he replied, his precise Oxford accent elegantly slicing the words into perfect squares. "Though the key is made of stone, so we can't carbon-date it."

"More's the pity," said Addison.

"Luckily," continued Uncle Nigel, "whoever created the key dated it for us. The Spanish inscription says AD 1533 . . . the same year Atahualpa was murdered."

Addison flipped open his notebook. Using a method Uncle Nigel had taught him, he delicately flattened a blank page over the stone key and rubbed with the side of his pencil to trace an exact copy.

"If the legend is true," Uncle Nigel went on, "the riddle engraved on this first key leads to the second key. The second key leads to the third key. And the third key leads—"

"To the lost treasure of the Incas." Addison's mind reeled, dizzy with the thought. Never in his life had he wanted his uncle's job so badly.

Uncle Nigel carefully retrieved the key from Addison's

grasp, cleaning it with a special brush from his desk. "Treasure hunters have searched in vain for the key for five hundred years," he said. "If the legends are true, the remaining clues to the treasure are still undisturbed, and, well, now you can understand why I have so much work to do. Archaeology is five percent field research and ninety-five percent paperwork. I need to get back to my reports."

"But it's dinnertime," Molly protested. "And we're starving."

"Plus, you deserve a celebration!" cried Addison. "Can we eat dinner in the prehistoric man diorama?"

"Maybe a picnic in the Roman court?" suggested Molly.

"Then we could watch the rainstorm from the greenhouse in the rooftop garden," offered Addison.

"Or go Rollerblading in the Chinese pagoda!"

"You know there's no Rollerblading in the pagoda," said Uncle Nigel, his eyes already fixed on his field notes. "And I'm sorry, guys, but I have too much work to have dinner with you." He tossed his wallet to Addison, who caught it one-handed. "Go grab yourselves some food from the vending machine down the hallway."

"But, Uncle Nigel—"

"I'm sorry. That's final."

Molly and Addison shared a look. Addison shrugged, and they shuffled out.

"You know the drill," called Uncle Nigel. "Don't visit

the museum exhibits after dark. And whatever you do, don't touch anything!"

.....

Molly and Addison took their time at the vending machine, debating which snacks might possibly fill them up for dinner. All at once, the lights flickered out, plunging the museum into darkness.

"I guess the storm knocked out the power," said Addison, invisible in the blackened corridor.

"You're a regular Sherlock Holmes," said Molly.

"If I could see you, I'd smack you."

"You wouldn't dare."

"That's true," admitted Addison.

Molly punched a few buttons on the dead vending machine. "Great. Now the vending machine doesn't work. We're going to starve to death in this museum. In a few days, they can add us to the mummy exhibit."

Even in the pitch dark, Addison could sense Molly rolling her eyes.

"This works in our favor, Molly. Let's go find Uncle Nigel—he has no choice but to buy us real food now."

Yet, as Addison crept back through the catacombs, Molly clutched him by the sleeve. "Did you hear that?" she whispered.

"Hear what?" Addison's voice echoed up and down the hollow corridor.

"Shhh. Listen!"

Addison strained his ears over the grumbling thunder. And then he heard. The voices of men arguing in his uncle's office. The men's voices grew to angry shouts. And then Addison heard the violent clatter of furniture being smashed to pieces.

"C'mon," whispered Addison. "Quickly!" He felt his way along the dark corridor, Molly keeping pace. Up ahead, flashlight beams cut the darkness in Uncle Nigel's office. Addison had read enough about Native Americans to know to walk toe to heel when he needed absolute silence. He snuck up to the doorway and crouched low to listen.

"Is anyone else in the museum, Dr. Cooke?" asked a rumbling voice so deep it seemed to shake dust from the rafters. Addison searched his memory, but he had never heard the voice before.

"Yes, Professor Ragar," Uncle Nigel's voice answered, a little shakily. "There are eight armed night watchmen patrolling the museum. I'm sure they will find us soon."

"*Four* night watchmen," corrected the man called Professor Ragar. "And we have already taken care of them."

"My god, you killed them?"

"My men dearly wanted to. Begged me, they did. But for now, your watchmen are only unconscious." The professor's Russian accent was so thick you could cut it with a Cossack's saber.

"Then I guess it's just us left in the museum tonight," said Dr. Cooke.

"Good," Professor Ragar's voice purred, raising the hairs on the back of Addison's neck. "Dr. Cooke, I've tracked you all the way from Bolivia, at considerable expense, and I need everything tonight to run as smoothly as—how do you say?—a Swiss clock."

Addison crept silently into Uncle Nigel's office on his hands and knees, sticking to the shadows. He ducked behind an ancient Greek sarcophagus. Molly followed, heart thumping, moving as quietly as she could. When they peeked over the lid of the marble tomb, Addison and Molly saw a sight that froze the breath in their lungs.

Immense men in dark suits crowded the room. They held Uncle Nigel pinned down, his face pressed against his desk. Two upholstered Victorian chairs were smashed. Uncle Nigel's spectacles lay shattered on the floor. Flashlights were trained on his trembling face.

Professor Ragar stood in shadow. He wore an immaculately tailored gray suit with a matching gray ascot and a silver-tipped walking stick. Addison wasn't sure if the suit fabric was herringbone or glen plaid, but whoever this strange man was, Addison had to admit his taste was impeccable.

"Dr. Cooke," the professor continued, "you beat me to the Aztec treasure at the lost temple of Montezuma. You

beat me to the Egyptian treasure ship filled with Nubian gold at the bottom of that—how do you say?—*shark-infested* reef in the Red Sea. But now it is finally my turn." Ragar stepped forward, his cane tapping on the stone floor. He plucked Atahualpa's key from Uncle Nigel's grasp and held it aloft in one gloved hand so that it flickered in the golden yellow gleam of the flashlights.

