



CHATURANGA

ANDREW C. KATEN

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SAMPLE

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INNER COMPASS

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Grand Junction, Colorado

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All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. While the majority of places, historical events, and political issues in the story are real, any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

To my beautiful family.

CONTENTS

PART I: THE OPENING

1	KHAN'S GAMBIT	1
2	THE MOST BORING SUMMER EVER	4
3	FROM PAPERBOY TO REPORTER	9
4	WORLDS APART	13
5	GO WEST, YOUNG MAN	17
6	GO EAST, YOUNG MAN	24
7	IN AND OUT OF ASIA	29
8	LAND OF FIRE	36
9	INTERESTS	42
10	IN POLO'S FOOTSTEPS	47
11	OLD CITY	54
12	MISHA	63
13	CHANGE OF PLANS	71
14	ENERGY MOVES THE WORLD	80
15	SHIFTING THOUGHTS	87

PART II: THE MIDDLEGAME

16	THE DAGESTAN	96
17	THE GREAT GAME	102
18	CROSSING BORDERS	114

19	THE PRICE OF GOLD	121
20	QUIET MOVES	127
21	A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS	137
22	PIPELINEISTAN	145
23	THE BLACK SAND	152
24	INTO TURKESTAN	159
25	SHADOWS OF THE GREAT GAME	166
26	SAND AND STARS	172
27	THE PRICE OF PETROLEUM	180
28	STUCK IN THE MIDDLE	188

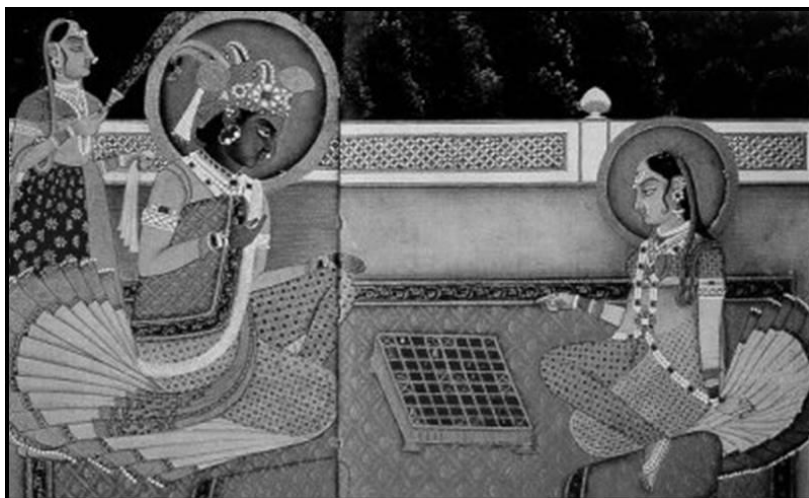
PART III: THE ENDGAME

29	QUEEN OF THE WORLD	198
30	NO MAN'S LAND	207
31	OUT OF THE SHADOWS	214
32	BUKHARA THE NOBLE	220
33	THE GOLDEN ROAD	229
34	CHECKMATE	238

PART IV: THE OPENING

35	A STEP FARTHER	244
36	PUSH PULL	255
37	CROSSROADS	265
38	SHIFTING SANDS	275

39	PLACE OF RUINS	286
40	HISTORY RHYMES	296
41	KARA-BURAN	307
42	FOREIGN DEVILS	316
43	LOST AND FOUND	323
44	TABIYA	332



Chaturanga is an ancient strategy game that originated in India in the fifth century. Meaning “four divisions” in Sanskrit, the earliest version of the game likely involved four players. The exact rules – even the meaning of its ornately decorated board – are not well known.

From India, Chaturanga spread along the Silk Road, where it became popular among all classes of society – merchants, soldiers, and rulers. Over time and across thousands of miles, the game continued to evolve. Eventually, it reached Europe, where it is known today as chess.

Numerous versions of Chaturanga endure, though the rules and strategies depend on where and by whom they are played.

