

## Chapter 1

Peter Smith hated the subway. He never had to deal with crowds back home in Iowa. Now he was here in the Big Apple. His dad told him the big money was here, but so far it was a big headache. He was staying with his cousin in Westchester County. Alice and her husband were nice enough, but the small room they gave him was almost as claustrophobic as this packed subway car. Pete was looking for a room to rent in Manhattan, near the office where he was to start as an accountant in one week. He knew taking the train both ways would wear him out, and he was hoping against hope to find something he could afford. His cousin's house was only a short-term solution anyway, since Alice was already six months pregnant.

Today was even worse than the previous days when he made this journey into the city. Even though the city tried to keep the cars as clean as possible, there was no way to control the people riding in them. Today someone close by was ripe. He tried to ignore the smell by turning his head away, but the bodies were so tight he couldn't move. He looked to his right and saw another man grimacing at the smell, which made Pete smile. The man smiled back and waved his hand in front of his face and rolled his eyes. He felt something sharp and looked down to see the blade of a knife poking into his shirt. He looked at the man in front of him who was grinning menacingly at him, motioning Pete to give him his cash. This was the stinky man, he was certain, and now he was being robbed in a car full of disengaged witnesses. He stared at the man's dark-brown teeth and felt his horrible breath on his face. He slowly reached into his pocket and withdrew a small wad of cash to hand over. When he looked at the man again, he could see he was staring over Pete's right shoulder with a look of abject terror on his face. The knife dropped out of his hand and the robber clutched at his chest with both hands and fell to the floor. Several women nearby

screamed. Another man in a dark suit pushed through the crowd and kneeled near the robber saying, "Back up! I'm a doctor."

Pete felt a hand on his right shoulder pulling him back. He turned to see the same man smiling at him. "Come on, buddy, give the doctor some room," he said. The subway car entered the station and slowed to a stop. When the doors opened, one of the riders shouted for the police. The stranger led Pete out of the car onto the platform, away from the action. "That was really something. What happened there?"

"I don't know. I was just standing there smelling that guy when he put a knife to my ribs," Pete replied. Several more police officers arrived and removed the robber from the car. The doctor began to give CPR to the crook while the officers pushed back the crowd. "Then he got a strange look on his face and collapsed to the ground. Maybe I should tell the cops about the knife."

"Did he cut you?" the man asked, looking down at Pete's body.

"No, I don't think so," he replied.

"Well, it's up to you, but I think that guy has enough problems already," the man said, pointing at the group of officers. One of the police had removed his jacket and placed it over the dead man's face. "I'm getting out of here. Was this your stop?"

"I think so," Pete replied, removing a piece of paper from his pocket and showing it to the other. "I'm looking for this address. I'm trying to rent a room there."

"That's funny, pal," he replied. "That's my address. You must be Peter Smith." He offered his hand to Pete, who shook it weakly. "I'm Gabe Prospect. Come with me, and I'll make us some coffee. You look like you're going into shock or something." The men left the subway station and walked along the busy sidewalk for two blocks before Gabe approached a glass-encased high-rise and signaled Pete to follow.

The doorman smiled and opened the door, saying, "Good morning, Mr. Prospect. How are you today, sir?"

"I'm good, Sam. How are Shirley and the kids?" Gabe asked.

“Just fine, sir, and thank you for asking,” the doorman replied and quickly closed the door behind them.

“Hey, Bob!” Gabe shouted to another man behind a large marble desk.

“Gabe, it’s good to see you sir,” Bob replied. “What’s happening with your cousin, Mike? We haven’t seen him in a while.”

“Oh you know, family business stuff,” Gabe answered. “Have a good one.” Gabe pushed a button and the elevator doors opened. When they were inside, he typed a code into a keypad and pushed the button for the penthouse level.”

“I really appreciate the offer of coffee, Gabe, but I can already see this place is out of my range,” Pete said. “Maybe I’ll just go to the next place on my list.”

“Nonsense, Pete,” he replied. “I’m not looking to make a lot of money here.” He leaned in and said, “My family owns this whole building and lots more. If you can afford to refill my liquor cabinet, I’m a happy guy. Anyway, after what we’ve been through with the smelly guy dying right in front of us, at least you can have a cup of coffee with me.”

When the doors opened, the skyline of Manhattan stretched out in front of them. The main room was massive, with glass all around. Several sitting areas were spread around the room. There were two fireplaces in the room and one giant flat-screen TV. Gabe led Pete through the room and into the large kitchen. He pointed to a table for Pete to sit and then walked out of the room. Pete had never seen such a place. It was right out of the movies about the rich and their extravagant life styles. The poor bastard in the subway would have had a better payday if he had picked on Gabe. All the appliances were top of the line and copper pans were hung from a large rack on the ceiling. There was even a small fireplace in this room, to offer warmth during a quick kitchen breakfast. Pete was not in Iowa anymore.

