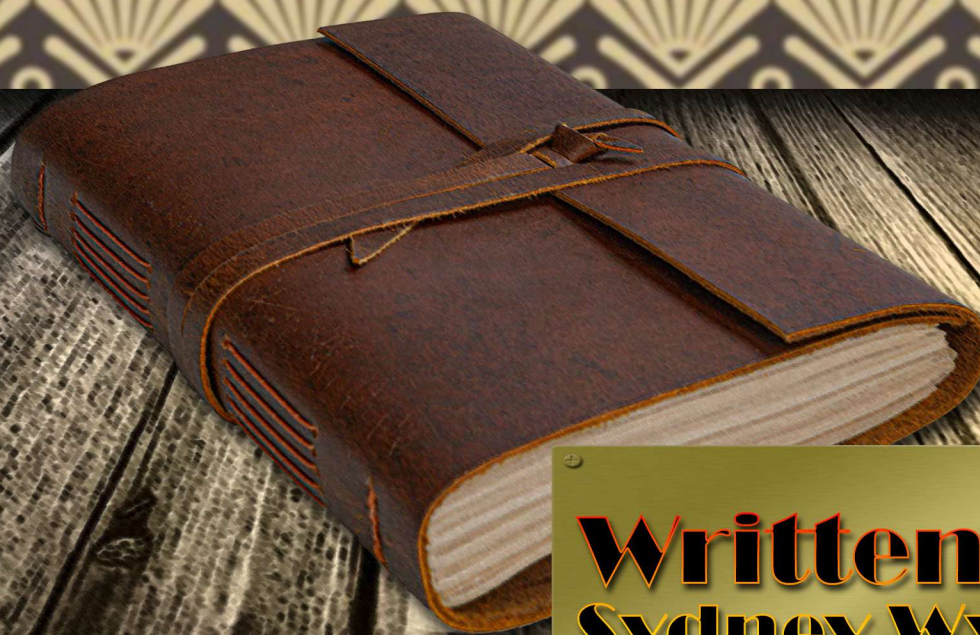


**THE
IMPROBABLE
ADVENTURES
of ETHAN DUPRE III**

**The Mysterious
Package**



**Written by
Sydney Wyeth**

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Autumn had come early to Mile High City, the wind from the North Atlantic was cold and biting, rain spit down upon the city, making it wet and depressing. It wasn't the kind of night for honest people to be outside. But then, no one had ever accused Ethan Dupreii of being honest, though it wasn't his fault, more of the people whose company he was at times forced to keep since coming to the city of dreams late last year. The bank had foreclosed on his parents' farm in the Midwest, forcing him to seek out his fortune in the big city however, the depression that the world was in had hit everyone hard, some more than others.

Ethan Dupreii braced himself against the cold, wet wind as he exited the speakeasy on the city's south side. The dark night spread before him and he walked at a brisk pace along Hope Avenue, his fedora low over his eyes and the collar of his coat high, protecting him from the pelting rain. Ethan turned and walked north, along Rockefeller Drive; the buildings loomed over him as he hurried along the desolate street toward the Brummel University of Technology and Innovation, where he was fortunate enough to have been employed as a custodian for the past several months. As Ethan Dupreii neared the university's campus, he noticed a pair of suspicious individuals standing in a recessed doorway across the street from Tesla Hall watching him intently as he angled toward the locked doors of the building.

As he slowly pulled his keys out of his pocket, feeling the cool metal flask that was in the pocket of his overcoat as well, Ethan Dupreii could feel their eyes boring into the back of his head. Dupreii pulled the keys from his pocket, unlocked the elegant metal and glass doors, opening them and quickly stepping inside before pulling them shut behind him. When Ethan Dupreii turned around to lock the doors, he noticed the two men were nowhere to be seen on the street, sighing deeply he made his way into the bowels of the building to begin this night's shift but first, he had a package to drop off with one of the tenured faculty of the university.

Ethan Dupreii's footsteps echoed through the empty corridors of Tesla Hall as he walked down them to the office of a Doctor E.M. Happenstance, a physics professor and the university's longest tenured instructor. As he neared Dr. Happenstance's office, Ethan Dupreii sensed that something was wrong; the hallway was flooded with light where his door stood wide open, something that in his year of working at the university he had never seen, especially this late at night. Ethan Dupreii quickly backtracked toward a utility closet that he had passed along the way and once he opened the door grabbed a mop, the closest thing he could grab and turned back toward the professor's office, walking slowly and gripping the mop handle tightly in his hands his knuckles turning white.