PART I: THE OPENING

1 KHAN'S GAMBIT

“Pearls don’t lie on the seashore.
If you want one, you must dive for it.”
– Chinese proverb

The Silk Road
Central Asia
1290 A.D.

Howling winds wrapped the caravan in a shroud of sand, obscuring the men and their animals from the outside world. Heads down, eyes and lips drawn tight against the onslaught, the travelers forged ahead into the storm. No sign of life, no prospect of salvation was anywhere to be seen. Wordlessly, as if resigned to their fate – or perhaps indifferent to it – the convoy pressed on.

There were ten men in all – eight on horses and the other two crewing an ox-drawn wooden cart. The men wore conical metal hats with woolen earflaps, tattered silk scarves and leather armor. Gripping the reins in one hand, the riders clasped their spears in the other, points doggedly fixed skyward in defiance of whatever mayhem the gods might throw at them. Atop the spear of the lead rider fluttered the threadbare remains of a regimental banner, its color drained long ago by the friction of nature and combat. Maintaining their formation in spite of the sandstorm, this unit of ten displayed the proud and disciplined bearing of professional soldiers.

In fact, they were much more than just common soldiers. They had been hand-chosen by the regional khan of all western

lands for a mission of extraordinary importance. The cargo which they carried was vital to the empire's survival, and their orders were to deliver it east to the Great Khan's capital in Beijing. Each soldier had accepted his assignment with the knowledge that he might perish along the way. But to these men, death was nothing to fear. They were the best and bravest warriors of the largest empire in all of history – they belonged to the elite Imperial Guard of the Mongol Horde.

Approaching what appeared to be a dusty river bed, the lead rider raised a gloved fist as his unit took up a defensive ring around their commander. They had to be getting close, he thought, squinting in the direction he hoped was south. It had been a week since departing the security of the oasis-city at the foot of the Mountains of Heaven, and three months since they broke camp on the shore of the Oxus River. But of all their travels, no place had proven more difficult than this final stretch of unforgiving desert. If they could just get across, the remainder of their journey to Beijing would be child's play.

Seeing no sign of danger, the commander barked an order to his men and spurred his horse forward into the squall. Despite the faltering steps of his mare, the commander did not realize his mistake until the rest of his unit was stirrup-deep in the current. What had seemed to be a dry river bed in the fog of blowing sand was in fact a fast-flowing river.

The commander yanked back his reins and shouted at his men to turn around, but they simply stared at his silent warnings, not comprehending the danger which bore down on them. By the time they realized their predicament, it was too late. The commander's horse lost its footing – both rider and beast toppled into the water and were immediately dragged away in a torrent of mud and debris. The other riders soon followed, their arms and heads momentarily bobbing above the surface before disappearing downstream in the fog of sand.

For what seemed like several minutes, the ox cart remained upright, grounded on a gravel bar, as the drivers desperately cracked their whips and shouted orders to the paralyzed animals. Then a surge of turbulent water lifted one side of the cart, momentarily balancing it atop the waves, before flipping passengers and cargo into the raging vortex below. Within seconds, the entire caravan was gone, swallowed by the river as if it had never been. A chorus of ghostly screams filled the air as the lost souls of centuries past welcomed their new companions in eternal slumber. Nothing but the wind remained.

2 THE MOST BORING SUMMER EVER

“The regular course was Reeling and Writhing, of course, to begin with; and then the different branches of Arithmetic – Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision.”

– The Mock Turtle,

“Alice in Wonderland” (Lewis Carroll)

Fairview Middle School

United States of America

May 25, 2015 A.D.

Patrick looked up at the clock on the wall, its big hand tracing a slow arc while its little hand seemed frozen. It felt like it had been 2:40 for the past twenty minutes. Mr. Blackburn continued his lecture about Genghis Khan to a classroom of forty distracted eighth graders, some of whom had their eyes glued to the clock like Patrick, while the rest stared at their books, or desks, or the wall. It was the last day of school before summer vacation.