Gabe returned with a middle-aged woman who came over and introduced herself as Maria, the housekeeper. She went to make coffee while Gabe sat across from Pete at the small table. "Maria's the best!" Gabe began. "Are you hungry, Pete? She makes the most amazing *chilaquiles*. I haven't eaten yet, how about you?"

"I guess I could eat something, but I don't want to be any trouble," he replied.

"Great! I don't like eating alone. Maria, *dos chilaquiles verdes, por favor.*" She smiled and nodded. "While we're waiting, let's get down to it. How does five hundred dollars a month sound?"

Pete was stunned. "Gabe, you could get five times that amount easily. I mean, look at this place: it's amazing!"

"Yeah, I know, but you seem to be a down-to-earth kind of guy to me," Gabe replied. "I already told you I don't need the money anyway. After the incident on the subway, I can see you're having some issues and where you live shouldn't be one of them."

"I still feel like there has to be a catch in here somewhere," Pete said. "If you don't need the money, then why get a roommate anyway? You could probably have parties here all the time."

"Unfortunately, it's the family that has the money, Pete," Gabe noted. "I can live here free, with food and Maria to help out. But, then there's my cousin."

"Ah, the catch."

"No, not at all. Mike is a great guy and I love him like a brother, but he is a bit of a stick in the mud. Anytime I get out of line or have too much fun, he's on the phone to his dad or my granddad about it," he answered. "His side of the family is a bit prudish, if you know what I mean."

"But what has that got to do with me?" Pete replied.

"First of all, Mike doesn't live here all the time," Gabe said. "He stays here when he is in town or when Granddad thinks I'm getting out of line. If I have a normal roommate like you, maybe he'll stay away more. If the family thinks I've matured, then they might stop grilling me on everything."

“What about your father?” Pete asked. “Is he still living?”

“Dad? Of course, but my whole side of the family is the black sheep. Everyone looks down on us because we aren’t the saintly bunch of do-gooders they are. You have no idea how hard it is for a whole family to work together. Everyone is constantly in everyone else’s business, poking around,” Gabe replied.

“What kind of business is your family in?” Pete asked.

“That’s a bit complicated, too,” Gabe replied. “Let’s just call it a conglomerate. Each part of the family is involved in different parts of the business, with Granddad sitting at the top. He is really the only one who can see it as one whole.”

Maria set cups of coffee on the table along with cream and sugar. Then she returned with two plates brimming with food. The *chilaquiles* were covered with cheese, eggs, and sauce. She patted Gabe on the cheek and left the room with her own plate of food. Gabe immediately began to shovel the food into his face. “Man, that’s good! This is my favorite breakfast. Go on, jump in there, roommate.”

Pete tasted the fried tortilla strips and rich sauce with cheese and sour cream. “Wow! This is fantastic. I’ve never had this before. But I don’t think I’ve decided yet about this place.”

Gabe laughed. “Okay, man. Look around! If I turn out to be some kind of freak, you can leave any time you want. But remember Maria is part of the package. She’ll keep doing the cooking and cleaning. Try it for a month. If you don’t like it, I’m sure you can find some dark, stinky hole nearby for twice the price.”

“You’ve got a point,” Pete replied. “But I should tell you about my one problem.”

Gabe dropped his fork and looked at the other man. “You’re the freak, right?”

Pete laughed. “No, I’m no freak. In fact, I’m probably more like your cousin in that regard. I just have a bit of a sleeping disorder.”

"You're not going to walk off the balcony and splatter onto the sidewalk, are you?" Gabe asked.

"No, nothing like that." He looked both ways to make sure they were alone. "It's just that I tend to have lots of bad dreams. My parents tell me that I talk in my sleep and often wake up screaming. To make things worse, I usually remember each dream for hours afterward."

Gabe smiled and said, "No worries. Our sound proofing is excellent here and the rooms are quite separate, so I don't think it's a problem. I guess we'll both try it for a month and see if we can still stand one another after that, okay?"

Pete extended his arm to shake the other's hand. "That's a deal, roomy."

"Great! Welcome to my humble abode," Gabe replied. "I guess you'll have to go get your stuff. After we eat, I'll go down to the lobby with you and get you set up with Bob. He can get you a key and pass-code for the elevator. You can't get to this level without one. Do you have a lot of stuff?"

"No, not really. I've been living with my cousin and her family. Back in Iowa, I was still at my folks' house. I just have a bunch of clothes, some books, and my laptop. It might take a couple trips, but it's no problem," Pete replied.

"Well, you might consider a cab for the return trip. Sam and Bob can help with your stuff. That way you can get it done in one trip if you like."

"Thanks. That's a great idea. When do I get to see the room?" Pete asked.

"Just eat your breakfast, Pete. We'll check that out before we head downstairs," Gabe answered.