As Ethan Dupreii slowly approached the open door, light spilling out into the hallway, he could hear movement in the office beyond. Skewing up his courage, Ethan Dupreii edged to the door and peered around the door frame into the lit office, it was a mess, messier than he was used to, papers were scattered all over the floor, drawers pulled out of file cabinets and the large oak desk, chair cushions were cut open and the insides ripped out and scattered around the room.

The office's tall thin windows stood open, the curtains blowing in due to the wind, the cold rain making the polished granite floor slick with water and getting countless pages wet. On top of a tall bookshelf that had all the books pulled from it sat a particularly ugly stuffed monkey with an eye patch. Ethan

Dupreii couldn't recall seeing it in his many visits to Dr. Happenstance's office in the past year. Ethan Dupreii leaned his mop against the wall right near the door and righted the wooden desk chair that had been knocked upside down and sat in it, putting his feet on the top of the desk and pulling a metal flask from one of the over-sized pockets in his overcoat, opened the stopper and took a deep drink of the hooch. As Ethan drank deeply of the alcohol in the flask, a flurry of motion erupted as something small and furry leapt from the top of the bookshelf and out the door of the office, nearly tipping him over in the chair in his surprise.

When Ethan regained his composure, he leapt to his feet and ran out the door, realizing that the source of the disturbance was long out of sight. He returned to the messy office and looked for any sign of the professor; all that he could find was under the desk in the form of a small pool of blood and the professor's incredibly thick eye glasses. Sensing foul play, Ethan picked up the black Bakelite hand set of the phone and dialed the police.

"There's been a break-in at the university." Ethan started when the operator on the other end answered. "And, I suspect a kidnapping."

"Sir, where in the university was the break-in? And who was abducted?" the operator on the other end inquired.

"Tesla Hall, Dr. Happenstance's office!" Ethan shouted.

"We'll send some cars right over sir." Ethan hung the phone up and waited. A few minutes later, several uniformed policemen arrived with a few security officers from the university. Ethan stood in the middle of the messy office, afraid to touch anything, including the flask that was on the floor where he had been sitting.

"What's your name?" one of the officers began grilling Ethan as the others began going over the room looking for clues. "And how did you come to discover the break-in?"

"E-Ethan Dupreii, I work as a custodian at the university...I was scheduled to work and I noticed that the professor's door was standing wide open... Something which is...highly unusual for the professor." The police officer looked toward one of the security guards, an older fellow around 50 years of age who nodded once. Satisfied, the police officer turned back toward Ethan.

"What was your relationship with Professor Happenstance?"

"The professor took a liking to Mr. Dupreii right after he was hired." The security guard stated. "I often found the two of them deep in conversation in this very office while I was on my rounds."

"Is this true Mr. Dupreii?" Ethan nodded in reply. "You may go, though it seems as if the professor had been drinking...You wouldn't know anything about this, would you young man?" The officer stated after being shown the flask and sampling some of the liquid that was still in it.

Ethan looked toward the older security guard nervously who nodded at him. "He-He sometimes asked me to bring him a small nip; he said to keep the chill from his bones..." Ethan looked at the police officer who was taking notes in a small notebook. "I did it because he disliked going out in public from what I gathered."

"Well, don't leave town, young man. But, in the meantime, you can return home for the evening, we'll take care of things here. Do you have transportation?" Ethan shook his head no as he turned to leave.

"I can take him home." The security guard volunteered. The police officer nodded before Ethan and the security guard walked from Dr. Happenstance's office.

As the two men walked toward the parking lot at the rear of Tesla Hall, the security guard looked Ethan up and down. Something seems to be bothering you, mind telling me what it was?"

"I was just wondering, do you remember Dr. Happenstance ever owning a monkey that had been taxidermy?"

"Not that I can recall. Why do you ask?" The security guard thoughtfully replied.

"It's just that, I can swear that there was one on top of the bookshelf in the office when I entered the room, but now it's gone..." Ethan stated slowly. "Furthermore, there were a couple of men watching the front of the building when I let myself in. I would have told the police, but I had forgotten about it until now."

The pair of men climbed into an older sedan with the university's logo painted on the front doors. "I'll let them know when I come back Ethan." Ethan grimly smiled at the security guard as he settled into the passenger seat of the car, closing the door behind him.

The security guard pulled away from Tesla Hall and slowly motored its way back toward the southern end of Mile High City. Pretty soon, they found themselves in a slum, the buildings were tall and looming, the streets poorly lit. Eventually the car pulled in front of a particularly destitute looking building and Ethan reached for the door handle to open it, but the security guard put his hand on Ethan's shoulder stopping him.