Molly glanced at Addison behind the stone sarcophagus. She mouthed the words, *What do we do?*

Thoughts tumbled through Addison's head like circus acrobats. He and Molly could try to put up a fight . . . but Addison counted six giant guards, plus Ragar, and he didn't love those odds.

Calling the police seemed a Nobel Prize-worthy idea. But if he and Molly tried sneaking out of the office, Professor Ragar's men might discover them. There was nothing for it; they were stuck. Addison looked back at Molly and simply lifted a finger in the air, signaling for patience. They kept listening.

"I heard you were serving time in a Siberian prison," Uncle Nigel said behind clenched teeth, as Ragar's men shoved him roughly into a chair.

Professor Ragar nodded. "I was arrested in Bukhara. I tried stealing the Jewel of Trust from the Tower of Kalyan."

"Really? What happened?"

"My men betrayed me."

Uncle Nigel paused to considered this. "You used to be a great archaeologist. What happened?"

"There's no money in it." Ragar gestured to the worn elbow patches on Uncle Nigel's threadbare jacket. "I'm sure you've noticed."

"For a thousand years, the Bukharans tossed criminals from the top of the Kalyan Tower, and you thought you could just waltz right in. Prison is better than you deserve."

Professor Ragar silenced Uncle Nigel with a hard slap to the face. "You are playing for time. Is there something you're not telling me, Dr. Cooke?"

Uncle Nigel did not answer.

Ragar slowly circled Uncle Nigel's desk and spotted his still-smoldering pipe. He placed the pipe between his own yellow teeth, drawing a luxuriant puff of smoke and smiling thinly in the gloom, his face still masked in darkness. "If there was anyone else in the museum, you would tell me, yes?"

"I'm alone here tonight," said Uncle Nigel firmly.

Behind the sarcophagus, Molly felt a sneeze coming on from the pipe smoke. She plugged her nose. Addison held his breath.

"Vladimir, you don't understand the Incan treasure or its value to history," Uncle Nigel continued, struggling to keep his voice steady.

"Seven hundred and fifty tons of silver, gold, emeralds,

rubies, sapphires, and pearls. I understand its value perfectly," Ragar hissed. He stepped forward into the crossing beams of the flashlights. His skin was as bone white as a vampire's; his piercing gray eyes flashing with anger. "Ten years I rotted in that hole. Ten Siberian winters." Ragar tapped his dress shoe with his silver-tipped cane. "I lost half my foot to frostbite. But I found my men." Ragar lifted the cane to gesture to the thick-browed men crowding the room. "Russian *vory*, all of them."

Uncle Nigel studied Ragar's mercenaries, prison tattoos peeking from their shirt collars and shirt cuffs. Skulls, iron crosses, and strange Cyrillic script inked on their necks and knuckles. He nodded. "Russian Mafia."

"Ten years we hunted rats in our cells to keep from starving. Ten years we licked ice from our prison bars to keep from dying of thirst. Together, we survived horrors you cannot imagine."

Ragar leaned close to Uncle Nigel, his face finally visible in the flickering light. From her hiding place, Molly stifled a gasp. The left side of Professor Ragar's face was marred by a savage burn scar. His jaw and cheek were a boiled, mottled red. "We have suffered enough. We have *earned* this treasure."

Uncle Nigel held Ragar's gaze and stared him down. "Atahualpa's treasure belongs to the South American people. You have no right to it."

Ragar tucked Atahualpa's key in his chest pocket and turned to his men. "Tie up the doctor."

The gang members yanked Uncle Nigel's arms behind his back and bound his wrists. Uncle Nigel twisted and struggled. "What do you need me for?"

"You, my old friend, are going to help me solve the riddles to the three Incan keys and find the treasure."

"You were an archaeologist once. You don't need my help."

"Incas were always your department, Dr. Cooke. You found the first key, no? And you will certainly help me if you hope to see your family again." Professor Ragar reclined in Uncle Nigel's chair, propped up his feet, and took another deep puff from Uncle Nigel's favorite pipe.

"Why are these men loyal to you, Vladimir?" asked Uncle Nigel. "They must know you're insane."

"When I freed them from prison, they made me their *pakhan*, their boss. They are mine, now."

"It's not too late to let me go."

The professor shook his head. "You know how I escaped the Siberian prison?" Ragar leaned close. "Malazar. He rescued me. And I rescued these men."

Uncle Nigel's eyebrows lifted in surprise. His face turned ghostly white. "You work for Malazar?"

Ragar nodded and slowly grinned.

From their hiding place, Molly looked at Addison. He shrugged. They kept on listening.

All the life seemed to have leaked out of Uncle Nigel, like air from a flat tire. He slumped in his chair, his head sinking to his chest. "Vladimir, you've made a deal with the devil."

Professor Ragar drew himself up to his full, towering height. His cold gray eyes narrowed to gleaming crescents. "Take Dr. Cooke to the car," he ordered his men. "If he gives you any trouble, knock him out. But do not kill him, not yet. Dr. Cooke is going to help us find the greatest treasure in the world."

And at that precise moment, to Addison's horror, Molly loosed a sneeze that was only slightly quieter than a sonic boom.

Professor Ragar's six bodyguards spun to face Addison and Molly. A dozen angry eyes locked on their hiding place behind the sarcophagus.

Ragar snapped his fingers at his men.

All six bodyguards lunged for the siblings

Addison turned to Molly. "Run," he suggested.

And for once, Molly willingly accepted his advice. They flew down the dark hallway as if launched from a catapult.