## Chapter 2

Gabe Prospect sat hunched over his laptop. He was reviewing the latest quarterly results from the family business. Every few minutes he took a sip of soda and stretched to relieve the tension in his shoulders. Pete had been impressed by the room, which was quite large and included its own bathroom and view of the city. He had left two hours ago to collect his personal effects, and so Gabe was doing his bit to earn the allowance the family provided. He was a magician at seeing patterns in the numbers so the family could discover trends in time to adjust their strategies. His phone rang and he picked up the receiver, saying, "It's Gabe."

"Hello, Gabriel, it's your father," said the voice on the phone.

"Hey Dad, what's up?" he replied.

"Your grandfather has been giving me crap all day about the subway incident. What did you do?" his father asked.

"I swear I didn't do anything, Dad. The scumbag just had a heart attack. I can't be held responsible for that. People die all the time!" Gabe replied.

His father sighed. "Yes, I know you're right. But as you know, your granddad is always suspicious when one of us is around when it happens. It did seem oddly coincidental though. That piece of shit jeopardized our plans. If it had been me, I might have encouraged him to have an arrest."

"I already said I didn't do anything like that," Gabe protested. "I'm not you, remember?"

"I keep telling your grandfather that, but you know how he is, son. Don't worry about it, Gabriel. I believe you. Unfortunately, it probably means Michael will come by for a while to keep an eye on you," he said.

"Great, just what I need," Gabe sighed. "That's okay. Now that we have a new roommate, it's probably best that Mike gets to know him too. This whole situation is very strange. If Mike can help me

figure it out, that's a good thing. Hey, I've got an idea that will shake everyone up. After this call, I'm going to call Mike and ask him to come here for a while. What do you think about that?"

His father laughed. "That's my boy, throwing a curve they'd never expect. I've got your granddad on the other line, so I'll have to let you go. I love you, son."

"I love you too, Dad," Gabe said as the line was cut off. He dialed another number and said, "Mike, what's happening?"

"Gabriel, this is a surprise," his cousin said.

"I got that new roommate today and was wondering if you'd like to stay here a few days and help me with him," he replied.

"Wow! I'm surprised. You're asking me for help? This is a first of some kind, isn't it?" his cousin laughed.

"Maybe," Gabe laughed. "But seriously, I could use your help on this."

"Say no more, cousin," Mike replied. "I'll be there later this evening. I've got a ton of stuff to do with the uncles, as you can imagine. When I'm finished, I'll head over there."

"Perfect!" Gabe replied. "I look forward to seeing you tonight."

"I'll see you then. And Gabriel, thanks for the invitation," Mike said and then hung up the phone.

Gabe laughed and said, "Well, I guess my stock just went up in this family!" He turned back to his computer. There was a new trend in the Middle East data that no one else had seen yet.

## §

Pete was able to squeeze all of his belongings into the taxi cab. He hugged Alice and promised to call her soon. She had been surprised by the address of the new room in Manhattan. Somehow, it seemed too good to be true. She had written down the phone number and promised herself to check out this Gabriel Prospect on the internet as soon as her cousin left. Pete kissed her on the cheek and climbed into the front seat of the cab, as the trunk and rear seat



were chocked full of his stuff. The car pulled away and headed for the nearest expressway into the city.

After the car turned the first corner, Alice turned and walked back into her small home and went to her computer. First she searched for Gabriel Prospect and found almost nothing. There was an article mentioning a Gabe Prospect as a member of the family running The Prospect Enterprise, a massive, but shadowy business that seemed to reach into many different industries and global markets. As a private company, there were no financial statements, but she did find a listing of properties owned by the company, which included the address her cousin had given her. It also mentioned another member of the family named Michael. He was all over the net. She found images of him at dozens of charitable events, where his family was a major contributor. At least the family did not seem to be a criminal enterprise from the first look.

Pete sat quietly in the cab, hoping to unpack his things as soon as he arrived at his new home. The driver seemed content not to talk, and that was better for Pete. He was never good with strangers. On the downside, the driver did not smell very good. Pete wondered if this was his fate in New York to be constantly surrounded by stinky people. At least this man was a licensed and bonded taxi driver, the opposite of the man on the subway. He closed his eyes to relax and put the man's odor out of his mind. Within seconds, he had fallen asleep.

Pete opened his eyes to see the cab exiting the expressway in the Bronx, far from his destination. He turned to the cabbie and said, "What the hell is this?"

The driver held a pistol in his right hand and pressed it against Pete's temple. "You just shut up and sit tight, or I'll blow your brains out right here and now!"

Pete was frozen in fear. Now he would be robbed and probably killed for the clothes and stuff in the back of the cab. Maybe he should jump out and hope not to be killed by the car behind them. The cabbie pressed the gun into Pete's ribs and smiled at him.

"Don't worry, Pete. This won't hurt for very long." The cab turned off the road into a small garage where five other men stood with rifles aimed at him. Two of the men began to pull his stuff from the back seat. The cabbie was laughing. "You stupid bastard. I don't know what you did to Lenny in the subway, but I'm going to kill you and sell your shit online." He hit Pete over the head with the gun again and again. The last things he remembered before passing out were the cabbie's laugh and body odor.