"What ever's going on, watch yourself son." Ethan nodded and turned to leave, but the strong hand retained its grip. "If anything else comes up in regards to this, call me before you do the police. Understand?" Ethan nodded slowly. The security guard released his grip on Ethan. "Get a good night's sleep; I'm sure that Chancellor Burroughs will want to speak with you in the morning." Ethan nodded again and when the security guard's grip on him was released, Ethan opened the door and got out of the car. Ethan watched as the car slowly drove away in the pouring rain before crossing the street to the decrepit building in which he lived.

As Ethan walked into the building, he noticed that the lights in the hall had gone out again and he cursed lightly as his shin made contact with a small table that had been left in front of the door for some reason that he couldn't fathom. The hall of the building smelled like cheap hooch and stale cigarettes, dripping water could be heard from further down the hall. Ethan felt his way to the stairs and slowly felt his way up them in the dark, until he reached the fourth floor of the building.

Ethan turned down another hallway and felt his way along it, counting the doors as he passed them, until he reached the fifth door on the left. Ethan unlocked his door and pushed it open, reaching around into the room and hitting a button that was hard to push in, lighting up his shabby apartment and the hall, he noticed then that there was a beat up package in a manila envelope leaning against his door, picking it up he found that it had no return address, only his address and a postal mark that showed it had been mailed from within Mile High City.

Closing the door behind him, Ethan walked into the cramped apartment and sat on an old chair that was worn from use, he turned the package over in

his hands, there seemed to be a thick book that was somewhat flexible inside. It was addressed to him in a small, cramped handwriting, he felt that he should know who the handwriting belonged to, but couldn't place it.

Ethan stood, walked over to a cupboard and pulled a bottle with a light brown liquid in it and poured a measure of it into a dirty glass that was on the counter before returning to his chair and sitting down again and turning the unopened package around in his hands while intently staring at it. Ethan cautiously opened the package and dumped its contents on a small table that was piled high with dirty dishes and within his reach.

Ethan silently stared at the note and thick notebook that tumbled had been dumped out of the wet manila envelope before picking up the notebook. The notebook was full of complex diagrams, mathematical formulae, and extensive notes that made Ethan's head swim while trying to make heads or tails of it.

Thinking about the technology that allowed Mile High City to levitate about a mile above the central New Jersey coast also made Ethan's head swim, all he could figure out was that a magnetic field was generated within the bowels of the city itself and repelled the city against the one created by the Earth. It was usually at this point that Ethan's understanding of it began to breakdown and him wishing that he had more education in such matters. The notes in the notebook however, while for something highly technical looked like it was for something different, some kind of electro-emitter was all he could puzzle together.

In frustration, he put the notebook down and picked up the note, which was written in the same cramped handwriting and signed at the bottom by Dr. Happenstance.

*Ethan, you're my only friend these days, and I'm fearful
that my days are numbered. I have been working on
furthering Nikola Tesla's work in transmitting power from
one place to another without having to use wires, this
could revolutionize any society that uses such a
thing. However, I have also discovered that it could be
turned into a weapon by unscrupulous individuals for nefarious
purposes, and I suspect that such people are out to steal my notes.
So, as a precaution I have mailed you my notes to you,
I need you to deliver them to a James Lanahan in
Cleveland, since if you've received this letter and
the notebook, then it means that I am either
dead or missing. Please don't let these plans fall into
the wrong hands, the fate of the world may depend
on you now, Ethan.*

Sincerely, Dr. E.M. Happenstance

After reading the letter, Ethan picked the envelope back up to put the notebook back into it when he noticed that there was still contents within the envelope, so he looked in and found a couple of large bundles of cash within it. Ethan counted the money and found that he had a little over \$5,000 in cash. What have you gotten me involved in, Professor? Ethan wondered as he took a

large swallow of his drink. After Ethan finished his drink, Ethan stood, returned the notebook, letter, and money to the envelope, then hid it under the pillow on his bed, turned the lights off, then settled in for the remainder of the night.

Ethan was awoken in the middle of the night when his door was kicked in with a crashing sound; he bolted upright and sat in the darkness listening as several men speaking in a foreign language that he didn't recognize searched the living room and kitchen of his shabby apartment. Quietly, he reached under his pillow for the package, finding it quickly with his hand, he then eased himself out of the bed, smiling widely at the good fortune that he had neglected to even take off his coat and grabbed the fedora that lay on the night table next to his bed and eased his way to the narrow window and opened it slowly, stepping out onto the fire-escape, Ethan closed the window quietly behind himself before climbing down the metal ladder toward the ground four stories below.

Ethan had made it down three stories when he heard a shout from above, which was quickly followed by several bursts of automatic weapon fire, he could hear the bullets whiz past his head as he crouched for cover against the wet brick wall of the building. When the gunfire stopped, Ethan jumped to the fire escape's ladder and, before climbing down it, looked up to see three men quickly descending after him, a fourth was leaning out his apartment's window shouting orders at the men in pursuit.