Patrick sighed and looked back at the clock – 2:43. Resisting the urge to bang his head on his desk in agony, he instead relaxed his mind enough to reflect on who he might invite to Candace Jenson’s fourteenth birthday party in two weeks. Whomever he took was not really as important as making certain that he did not go alone. He’d made that mistake last year, when he and his best friend, Ryan, had stood in the corner for an hour watching other kids dance and trying to screw up the courage to ask a girl and join the ridiculous affair.

One reason the party was such a big deal was because the rest of the summer, well... wasn’t. Wasn’t a big deal, that is. Patrick’s mother had recently decided to return to work as a lawyer

and wouldn't be able to stay home with him. After years of doing laundry and cooking meals, she convinced his father that it was finally time to use the law degree she'd spent three years earning. His dad would be gone over the summer on another business trip. He worked for an oil and gas company, and it seemed like he was always away on business to some place or another.

This summer, Patrick would be staying with his grandfather in Springdale. Not that he minded spending time with Grandpa – far from it, in fact. Grandpa was his favorite family member and they got along tremendously. He told the most incredible stories and maintained a virtual history museum in his cabin.

But hanging out with Grandpa all summer was not quite the same as playing baseball and video games with Ryan, loafing at the pool, or riding the roller coasters at Taylor Park. Springdale had no movie theaters, no pool, and no internet. And there were no other kids there – only old people and weird artists. A fourteen-year-old could only read so many books, listen to so many stories, solve so many of Grandpa's codes and riddles, jump off the dock so many times, and...

The school bell screamed at him like a fire alarm. Startled out of his daydream, Patrick's hand slipped out from under his chin, which finally slammed down onto his desk after making it through 152 days of Mr. Blackburn's history class. Rubbing his jaw, he watched his classmates climb over each other to reach the door.

Ryan slapped his back and grinned. "Come on buddy, it's summer! We're high schoolers now. Let's get out of here!" Patrick slung his bag over his shoulder, took one last glance around Mr. Blackburn's classroom, and hurried out the door to begin what was sure to be the most boring summer ever.

His mother was on the phone when Patrick walked into the kitchen and tossed his book bag onto the counter.

“Yes, okay,” she said. “So what’s that mean?” She hesitated for a few minutes. “Uh-huh. For how long?”

Her eyes met Patrick’s, and then she jotted some notes down on the list she was making. As he listened, Patrick realized she was talking with his dad.

“All right, you stay there. We’ll fix a snack and be there as soon as we can.” She nodded again, smiled, and said, “I love you, too. We’ll see you in an hour.”

When she hung up the phone, she looked at Patrick for what seemed like an entire minute. Patrick looked back. Neither spoke. Then she walked over and wrapped her arms around him, squeezing him and kissing his hair. Hugs can be awkward for fourteen-year-old boys, and Patrick usually squirmed or pushed away.

But today, he didn’t move.

“Grandpa had a heart attack,” she finally said, trying to keep her voice from cracking. “He’s at the hospital with Dad. We’re going to get packed and go see him, too.”

The news stunned him. A lump began to form in his throat and he tried swallowing, but it only seemed to grow larger. As if reading his mind, Mom spoke again.

“Grandpa is in stable condition and seems to be doing okay for now. Dad is doing okay, too, but you and I need to go keep him company.” Patrick nodded again, still unable to look up.

She spoke more softly. “Patrick, I know this is hard for you. But Grandpa’s tough, and so is your Dad.” After a few seconds, she added, more slowly, “And so are we. We can be scared and tough at the same time.”

Patrick looked up at her and nodded. He tried to smile back with confidence – to show her he could be tough, too. But he started to cry like he hadn’t since he was a little boy. And just like then, he didn’t try to push her away.

Once they had left the house and were on their way to the hospital, Patrick felt a little better. It was time to be strong for his dad and Grandpa.