"Here we are, sir," the cabbie said. Pete woke up suddenly, still sitting in the taxi. All of his belongings were still packed into the back seat. It had all been a dream. He fumbled for his cash to pay the fare and gave the man a twenty-dollar tip to compensate for the dream when he was attacked and murdered. He climbed out of the cab as Sam was finishing unloading the vehicle. When the car was empty, Sam pounded on the trunk and the vehicle pulled away into traffic.

"Don't worry, Mr. Smith," Sam began. "Bob and I will make sure everything gets to your room." He looked closely at Pete and said, "Are you okay, sir? You look a little confused."

"No, I'm okay, Sam," Pete said. "I just fell asleep in the cab and had a bad dream. I guess I was startled when we arrived here." He held out another twenty to tip him.

"No tips needed, sir. It's all included in the rent, but thanks for the offer," Sam said.

"Okay. And you and Bob should just call me Pete. I'm not a sir to anyone," Pete replied.

"Okay, Pete, and welcome home," Sam said. Pete walked into the building where Bob was waiting for him with a key-card.

"Welcome home, sir," Bob said. "Here is your new key-card. I'll go up with you now and show you how the elevator works. Sam will keep an eye on your stuff."

"Thanks, Bob. You should call me Pete. I'm not really comfortable with sir," Pete replied as he followed Bob into the elevator car.

"Sure, Pete, as you wish," Bob said. When the doors had closed, he began, "Rule Number 1: Try to have an elevator car to yourself. If you can't, you can press the penthouse button and slide your key-card, but don't enter the pass-code. When everyone else leaves, the car will go up to your floor, but the door won't open until you enter the code."

"Okay," Pete said.

"It's important since the elevator opens directly in the foyer. We don't want others running around in the apartment, do we?"

"No we don't. Okay, I got it," Pete replied.

"You're not a superstitious person, are you?" Bob asked.

"No."

"Good, because the code is six, six, six, asterisk, six, six, six," Bob said.

"That's an interesting choice," Pete laughed.

"Gabe wanted something easy to remember," Bob said. "Don't worry. If you forget, just contact me or Gabe. Please don't write it down though. If anyone else finds out, just let me know and I'll change it immediately."

"Okay, I got it," Pete replied. "What's Rule Number 2?"

"If anyone comes to visit you, either you or Maria will have to come to the lobby to escort them," he answered. "The only way to the penthouse is with a key-card and the pass-code. So only someone with both can get there. That's it!" Bob said. He pushed the open-door button and walked out. "That's all my rules, Pete. Sam and I will bring up your stuff. Just relax and enjoy your new home." As the doors started to close, Bob inserted his hand to re-open them. "I forgot. If the elevator stops before the penthouse to let someone else go up, the system will disable the pass-code. You'll have to wait for them to leave and then re-enter it, unless it's a guest you've invited, of course. Have a good day, Pete."

When the elevator opened again, Pete was standing in the foyer of the penthouse. Since he had time to wait for his belongings, he sat in one of the groupings of furniture and turned on the

television. A breaking news alert flashed on the screen. "This is a breaking news bulletin. Police have confirmed the identity of the man who died of a heart attack in the subway this morning. His name was Leonard Manson of the Bronx. He was an indigent who had been living on the streets for a number of years. He had a long history of run-ins with authorities. His body was found with a knife which had his fingerprints on it. Anyone with information regarding Mr. Manson or the events of this morning should contact the NYPD."

"That is too weird!" he gasped.

"What's weird, Pete?" Gabe said.

Pete turned to see the other five feet behind him, holding a glass of soda in his hand. "I'm sure it's nothing, Gabe. I fell asleep in the cab and had a stupid dream."

Gabe walked over, sat on an adjacent couch and set his glass on the coffee table. "Tell me about it."

"It seems silly, really," Pete protested.

"Come on, man. You already told me you have freaky dreams. Tell me already," Gabe demanded.

"It's just that in the dream, the taxi took me to the Bronx and the cabbie threatened to kill me. He said something about revenge for Lenny," Pete said.

Gabe was laughing. "You're nuts. There was probably a story on the radio about the incident, and your subconscious mind pulled those things into the dream. Don't sweat it." He got up and went to the kitchen for more soda.

Pete chuckled but was not convinced. The cabbie never turned on his radio. It was off when he fell asleep and still off when he awoke. He promised to forget it and continued watching television.

## Chapter 3

Pete was happily putting away his belongings. The room was much larger than he could have hoped for at this price. It was not surprising, given the size or location of the building, however. He also still had most of the week to learn the neighborhood before his job began. There had to be local stores and eateries just waiting to be discovered. The incident on the subway and his dream in the taxi were fading away quickly. He was thrilled to have cable and internet connections for his small television and computer. He felt he could live happily in this room alone if Gabe and his family demanded it. Perhaps this change of locale was just what he needed to get beyond the nightmares of his youth. He looked forward to a long night's sleep for the first time in ages.