Quickly Ethan slide down to the ground in the alley and was about to run toward the street when a machine gun was once again fired in his direction, missing him by mere inches, Ethan took cover in a pile of garbage, until the gunfire once again ceased. When he looked again, Ethan saw the trio of men rapidly closing the gap between him and them. Ethan reached into the garbage and pulled out a piece of wood that was about the size of a baseball bat, but had a cluster of bent and rusty nails at one end, by the time Ethan stood up, the men were down and charging him with long, curved bladed daggers drawn.

Ethan stepped forward, keeping his weapon defensively between himself and his potential attackers as he slowly edged along the wall of the building opposite his own toward the street some 100 yards to the east. The three men charged Ethan without a sound and he closed his eyes and wildly swung the piece of wood, he could feel it make contact with something, then he nearly lost his grip when the nails on the end grabbed into flesh, ripping it away in the process. Ethan could hear a scream of pain and then someone stumbling away from the fight. When Ethan opened his eyes again, he could see bits of flesh hanging from the nails on his board, one of his attackers stumbling away, cradling his head in his hands with blood pouring from where his cheek was ripped open leaving a gaping hole in the right side of his face. The other two exchanged glances before pressing their attack.

As they closed in to attack Ethan, he could see that they were of swarthy complexion with black hair and eyes, they glared at Ethan with malevolence as they circled around him looking for an opening, their expensive suits were spattered with blood.

"Give us the notebook, American pig." The attacker on Ethan's right ordered in a foreign accent that Ethan wasn't accustomed to.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Ethan replied through gritted teeth as he tried to watch both men.

"We know that is a lie. Give us the notebook or you will die." Ethan took a swing at the attacker who had thus far remained quiet, missing him by quite a bit.

"I'm afraid that I can't give it to you, it was entrusted to me." Ethan stumbled on some boxes as he continued to back toward the street of the alley, but he quickly regained his footing before his attackers could seize the opportunity his brief distraction gave them.

"Then, you will have to die as well." The attacker on Ethan's right stated and thrust forward with his wicked looking dagger, Ethan barely moved aside in time as the dagger was plunged low to where his abdomen had been mere seconds before, slicing into his overcoat instead. In a panic, Ethan swung his weapon, narrowly missing the attacker who grabbed Ethan's wrist in a strong grasp.

The attacker tightened his grip on Ethan, causing pain to shoot up and down Ethan's arm as Ethan struggled with him in an attempt to break free. Desperately, Ethan brought his knee up quickly and connected with his attacker's groin.

Ethan's attacker groaned in pain and loosened his grip on Ethan's wrist before slowly sinking to the alley's wet pavement, the dagger clattering to the ground. Ethan turned toward the other man who paused to reconsider his options, then turned and ran toward the other end of the alley. Ethan kicked the attacker that he had just kneed in the groin and punched him violently in the face, knocking the man unconscious. Ethan then dropped the board with the bloody nails in it and fled the alley toward the comparative safety of the street.

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Ethan Dupreii found himself seeking shelter at the speakeasy that he had left earlier as dawn approached. Ethan took a table near the rear of the smoke-filled room, ordered some rotgut and took out the money and the notebook, Ethan quickly hid the money in the deep pockets of his coat before any of the dangerous people in the room could see it and began to closely examine the notebook.

The notebook was bound in brown leather; it appeared as if it were heavily stained with unknown liquids. The pages were made of heavy, lined paper and was filled with complex diagrams, mathematical formulae, and lengthy notes, it seemed to Ethan as if they were instructions on how to build what seemed to him to be a power plant of some sort. At the rear of the notebook, Ethan noticed that several dozen pages had been ripped from the binding.

Ethan looked about the dingy, poorly-lit, and smoke-filled room at the dregs that usually inhabited such an establishment at this late hour; they were most likely alcoholics and other dregs of society. Quietly, Ethan hid the thick notebook in an inner pocket of his overcoat and nursed his drink while he thought about what he should do next.

Dr. Happenstance had requested that he, Ethan, was to drop the notebook off with a former student in Cleveland, Ohio. Of course, there was the matter of the foreigners attacking him outside of his apartment only an hour earlier as well, perhaps I should go to the police Ethan mused, they'll know what to do, and could most likely protect these plans from the people that the professor mentioned in his letter. Unless, Ethan continued thinking, the



government getting a hold of the plans was what Dr. Happenstance was worried about in his letter. The police and campus security were the only ones that knew Ethan had been in the professor's office this night, which he had discovered the break-in, perhaps the police were in on it, and there were rumors of mob connection in the police department, after all. Of course, Ethan mused, he could be said to have mob connections just because he frequented the city's speakeasies. With an uneasy feeling, Ethan looked around the bar once more, then stood to leave.