Poor Grandpa, all alone in his old age. Patrick's grandmother had passed away when he was five, so he remembered her only vaguely. She and Grandpa had met at the beach when they were teenagers. He was a surfer and she was finishing high school. They'd married soon after and rarely left each other's side over the next half-century.

Trying to picture Grandpa as a young man, let alone a surfer, was not easy for Patrick. To Patrick, it seemed Grandpa had always had thin gray hair and bad hearing. The warm and caring old man that he knew – the one who still listened to his record player and habitually fell asleep in his reading chair before dinner – could hardly be the same handsome nineteen-year-old with a surfboard under one arm and a tan, bikinied Grandma under the other in the framed photo by Grandpa's bed.

Then again, perhaps the photographs were forgeries. The possibility was not far-fetched, really. Aside from his proficiency with magic and codes, Grandpa was an infamous prankster. Countless small-time mischiefs kept the mood light and the family on their toes when Grandpa came to visit. But the magic, riddles, and pranks aside, Patrick loved his Grandfather most of all for what his other family seemed to appreciate least.

Grandpa was an amazing story-teller. He recounted fantastic tales of his travels across the world with Grandma. A six-month motorcycle trek through South America, climbing the Andes Mountains, surfing off the coast of Chile, and spending three months aboard a sailboat that rounded the Cape of Hope were just a few of the adventures that they had enjoyed together.

Of all Grandpa's stories, however, the ones that really captivated Patrick's imagination were those of Grandpa's own father (and Patrick's great-grandfather), Thomas Eaton. On those special nights when they visited the cabin in Springdale, Grandpa

would light his pipe and rock back in his chair as he and Patrick sat around the fireplace in his sitting room. These were magical nights for a young boy.

Remembering Grandpa like this, Patrick regretted how he had felt during Mr. Blackburn's class earlier today. To think he had actually *complained* about having to spend an entire summer with Grandpa – eight weeks of exciting stories, games, and conversations with the person he loved more than anyone else in the world. Patrick rolled towards the window and closed his eyes tightly. As the windshield wipers swished a slow and steady beat, his mind drifted to the last story Grandpa had told him about his great-grandfather.

3 FROM PAPERBOY TO REPORTER

“I’m the twinkle in my Grandpa’s eye...”

– Author Unknown

Patrick’s great-grandfather traveled the world searching for buried treasure, ancient art, and lost civilizations. During the first half of the twentieth century, Thomas Eaton lived the kind of adventures that most people today could only imagine in books or movies. Born in 1902, he spent much of his boyhood in the mountains surrounding his family’s ranch in Montana – fishing, hunting, horseback riding, and studying the plants, animals, and rocks of his remote world. When he wasn’t wandering the back-country, tracking grizzly bears or testing his courage running rapids, he was on horseback delivering errands for various businesses around town.

By the time he was Patrick’s age, Thomas earned a decent wage selling newspapers for the local tribune. Despite his youth, he soon became knowledgeable about local politics and the influence of the press. He developed a special talent for blending into crowds and making friends wherever he was, and he became a keen observer of his fellow humans. These skills not only helped him sell papers, but they also provided him with fascinating leads that he fed his grateful editors.

While delivering papers and collecting payment, he often found himself in the doorways of barbershops, dark corners of bars, and back alleys of gambling houses. Frequently overlooked for his youth, Thomas witnessed the town’s most interesting – and often its darkest – secrets. His boyhood activities would no doubt horrify most mothers today – and certainly his own, as well, had she any idea of where and how he spent his days. Anyone who knew Thomas back then would have described him as having a

boundless appetite for adventure and extraordinary knack for survival.

So it was that Thomas went from selling stories on the streets of his town to writing them. As a senior in high school, he worked forty hours a week as an investigative journalist for the paper he'd once peddled for a nickel. His nose for tracking down a lead – combined with his talent for loosening the tightest lips – quickly earned him fame throughout the state as a tenacious and heroic reporter. It came as no surprise when, a few years later, he accepted a full scholarship from a small western college, where he earned a journalism degree in half the time required by most students. Months before graduation he'd been recruited to write for the largest newspaper in San Francisco, a city of growing international importance, and where he would launch his journalistic career.