Gabe was preoccupied with his thoughts. He paced the floor wondering what was going to happen next. The phone rang and he grabbed the receiver. "Hello?"

"Gabe, it's Bob," the front desk man said. "You should check out Channel 27. There's an interesting story you need to see. I'll hold while you watch."

Gabe turned on the set and changed to the appropriate channel. Trent Michaels, the new field reporter was talking to a man in the street. "We're live on the street in the Bronx this evening with Vincent Manson, whose brother died in a subway this morning. How is your family, Mr. Manson?"

"How do you think we're doing?" he replied. "It's a mess right now. Lenny was a good man. He didn't have a heart attack. Somebody killed him."

"Mr. Manson, the police say there was no evidence of any assault on your brother. Why do you say he was murdered?" the reporter asked.

"I know my brother was no saint, but he didn't have any heart problems. He was as healthy as an ox. I'm hoping someone out

there can help me find my brother's assassin. We're poor people, but we didn't deserve this!" the man finished.

Gabe switched off the television and returned to the call. "Okay, what's the big deal? The guy is grieving for his brother."

"Gabe, Sam is confident the cabbie who brought Mr. Smith is that same Vincent Manson."

"Shit! Is he sure?" Gabe asked.

"One hundred percent certain, Gabe," Bob replied. "And one more thing: your cousin Michael just got out of a cab in front."

"Perfect timing, just like always!" Gabe laughed. "Please tell him everything. Bye." He hung up the phone and sat on the couch. They were in for it now!

Within a minute, the elevator doors opened and Mike walked out and found his cousin sitting on the couch with his head in his hands. Mike was taller than Gabe, at around 6 feet 2 inches. He was very fair with blonde hair and icy blue eyes, while his 5-foot-10-inch cousin had black hair and dark brown eyes. Mike's family was one of their grandfather's favorites, probably only surpassed by his Uncle Michael's, for whom Mike was named. It was ironic that Gabe was named after Mike's father. Mike strode into the room and left his two suitcases for Maria to put away. He walked over to the liquor cabinet and poured himself a double whisky over the rocks. Then he sat on the couch next to his cousin. "Well, this is another great mess your family has gotten us into!" he laughed.

"I didn't do anything!" Gabe argued. "I swear I was just riding in the subway when that man had an attack. This is totally unfair, especially to blame my whole side of the family for a random occurrence."

"Okay, okay, I apologize," Mike said, offering his glass to his cousin. "You probably need this more than me." He walked back to the cabinet and prepared a second drink, then rejoined the other. "Here's to Granddad!" he said as the two touched glasses and sipped the drink. "Where's our new friend? You didn't let him go wandering about, did you?"

"No, he's just setting up the stuff in his room," Gabe replied. "He could come out at any time, so keep it down."

"Okay," Mike whispered. "What do you think is happening with him?"

"It's very strange so far. The incident with the cabbie is too coincidental. We have to keep an eye on him. This could devolve into something very sinister if we're not careful," Gabe replied in hushed tones.

"You know this hasn't happened in a very long time," Mike said. "Everyone has bad dreams, but when they start to be based on unknown realities, it gets our attention."

"I know. That's why we brought him here. Perhaps it's nothing. If his dreams occur here, maybe we'll be able to react if they presage something," Gabe replied. "We don't want to get ahead of ourselves though. I have to believe this was a one-time deal. A few more dreams that don't match up and we can forget all about it."

"And you can send him packing," Mike said.

"Maybe, maybe not," Gabe answered. "I really like the guy. Maybe I'll let him stay until he has enough dough to get a decent place."

"Just keep our secrets!" Mike urged. "We don't want him to know too much."

They heard a door open and turned to see Pete walking towards them. He was looking at Mike and offered his hand. "You must be Gabe's cousin Mike. I'm Pete Smith."

Mike shook his hand firmly and replied, "Nice to meet you Pete, but I prefer Michael, if that's okay."

"Of course, sorry if I offended you, Michael," Pete answered.

"No worries, Pete. Come sit down and join us," Mike said. "Let me get you a drink too." Mike poured two fingers of whisky over ice and handed the glass to Pete. Then he sat next to his cousin. "So, Pete, tell me about yourself."

"Not much to tell, actually," Pete replied. "I grew up in Iowa, just got my degree from the University of Iowa and came to the big city to make my fortune."

"Gabe tells me you have a job nearby starting next week. That's great in this economy," Mike said. "If it doesn't work out, let me know. We're always looking for good people in our family's business."

"Cool. I was talking to my cousin Alice a little while ago and she mentioned the Prospect Enterprise. Is that your family's company?" Pete asked.

"That's us. What kind of work do you do?"

"Well, my degree is in finance, but this will be my first job since getting it," Pete answered. "I guess I'll see where life takes me. I love finance but, really, I just want to fit in and move up as best I can."

"That's what it's all about, right?" Gabe interjected. "Is your new company big?"