Ethan quickly strode across the bar toward the exit, just as he got there, the door opened and in stepped the security guard who took Ethan home earlier in the night. He seemed momentarily surprised to see Ethan, and then quickly regained his composure.

"Ethan m'boy, good to see you, though I thought you were going to be getting some sleep when I dropped your off earlier. Everything alright?" Ethan nodded curtly, grabbed the security guard's elbow and led him to a nearby table.

"I need to talk to you Bob, how are the police doing on the break-in?" Ethan hurriedly whispered as they sat at a small round table.

"Not a lot to go on, I told them what you remembered in the car, but they didn't think it was at all connected." Bob the security guard looked at Ethan's bedraggled appearance. "Something wrong, son? You seem... distracted."

"Tonight, when I got home, there was a package from Dr. Happenstance in front of my apartment's door. In it was a notebook and a letter." Ethan produced the crumpled letter from one of his pockets and handed it over to Bob, who scanned the page.

"Do you have the notebook on you right now?" Ethan nodded as he pulled it from the inner pocket of his overcoat. Bob took it when Ethan offered it to him and thumbed through it quickly. "There seems to be a few pages missing from the book, did you rip them out?" Bob inquired as he handed the notebook back to Ethan who shook his head in reply.

"They were already gone when I got the book. I've been trying to figure out what to do next."

"What are you thinking of doing?"

"Well, I could do what Doctor Happenstance requests in his letter; go to Ohio and try to find this Lanahan guy, or take everything to the police, and let them take care of it. Something I haven't told you, I was attacked by some foreigners at my apartment after I received the notebook, barely got away with my life. In the process, I think I hurt one pretty badly." Ethan noticed the look of shock that briefly crossed Bob's face which was quickly replaced with an expression of relief.

"I think, were I in your situation, I'd try to find this Lanahan guy. He might know what to do with the notebook or at least where the missing pages are, or have an idea of their location." Bob replied. "I'm glad that I'm not in your shoes, Ethan, sounds dangerous, especially if those foreigners continue to hound you, and I have a feeling that they're up to no good. If you are going to track down Lanahan, I suggest you leave Mile High City as soon as you can; no sense in sticking around here if you're a target... And watch your back son." Ethan nodded.

"Guess I should head to the aerodrome then and catch the first airship to Ohio. Bob nodded solemnly.

"I'll cover for you at the University until you get back."

"I'd appreciate it. I don't know that I could find another job, even here in the City of Dreams." Ethan stood to leave, quickly hiding the letter and the notebook in the inner pocket of his overcoat once again before leaving the dingy, smoke-filled dryness and warmth of the speakeasy.

The rain continued to fall and the cold wind to blow as Ethan made his way toward the Mile High City Aerodrome on the western side of the city as it floated high in the air above the New Jersey coast.

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"No, that's fine. A ticket to Chicago will work I suppose. I'll try to get a train to Cleveland from there I guess." Ethan sighed. The pretty lady at the ticket counter smiled widely at him as she handed him his ticket.

"Enjoy your flight today, Mr. Dupreii." Ethan grunted in reply as he quickly made his way to the boarding gate for his flight, which was to leave in the next fifteen minutes. As Ethan made his way to the gate, he had the feeling that he was being followed, which made him quicken his pace toward the waiting Zeppelin. Ethan boarded without any problems and took his seat by the window, looking down at fog, below which were the windswept waves of the Atlantic Ocean and then a couple of miles to the west, the shoreline and New Jersey farmland. Ethan settled in, put his hat down over his face, and drifted into troubled sleep as the Zeppelin slowly made its way toward Chicago.

When Ethan woke-up, he noticed that the seat next to his was occupied by a lovely young lady who was quietly reading a book. She was tall and slim with her dark hair in a stylish bob. She wore a navy suit with a cream colored silk blouse underneath the jacket; the cuffs and collar were lace. She appeared to be a woman of some wealth. Ethan suddenly became extremely self-conscious about his own rumpled and disheveled appearance in contrast to her clean and proper look.

"He awakens." She said simply as she smiled at Ethan.

"What? Who?" Ethan groggily stammered while rubbing his eyes.

"The name's Rose Sheffield." She extended her right hand in greeting, and Ethan gingerly grabbed it in reply. Her touch was cool in his hand and he couldn't help but stare into her bright blue eyes. "And you are..." she prompted. Ethan became well aware that he still held her hand in his.