Within six short months, Thomas had attained celebrity status in the booming city on the coast. However, just six months later, his luck began to turn. He'd focused all his energy and talent on exposing the city's most dangerous gangsters and corrupt politicians. Now, sinister forces began to stir in certain parlors, back offices, dark basements and alleys. There were consequences for upsetting the status quo.

Following warnings from friends and trusted contacts, and then several suspicious near-accidents, Thomas realized his spotlight had gotten too hot. A well-tuned antenna for danger told him it was time for a change of scenery. Thomas's editor agreed, and they decided to find a new place for Thomas to write his stories, far away from the vengeful reach of local troublemakers.

And so, at the fresh age of twenty-two and without a single friendly face on the other side of the ocean to welcome him, Thomas boarded a steamship from San Francisco to China, carrying everything he owned on his back. As the ship passed under the Golden Gate Bridge, its passengers gathered on the stern to bid farewell to the United States. On the far end of the ship,

standing alone on the bow, Thomas looked west towards Asia in eager anticipation of adventure, exploration, and world-class news stories.

Over the years, Patrick had listened to this story, as well as many others of his great-grandfather's exploits. In fact, he had become the sole heir to them. At one time or another they had been shared with Patrick's cousins or uncles, too. But as family members grew less interested, Grandpa decided to reserve these tales for Patrick only. This special status warmed Patrick's heart. He enjoyed the satisfaction – and not a little pride – knowing he would be the lone caretaker of Thomas Eaton's life and escapades. Just as his relationship with Grandpa was strong, Patrick was confident that he and his great-grandfather would have been best of companions, as well. Perhaps the three of them would have had daring and fantastic adventures together.

Grandfathers and grandsons are known to share uniquely special relationships, and this was the case for the Eatons, as well. Grandpa treated Patrick with love, respect, and acceptance that he didn't get from anyone else. Of course, Patrick did not doubt for a moment that his mom and dad loved him, too, and very much at that. In fact, compared to many of the boys he knew from school Patrick felt he had little to complain about.

But regardless of his privileged life at home, Patrick was most at peace when he was at the cabin with Grandpa, listening to stories, playing chess, working to crack one of Grandpa's invented codes or riddles, or reading side-by-side in the sitting room. Grandpa spoke to him as an old friend, asked his ideas and perspectives, and never lectured about what Patrick should or should not do. He didn't make sarcastic remarks about Patrick's newest hairstyle or clothes, or remind him that he could do better in school, or even reprimand him for day dreaming. Grandpa didn't get mad when Patrick accidentally tracked mud and leaves

in from outside, or when he forgot to put a coaster under his drink. Grandpa hadn't once criticized Patrick for missing a ground ball in a baseball game, poor handwriting, or forgetting to do something he was supposed to do.

It seemed Grandpa was only capable of smiling and nodding approval at Patrick's doodling and wandering imagination. He waited patiently for Patrick to finish a book chapter or drawing before asking his attention. He listened kindly to Patrick's dreams of growing up to be a photojournalist, an inventor, or an astronaut (depending on whichever required the least amount of school). The old man pointed out the tremendous benefits of forgetting to wash one's ears – namely that ear wax is an excellent protectant against sand and dirt. When Patrick slept in, Grandpa explained that kids need more sleep than anyone because their brains get so tired thinking up great ideas all day long. And if Patrick was in a bad mood and didn't feel like talking – or snapped at him – Grandpa only patted his shoulder and returned to his reading.

With Grandpa, Patrick knew he was a good person. He was unique and talented. And it was possible for Patrick to do anything he desired with his life.

4 WORLDS APART

“One father is more than a hundred Schoolmasters.”