"I googled them and they have annual revenue around five billion. So, pretty big, I guess," he replied. "How does that compare to your company?"

"Well, since we're private, I can't really say, but we're definitely bigger than that," Mike said. "To find that out, you'll have to marry one of my sisters or another female cousin, right Gabe?"

"That's right," his cousin agreed. "Granddad has a tight circle he trusts. Everyone else only knows what they need to. I hate to change the subject so much, but I thought I'd make sure you understand our house rules, Pete."

"Okay, just tell me what to do," he replied.

"First, we should discuss privacy," Gabe began. "We'll both stay out of your room and you will stay out of ours. Of course, none of us have anything to hide, but I'm sure you wouldn't want one of us rummaging around in your stuff." He took a sip of whisky and smiled at Pete. "Second is the house phone. Please don't use or



answer any of them. They are part of the business and we use them for business use only. You can use your cell phone wherever you like. Is that a problem?"

"Of course not," Pete said. "I use my cell for everything anyway. What else?"

"No parties without our approval," Mike said. "If we have any gatherings, you are welcome to join in, unless Granddad comes. He's kind of special and doesn't generally like to meet our friends. If he comes over, you'll have to stay in your room. We'll have Maria bring you dinner."

"Don't make such a big deal, Mike," Gabe laughed. "Pete, honestly, my grandfather has never been here. I told you before we were the black sheep of the family. I'll probably have to stay in my room too if he shows up."

"But you understand my point, right, Gabe?" Mike asked.

"Yes, you are right, Mike," Gabe replied. "No one meets Granddad." He winked at Pete.

"Seems kind of strange, but if that's the rule, I'm okay with it," Pete replied. "Anything else? DNA samples? Microchip implanted in my head?"

The two cousins laughed. "What a comedian!" Gabe smiled. "Nothing like that, although I feel like there's a chip in my head most days. But besides the monthly rent, it would be cool if you could give Maria fifty bucks a week for food and odds and ends. She cooks all the meals and will do laundry if you like. How does that sound?"

"That's very fair, especially if the rest of her food is like the breakfast," Pete agreed.

"She didn't make *chilaquiles* for him, did she?" Mike asked. "It's too bad I missed it."

"Well, that's what you get for being a workaholic, cousin," Gabe replied.

"If that's all, I'm pretty bushed," Pete began. "It's been a long day for me. I think I'll go to bed." He stood up.

"Have a good night, Pete," Mike replied. "By the way, what's your plan for tomorrow?"

"I thought I'd wander around the neighborhood and see what's happening," Pete replied.

"If it's okay with you, I'd like to hang out with you tomorrow. I don't come here very often, and I'd like to take a look around too. I can help you navigate," Mike asked.

"That would be great. I'll talk to you both tomorrow." Pete stood, walked to his room, and closed the door behind him.

"What the heck was that about?" Gabe whispered.

"I'm not taking any chances on this one, Gabe," he answered. "If there is anything to that man, I want to find out before something bad can happen to him."

"I think it might be provocative for you two to be seen together," Gabe replied. "I should be the one to hang out with him. No one knows who I am. You're in the press all the time."

"I hadn't thought about that," Mike sighed. "The last thing Pete needs now is publicity. But I'm not sure about you either after the subway incident, cousin."

"We're not going to talk about that again, are we?" Gabe moaned. "I didn't do anything."

"We should sleep on it, Gabe. Tomorrow, I'm sure the right solution will emerge," Mike replied.

## Chapter 4

Pete was having one of his favorite dreams. The first cup of coffee was the best part of the morning to him, and he was sitting in a small coffee shop savoring every drop. He sat at the front window, watching the traffic and pedestrians walk by. It was a busy day in the city, and the sidewalks were packed with people heading to work. It was cool and a gentle rain poured over the field of black umbrellas. He took a bite of his scone and looked to his left. A stunning blonde with blue eyes sat on the stool next to him. She smiled when he looked at her. Her perfume smelled like strawberries. He tried to say something to her when an odd smell hit his senses, but it was not like the body odor of the cabbie. It was more sinister, like sulfur or chlorine. A young man walked into the coffee shop to grab some coffee before heading to classes. His backpack was brimming with books. He saw Pete looking his way and smiled before heading over to the counter to place his order.

Pete noticed the beautiful woman had picked up her bag and walked out the door. That would be him soon, with places to go and things to do. Today, he was just happy to explore this new neighborhood. Another smell caught his attention. He turned to his right and saw the cabbie sitting on the other stool. He turned back quickly to avoid being recognized, and began to climb off the stool. As he turned back to grab his cup of coffee, he noticed the young man walking out of the store, but he had somehow forgotten his backpack. He smiled at Pete again as he began to type numbers into his cell phone. Pete tried to get his attention when the store exploded.