"Ethan...Dupreii." He quickly stammered. She smiled warmly at him.

"Pleased to meet you. What do you do Mr. Dupreii?"

"Huh? Oh. Uh, I work at the university in the city." Ethan quickly released his grasp of her hand when he realized that he was still holding on to it, he blushed and turned back toward the window.

"Really? Are you a professor there?" Ethan shook his head. "No, I suppose not. Not very talkative, are you?"

"Sorry, I've had a rough night. I'm, I'm just a custodian at the university, going to be visiting my uncle in Cleveland for a little while." Ethan turned back toward her and smiled.

"Oh? I'm from Cleveland, what is your uncle's name? I may know him."

"Oh, I doubt it. He's only lived there for a short while." He replied.

"Try me." She smiled warmly at Ethan and he felt his knees melt.

"Lanahan, Jim Lanahan." Ethan simply stated. "Do you know him?" Rose shook her head and Ethan let out a deep breath when he realized that he'd been holding it. Ethan stood quickly. Uh, I uh, I'll be right back..." and he climbed from his seat over her. As he made his way to the head, he noticed a pair of square-jawed men watching him; they had chiseled features and were dressed in nondescript tan suits.

When Ethan returned from the head, he noticed that the pair of men was still watching him from behind the newspapers they held up. Ethan returned to his seat and found Rose still there, gazing intently out the window at the darkening farmland below as the sun descended past the horizon. The zeppelin's cabin was now well-lit and the crew was serving dinner as he sat in his seat again.

"What do you do for a living Rose?" Ethan inquired. She looked at him then smiled.

"I travel." She simply said.

"I see." Ethan turned his attention back to the window and the darkening sky and he felt himself nodding off once again.

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Ethan disembarked a few hours later, still rumpled and disheveled, but at least he was rested and went off in search of transportation from Chicago's downtown to a train station in search of passage to Cleveland from there. As Ethan was waiting on the sidewalk trying to flag down a tax, he spied Rose Sheffield doing the same down the sidewalk a little bit. He walked over to her just as a taxi stopped in front of her.

"Excuse me, Miss Sheffield; may I be so bold as to ask if you're going to Grand Central Station?" Her eyes lit up when she recognized him.

"Why yes, I am. Would you like to share a cab?" She slid over on the seat and patted it in invitation.

"If it's not any trouble at all, Miss."

"Oh, for you, it's none what-so-ever. I enjoy a handsome man's company when I travel, to be honest. Where's your luggage Mr. Dupreii?"

Ethan blushed a deep shade of crimson. "I don't have any, I fear. I left in a bit of a hurry without time to pack."

"You do travel light, don't you Mr. Dupreii?" Rose stated with a bemused smirk on her face and a raised eyebrow.

"Yes Ma'am, it seems to be that's the case." Ethan thought back to when he'd first arrived in Mile High City with nothing but what he wore and a small knapsack with a change of clothes and a couple of dented cans of vegetables in it.

"We have some time before I need to catch my train." Rose leaned forward. "Driver, take us to Marshall Field's before Grand Central." The taxi driver nodded and he pulled away from the curb.

"I have one question for you, Ethan Dupreii."

"Yes?"

"How does a simple custodian afford to travel halfway across the United States on what I assume is a low-salary?"

"I've come into some money recently." Was all he said in reply.

"And your uncle knows that you're coming?"

"Well, it's actually more of a surprise than anything. He keeps saying, 'Ethan m'boy, get on over to Cleveland sometime! I'll show you the sights, take you 'round town.' So, I decided to take him up on that offer late last night."

"And didn't have time to pack?"

"Well, I wanted to get on the first flight to the Midwest before I came to my senses."

Rose nodded understandingly. Shortly, they found themselves in front of Marshall Field's Department Store, she paid the taxi driver and instructed him to wait for them and there'd be a little something extra in it for him. The driver nodded.

An hour later, they emerged from Marshall Fields with bags and boxes under their arms as well as a luggage set for Ethan. Ethan was now a couple hundred dollars lighter, but at least he had nice clothes to change into on the train and didn't look quite so much like the vagrant that he felt himself to be.

Minutes later, they were walking into Grand Central Station with their bags, boxes, and luggage on a couple of trolleys and were wheeling their way into the massive building.

"I assume you still need to get your ticket. I'll see you on the train." Rose smiled at him.

"Huh? Yeah. On the train..."

"We're both going to Cleveland, you realize I hope as I am from there."