– George Herbert, 1640

The one-hour drive to the hospital near Springdale ended up taking closer to two hours due to rain and traffic. But Patrick welcomed the additional time – it gave him a chance to do some thinking about Grandpa and talk over the situation with Mom. The optimistic news from Dad merged with boyhood memories from the cabin to lighten Patrick’s mood.

Walking through the sterile, polished hallways of the hospital, Patrick couldn’t help but reflect on how different it was from Grandpa’s lake house. The warmth of the cabin – cluttered with books, maps, artifacts, and souvenirs from distant corners of the world – was a far cry from the beige cinderblock walls and the monotonous beeping hum of the hospital equipment.

At the far end of the hall, Patrick saw his dad reading a book in an otherwise empty waiting room. Patrick was startled by how tired, and how much older, his dad looked. Mom went straight to him for a hug, while Patrick hung back and watched. He wanted to embrace his father and wasn’t sure why he did not. Before he could give the issue further thought his dad hugged him. For the second time today Patrick felt like crying, though he managed to hold back this time.

“Grandpa’s going to be okay,” Dad said. “They’ve finished treating him and think he’ll recover just fine, but he won’t be running marathons anytime in the next few days.” With those few words from his father, Patrick breathed a quiet sigh of relief and drifted to a nearby chair. He thumbed through a magazine while his parents talked and the weather channel purred on the television in the background.

It was strange to see his father like this – with puffy eyes, wrinkled shirt, and messy hair. Dad was normally a giant, full of energy and action, always certain about what needed to be done and how to do it. But tonight, talking to Mom by the water fountain, Dad looked like Patrick felt – apprehensive and uncertain. Patrick lowered his eyes and returned to the magazine.

Although Dad spent most of his days working in an office, he'd once been a field geologist who trekked through deserts and jungles, far from the comforts of civilization, in order to study rocks and fossils or discover veins of precious metals and hidden reservoirs of oil. In the old picture on Mom's nightstand, Dad looked very much like the man Mom described from her early memories – strong, rugged, and sure of himself, sporting a suntan and bleached beard, with a boyish grin and twinkle in his eye. As with his grandfather, however, Patrick found it difficult to reconcile the young man in the photos with the gray-haired adult with whom he lived. Dad may have carried a rock hammer and hand lens at one time, but now he wore a suit and shiny shoes to work.

Yet it seemed these different personalities actually belonged to the same man. If true, then the spirit of adventure may run in Patrick's blood, as well. But here in the twenty-first century, he was doubtful whether he could pick up the torch carried around the globe by previous generations of Eaton explorers.

Regardless how much Patrick wished, the world seemed too small a place now. In school he had been taught that the rainforests were shrinking, and the world was endangered by overpopulation. With too many people came the disappearance of frontiers. No longer was the west full of outlaws and bandits, the ocean floor unmapped, or the source of the Nile legendary. Even Mt. Everest – the tallest mountain on earth – had become a tourist attraction that was visited and climbed by hundreds of people every year. No question about it, the days of the explorers were

over and done with. The frontier had vanished. After all, what could possibly be left to discover?

Flipping through the magazine, too distracted by his thoughts to read, Patrick finally took notice of the story open before him. Underneath its title, “From Alexander to America: Afghanistan’s Struggle with Empire,” was a large color photograph of an old man standing next to a mud wall. He looked at least ninety years old, with dark, leathery skin and a long beard, full-length robe, sandals, and turban. His face offered no expression.

And yet the man’s eyes seemed to pierce the surface of the page, as if seeing Patrick across distance and time. The caption described him as a villager from Balkh (a city in northern Afghanistan), who had endured years of occupation during his life – first by the Soviet Union in the 1980s, then the Taliban in the 1990s, and finally forces led by the United States after the September eleventh attacks. The man’s family had lived in their valley for hundreds of years. They were all fervently religious, and they made their living raising animals and crops and trading with other valleys. The biggest threat they faced was not crowds or concrete, but rather their country’s endless wars and violence. The man’s life was so different from Patrick’s that it was hard to believe they lived in the same century.