Pete, the other patrons, furniture, and broken glass flew out onto the sidewalk and the street. The mass of people on the sidewalks began to scream and run away from the scene. Pete was on the bottom of a pile of people and debris. He could hear others shouting for help. He was able to see the cabbie's lifeless body a

few inches away. Blood poured from a large chunk of plate glass that was embedded in the cabbie's chest.

Pete sat up straight in bed with the sounds of sirens and screams for help still ringing in his ears. He was drenched in sweat and trembling. He slowly rose to his feet and walked into the small bathroom. He washed his face and sat on the toilet, allowing the images from his dream to fade. Looking at his watch by the sink, he noticed it was three-thirty in the morning. After five minutes he felt calmer and returned to bed, although he doubted he would sleep again. Under the covers, the images of the dream filled his head still. He pushed the thoughts out of his mind, and after fifteen minutes fell asleep again.

He awoke again and looked at the alarm clock, which read four-thirty. That would be it, he thought. He sat up and turned on the light on the bedside table. He was startled to see Gabe in his room, sitting on the easy chair beyond the end of the bed. "What the hell are you doing in here?" he demanded. "What about the privacy rule?"

Gabe stood up and walked to the end of the bed. He was smiling but said nothing. Pete stood up and walked over to the other and thumped him on the chest with his index finger. "Hey, I'm talking to you, Gabe! What the devil are you doing in here?"

Gabe only smiled and stood his ground. Pete smelled that same sulfurous odor he had in the coffee shop dream, but now it was overpowering. He covered his nose with his hand. Suddenly, the walls of the room were ablaze. The curtains were consumed instantly and the fire spread to the ceiling, where waves of flame raced toward the center of the room. The temperature was soaring and noxious black smoke covered the ceiling and was moving toward them. Pete could feel his pajamas catching on fire and tried desperately to put out the flames. Gabe was laughing now and pushed Pete back down onto the burning bed. Pete screamed in pain as the fire covered his body.

Pete awoke to a knock on the door. He was still shaking from the last dream and weakly said, "Yeah?"

Maria opened the door and said, "Mr. Pete, breakfast will be ready in fifteen minutes." She smiled at him and closed the door. He was panting for breath and his skin felt like it was still on fire. He rushed to the bathroom and turned on the shower. He pulled off his pajamas and stood under the cold water. As the water warmed, the dream began to fade into another miserable memory. Clearly, one day in this new place had done nothing for his sleep.

Twenty minutes later, he left his room and walked into the kitchen to find Michael and Gabe sitting and eating. They motioned him to sit between them and Maria brought a plate of food and a cup of coffee for him. "How are you today, Pete?" Mike asked.

"Not too good, I'm afraid," he replied. "More bad dreams. I'll be okay, just let me get something into my stomach." The two cousins had been watching a morning news talk show. Pete began to watch as well. It was the typical format with small snippets of news between various local interest stories and celebrity interviews. It was the kind of television Pete hated, but he was the guest here. He preferred scientific or historical programs where he could feed his mind.

The host on the show said, "This just in. There has been an explosion at a coffee shop in Manhattan this morning, approximately thirty minutes ago. That is all we know now, but the area is now cordoned off by police. We will keep you advised as more information becomes available." Pete's fork dropped to his plate and he sat slack-jawed, staring at the screen.

"Are you okay, Pete?" Gabe asked.

"No, I'm not," he replied. "This can't be happening."

"It's probably just a gas line explosion," Mike said. "What a terrible tragedy. I'm sure the police will get to the bottom of it."

"You don't understand," Pete argued. "I had a dream about that last night." The two cousins exchanged worried glances. "It's probably a coincidence, but I saw a young guy come into the shop

with a backpack. I thought he was a college student or something. Then I saw him leave without the backpack. The bastard smiled at me and dialed a number on his cell phone. That's when the bomb exploded."

"It must be a coincidence," Gabe insisted. "The odds of a terrorist attack are very small. What else do you remember?"

"There was a beautiful blonde sitting next to me. She left just before the blast. Sitting on my other side was the cabbie who brought me here. He died in the blast," Pete recounted, panting for air.

"You have to know your mind put him there, Pete," Gabe said. "You saw him yesterday and your mind plugged him into the other dream. I'm sure he's fine."

"I know you're both right," Pete sighed. "The coincidence caught me off guard. I'll be okay."

"Anything else?" Mike asked.

"Not in that dream, but I did have another one," Pete admitted. "It was very strange. I woke in my bed and Gabe was in my room." He turned to Gabe and continued, "I asked you why and you just smiled at me. Then the whole room caught on fire and you pushed me down on the burning bed."

"Well, that part is definitely a dream!" Gabe said. "Pete, excuse Mike and me. We have a conference call in a few minutes. It shouldn't take too long and then we'll both go out with you to look around, okay?"

"Sure, that would be great," Pete replied as the other two hurried out of the room. He turned to Maria who looked horrified by his revelations. "The pancakes are awesome, Maria. Thanks. And don't worry about my dreams. I get them all the time." She smiled and returned to cleaning the dishes.