"Oh yeah. Yeah, I forgot. See you on the train." Ethan wheeled his way toward the ticket counter where he was able to purchase a ticket. Ethan then got directions to the nearest restroom, where he changed into a clean suit from his coveralls. However, Ethan did keep his beat up fedora and rumpled overcoat, the rest of the news clothes he packed into the two suitcases that he had purchased and was about to leave the restroom after freshening himself up when he realized that the rest room was empty, save for himself and a pair of square-jawed men in nondescript tan suits who approached him.

"Mr. Dupreii?" They asked in unison. Ethan looked them up and down and decided that he didn't like their looks as he could see the bulge of something beneath their jackets, probably guns in shoulder holsters he decided.

"I'm sorry. You must be mistaken." Ethan tried to push past the pair of men, but found them to be unyielding.

"No, you are mistaken. You are Ethan Dupreii of 2456 Oak Lane, Apartment 42 in Mile High City. You work at the Brummel University of Technology and Innovation, and you have a notebook that belongs to Dr. E.M. Happenstance."

"OK, so you know who I am. What do you want?"

"Mr. Dupreii, we are with the FBI, and we'd like to talk to you about the disappearance of Dr. Happenstance two nights ago."

"I'm sorry, I've told the police everything I know about the incident."

"Everything except for the notebook, yah?" Ethan looked at the two men curiously.

"And how do *you* know about this notebook that I'm supposed to have?"

"We've been watching you ever since you became acquainted with the professor late last year."

"And why is that?"

"We believe that he was a spy for the Germans, trafficking state secrets to them as a spy."

"I doubt that. He was very loyal to the US."

"The two of you talked about such things? A Professor and a mere custodian?"

"I don't know why he took a liking to me. But he was fun to chat with and since he was often still in his officer when I reached it on my rounds, we'd often sit and chat. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a train to catch."

"Yes, you're going to Cleveland suddenly, why was that again?"

"Visiting my uncle. For a couple of weeks."

"You will give us the notebook as well?"

"I'm sorry, but I don't know what you're talking about." Ethan forcefully pushed his way past the two men and climbed aboard his train just as it was pulling from the station and made his way to the Pullman car where he found Rose Sheffield sitting alone with a couple of soft drinks in front of her.

"I was beginning to wonder if you'd make it." Rose beamed as he approached her seat.

"I was a bit... delayed. I'm sorry." Ethan stated as he sat opposite of Rose, she lightly pushed one of the drinks toward him. Ethan reached into one of his oversize pockets and produced a flask and offered it to her. "Would you care for a little nip?" he asked in a whisper.

"My, Mr. Dupreii, you do know how to travel it seems. Don't mind if I do..." Rose pushed her glass closer to Ethan, who reached over and poured a small amount into her glass. Rose reached over and stirred it with her finger, then placed it to her mouth and licked the liquid off of it while staring directly into Ethan's eyes.

Ethan raised an eyebrow.

"Tell me, Mr. Dupreii, who are the men in the tan suits that have been following us all afternoon? And, are they the reason that you were late for the train?"

"They claim to be FBI. But, I doubt it."

"And why would the FBI be interested in a simple custodian?"

Ethan shrugged. "They think a colleague from the university might have been selling secrets to the Germans. They took an interest in me when I left suddenly."

"Should they be interested in you, Mr. Dupreii?"

"Not in the least. I'm just a simple man on a well deserved vacation."

"I hope, for your sake, Mr. Dupreii that you're telling the truth." Ethan and Rose fell silent as they sipped their drinks and looked out the window of the train at the countryside racing past.

A couple of days later, they arrived in Cleveland and went their separate ways. Ethan's first stop was a phone booth to track down Lanahan's address and when he located it, flagged a taxi and was there within an hour.

Ethan stood on the street outside of a white bungalow in a quiet, tree-lined neighborhood, the house seemed deserted. Screwing up his courage however, Ethan cautiously approached the house, not sure of what to expect.

As Ethan stepped up onto the porch, he noticed that the front door was ajar and he lightly pushed it open, inside the house was in a shambles, as if the place had been ransacked.



"Mr. Lanahan?" Ethan shouted into the apparently empty house, when no reply was forthcoming he slowly entered, keeping an eye out for anyone he could see in the building. The living room was completely ransacked, the cushions on the furniture was removed, pictures cut from their frames, house plants over turned, even the large radio in the corner of the room was pulled apart.

Ethan heard movement down a hallway and slowly edged down it, until he arrived at a door that was slightly open, Ethan tried to peer in but couldn't see anything, though he could hear someone walking about in the room and it sounded as if he were going through desk drawers. Ethan returned to the living room and finding a lead candlestick slowly returned, just as he was about to leap into the room, the door was yanked open and he stood face to face with Rose Sheffield pointing a loaded revolver at him.