Patrick looked up from his magazine to study his father, who was sitting with his hands in his lap, quietly staring out at the rainy night. Patrick couldn’t remember if his dad had visited Afghanistan to study its rocks or mountains. It seemed like he had, but keeping track of who did what, and where, could be tough in the Eaton family.

As much as Patrick wanted to add his own chapter to the Eaton saga, the prospect seemed unlikely. Even if the world was still big enough to explore, he was only fourteen years old. By the time he was old enough to have his own adventures, the frontiers really would be gone. Even Afghanistan would have shopping

malls and theme parks by then. It seemed like Patrick had come along a couple of generations too late.

But even if he would never have his own adventures in faraway lands, at least Patrick could savor the stories that Grandpa told him of his great-grandfather. Reassured by this thought, he put down the magazine and leaned back in his chair. As he closed his eyes, his thoughts floated away from the hospital, his grandpa, and the everyday life of a fourteen-year-old boy in this too-small world. Drifting off to sleep, he found himself traveling side-by-side with Thomas Eaton as he embarked on his first journey through Asia nearly a century ago.

5 GO WEST, YOUNG MAN

“Where there is an open mind there will always be a frontier.”

– Charles F. Kettering

When Patrick’s great-grandfather stepped off the boat in Shanghai (Shang-HI) in the summer of 1924, he was instantly enchanted by the sounds, smells, tastes, and sights of China. Thomas Eaton knew at once that he had entered a land and culture vastly different from the rural mountains and small towns of Montana. Even San Francisco, with its population of half a million, seemed insignificant compared to the three million people living in this metropolis. Situated where the Yangtze (Yang-ZEE) River flows into the Pacific Ocean, Shanghai – the “Paris of the East” – was the center of trade and commerce for all of Asia.

Thousands of European, American, and Russian businessmen made the western part of Shanghai their home. As settlers in a foreign land – many of whom had brought their families with them – they tried to recreate a way of life that was familiar to them. Inside gated communities they built homes, gardens, and parks like those found back in London, New York, or Moscow. Nevertheless, just a few miles away, on the other side of Shanghai, and in the vast lands beyond, lurked ancient China – exotic, mysterious and, all too often, dangerous.

Despite knowing almost nothing of China when he arrived, Thomas swiftly put to use his talent for making friends and gathering information. He hired a local boy as an interpreter and began wandering the city’s streets and alleys, mingling with natives and foreigners, tasting local foods, and jotting notes in his journal. From marketplace to theater, temple to government building, and slums to the luxurious homes of politicians, Thomas

befriended and interviewed everyone he met. Within just a few weeks, his face became known and welcomed wherever he went. And, although he had yet to send a single story to his editor back in San Francisco, Thomas had already amassed an enormous collection of sources and potential leads.

Thomas also learned that he had arrived in China at a very interesting time. After more than two thousand years of rule by emperors, the last imperial dynasty had finally been overthrown just a dozen years ago in 1912. In its place, the Republic of China had been created. However, there remained a great deal of argument about who should rule the second-largest country on earth. Throughout the northern, southern, and western provinces, local leaders continued to fight each other for power. Consequently, this period of Chinese history has become known as the “Warlord Era.”

In addition, a group calling itself the “Communist Party of China” had recently formed in Shanghai, where it was attracting support from local workers. Nobody seemed to know much about them – or what they planned to do if they gained control of the country. But something told Thomas that he would hear more of them in the future.

Meanwhile, Thomas was soon drawn back into the shadowy world of politics, corruption, and crime. Although he had left San Francisco to escape retaliation from criminals and dirty politicians, here in the Far East his nose for a good story put him at risk once again. Within a few months of his arrival in Shanghai, Thomas published a series of shocking and revealing newspaper articles about the most powerful official in the city. This man was a police detective whose job was to investigate illegal gambling and the drug trade. As it turned out, he also happened to be associated with some of the very people that he was supposed to arrest and put behind bars.