Michael and Gabe rushed into Gabe's room and closed and locked the door behind them. "It's got to be a coincidence," Gabe began. Mike raised his hand to silence the other and dialed a number on his phone.

"It's Michael . . . what can you confirm about the explosion today . . . okay, I understand . . . what about a Vincent Manson . . . really . . . okay, tell Granddad we have a situation. Bye." Mike collapsed onto one of the large chairs in the room, held his head in his hands and sighed. "It's all confirmed. Every last word."

"We have to keep this from Pete. If he knew, who knows what he would do? He might start thinking he is causing all of this," Gabe said.

Mike laughed weakly. "You have to know that is a possibility, cousin."

Gabe laughed and said, "You know better than that! He's just a guy, not some evil demon or terrorist. And what about the room on fire? You know I would never do that!"

Mike stood and walked over to the window and looked down on the city. "Yeah, you're right. But something is going on here. We have to keep our eyes on Pete, and we absolutely can't let him take that other job. That would provide too many hours a day when we cannot watch out for him."

"I'm sure your dad or mine can find a job for him," Gabe replied. "Or there is another possibility. We could tell him everything."

Mike laughed out loud. "You must be nuts, Gabriel. It may come to that eventually, but it's way too early. This could be a once in a lifetime premonition. As you said, the burning room was just a dream. Even his dream when he thought Vincent Manson would rob and kill him was just a dream. That poor bastard is dead now. He won't be hurting anyone anymore."

"What about the bomber?" Gabe asked. "Pete saw his face. I'm sure the police would love that information."

"There were lots of witnesses who saw the student with the backpack, so the police don't need Pete. Besides, are they going to believe a man's dream?" Mike laughed.

"We sure do," Gabe remarked. "You even told Granddad we have a situation. That's not something he'll be happy to hear."

"It had to be done," Mike sighed. His phone buzzed and he looked at the caller ID. "And speaking of the old man, here he is." He pressed the connect button. "Hi, Granddad, how are you . . . yes, Gabriel is here with me . . . yes, I said a situation . . . okay, let me put you on speaker."

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While he was waiting for his roommates to wander the sites, Pete was typing into his journal. Years ago, he had decided to keep track of his nightmares. He hoped to find a trend in the data, or closure, but so far nothing. He thought it might make a good book someday, so he kept at it. As he was finished with the dream about the room burning, his cell phone rang and he looked at it. It was his cousin calling. "Hi Alice, how are you?"

"I'm so glad to hear your voice," she sighed. "You heard about the bombing today, didn't you?"

"I heard about an explosion, but didn't know it was a bombing yet," he replied.

"Get off your computer and check out the news!" she said. "It was definitely a bombing, although no one has claimed responsibility yet. At least ten people were killed and dozens injured. Many of the injured are reporting a young man with a backpack left it behind just before the blast. That's not far from you, is it?"

"They said backpack?" he groaned. "It's just like my dream."

"What are you talking about?" she asked. "I want you to move back here. Don't worry about the job. I want you to be safe."

"Relax, Alice, I'm fine," he replied. "I'm living in one of the most secure buildings in the city. My new job is only a few blocks away. I'm not going to hide from some maniac with a bomb, and the cops will probably nab him today anyway."

"I'm afraid, Pete," she said. "Your folks asked me to keep an eye on you. I don't think the city is safe anymore."



There was a knock at his door. "Alice, my roommates are taking me out on the town. I'll call you later. Bye." He walked over and then opened the door to find Gabe standing there. "Are we ready to go?"

"There's a bit of a change in plans, Pete," Gabe said. "Can I come in? I promise not to set your room on fire."

Pete laughed. "Sure, sorry about that stupid dream, come on in." When the two had sat down, Pete said, "If you guys can't go, that's okay. I just want to look around."

"Bob and Sam tell me the streets are a real mess right now," Gabe began. "Cops and the FBI are everywhere. Bob has brought in another ten security guards until things cool down. "It's probably better we stay here today. Hopefully things will be back to normal tomorrow."

"No problem," Pete replied. "I don't want to get caught in a mob. That would just fuel more bad dreams."

"There is one other thing," Gabe said. "My dad, Mike's dad, and Granddad are coming for dinner at six."

"I know the rules," Pete said. "I'll stay here. I've still got lots of stuff to put away."

"Well, that's the thing. They all want to meet you," Gabe said.

"Me? Okay, that's fine too," Pete said. "Any special things I need to know about them? I don't want to mess up."

"My dad's cool. Mike's is a lot like him; another stick in the mud. Granddad is the greatest, but to some folks, he can seem a little overwhelming," Gabe answered.

"So, he's like a superhero? He sounds great!" Pete replied.

"Something like that, Pete. Just let him do the talking. If he wants small talk, he'll lead the way. And sometimes he says some stuff you'll find hard to believe. Don't worry about that. He's fine, but a little eccentric," Gabe stated. "And wear something nice. No suit and tie, but no jeans either, okay?"