"What's going on Mr. Dupreii, if that is who you really are?" Ethan was speechless and stood mouth agape at the sight of Rose Sheffield standing in the house that belonged to Lanahan. "I'm only going to ask you once more Dupreii, what's going on? What is your connection with Jim Lanahan?"

"I could ask the same of you, Ms. Sheffield." Ethan was finally able to stammer.

"You could. But, I'm the one with the gun, Mr. Dupreii."

"Point taken." Ethan walked to the living room and Rose followed, not lowering the revolver. "My name *is* Ethan Dupreii and I *am* a custodian at the Brummel University of Technology and Innovation."

"And what is your connection with Lanahan, Mr. Dupreii?"

"I'm acquainted with a professor of his from the university. Now, what's *your* connection with Lanahan Ms. Sheffield?"

"He's my older brother, Mr. Dupreii."

"You said you didn't know who he was..."

"And you said he was your uncle. Both were clearly lies. Now, what do you want with my brother, Dupreii?" Rose waved the gun at him to remind Ethan that she still had the upper hand.

"Alright, this professor of his, Doctor Happenstance, was either killed or abducted a couple of nights ago, his office was also broken into, which I discovered while working. When I got home," Ethan slowly reached into his overcoat and produced the notebook, "I found that this was delivered to my apartment." Rose carefully took the offered notebook while she kept the revolver leveled in his direction. Cradling the revolver in her elbow, rose carefully opened the notebook and thumbed through it quickly.

"What is it? It looks like schematics of some sort."

"Your guess is as good as mine."

"What does this have to do with my brother?"

"There was a note included with the notebook." Ethan produced the letter from Doctor Happenstance, Rose took the letter and carefully read it.

"I don't get it. Happenstance was precisely the reason that my brother flunked out of the university..." Ethan could only shake his head in dismay.

"If you look toward the back of the book, there seem to be a number of pages missing." Ethan stated, flipping through the book to the back of it and showing it to Rose, who had lowered the revolver by this time and took hold of the notebook to examine it closer.

"You know, Jim said that he had received a package from Happenstance the last time I spoke with him, it's why I happen to be returning to Cleveland at this time, he asked me to watch his house while he was gone."

"Do you know where he went?"

"San Francisco. But he didn't say why he was going there." At that moment, Ethan and Rose heard several car doors closing outside, the pair rose and peeked out the window, six swarthy men in suits and overcoats were walking toward the house, five of them seemed to be carrying large weapons hidden under their coats, the sixth one had a small monkey with an eye patch sitting on his shoulder.

"These guys were at Happenstance's office and some of them attacked me in the alley below my apartment later that night." Ethan hissed. "We'd better get out of here." The men spread out, three split off and went around the house toward the backdoor while the other three paused in the yard, they lit cigarettes while they waited, discarding the matches on the ground.

"I think they're Turks, they look wealthy judging by the expensive suits and the car. We're also surrounded, the only way out is through the cellar." Rose whispered quickly. "Follow me." And the pair crept through the house down the hallway toward the bedrooms.

When they got to the back most bedroom, they could hear the Turks breaking down the doors in their rush into the house, Rose quickly lifted a section of the rug in the corner and pulled open a trapdoor in the floor, she ushered Ethan down it, handing him the revolver as he quickly descended into the dark cellar. Rose was on his heels, but she paused long enough to close the trapdoor behind them.

They could hear the Turks stomping through the house and shouting in their language.

"Definitely Turkish." Rose smiled grimly. "Come on, she grabbed Ethan's hand and they crept cautiously through the darkened cellar until they found a small door in the back corner, which she opened and they stepped into a narrow, low passage, Rose closed that door behind them as well, and they followed the passage until they reached a rickety, wooden ladder which went up.

Rose climbed the ladder first and opened a trapdoor above her head and lifted herself out of it, Ethan followed closely behind and found that they were in an old, dusty garage, there was an older Model T inside it. Ethan went to the windows in the garage door and saw that a couple of the Turks stood in the backyard between the garage and the street surveying the area as if they were keeping an eye out for someone.

Rose clambered into the front seat of the old car and waved at Ethan to get in as well, when he had, she hit a button in the dashboard and the automobile's engine roared to life. Rose quickly shifted the car into gear and stepped on the accelerator, the car lurched forward crashing through the wooden garage doors, the Turks were taken by surprise as the car raced toward them, causing them to jump out of its path. Rose and Ethan quickly reached the street and she cranked the wheel hard, nearly causing the vehicle to roll as they tore down the street with a roar.

Ethan looked back and could see the Turks running out of the house toward their car in pursuit.

“We’re going to have company!” Ethan shouted at Rose who nodded grimly in response.