When Thomas’s articles appeared on the front pages of newspapers around the world, certain people in high and powerful

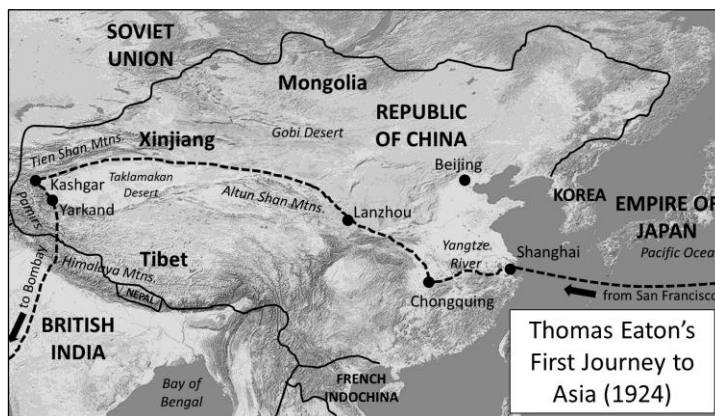
places became embarrassed and angry at having their secret ties to this detective revealed. While the stories delighted his editor in San Francisco – who published one account after the next for the fascinated readers back home – Thomas discovered that his own spotlight had once again become too hot. It was time for another change of scenery.

So it was that on a moonless night in the late summer of 1924, Thomas again found himself alone on the front of a boat looking west. But this time, rather than on the deck of a world-class steamship, he chugged up the Yangtze River in a grimy, sputtering tugboat. He left behind the crowds, familiar faces, and celebrity-like status he had enjoyed in Shanghai and entered China's remote and mysterious interior as a pale stranger from the outside world. From now on, he could no longer rely upon friends or fame to keep him safe. Here, he would be known only as *gweilo* – “foreign devil.”

It took Thomas four months to complete the 3,000-mile journey to the isolated outpost of Kashgar (KOSH-gar) in the westernmost province of China. After leaving Shanghai in August, he had gone up the Yangtze River as far as Chongqing (Chong-CHING), where he'd hired a local guide and team of mules for the trip north. However, he soon grew to suspect that his guide intended to double-cross and rob him. Thinking quickly, he had sent the man on an errand to a local town and then made a hasty getaway in his absence.

Driving his mules hard – and constantly looking over his shoulder for any sign of pursuit – Thomas skirted the Altun Shan (ALL-toon Shawn) Mountains and reached Lanzhou (lan-CHOW) by the middle of October. From Lanzhou, he bought camels and retraced the ancient Silk Road west, around the Taklamakan (TAK-la-ma-CON) Desert, and eventually to Kashgar. Arriving in December, tired and weak, he was relieved to find sanctuary with

local British diplomats. For the first time since leaving Shanghai, he could finally let his guard down.



Thomas looked like a different man upon reaching Kashgar. During his expedition, he had dodged bandits, bribed warlords, and at one point even disguised himself as a Buddhist monk to avoid capture. Two of his mules had died from exhaustion along the way. He was virtually unrecognizable from the young, clean-shaven reporter who had left Shanghai months earlier. His skin, which had been pale and smooth when he started out, was now deeply tanned and cracked, and his beard and hair long and sun-bleached. Whereas his talents for making friends and blending into crowds in Shanghai had merely gotten him good stories, in the rugged backcountry of China these skills had kept him alive.

But despite his weather-beaten appearance and numerous close calls with thieves, frostbite, and dehydration, Thomas did not regret the expedition for a minute. Along the way he had learned about the geography and history of China. He had also made many friends and developed a deep respect for the diverse culture and character of China's many ethnic groups. And, perhaps most

importantly, he had learned a great deal about himself and what he was capable of.

Thomas had come to view life as a journey towards enlightenment, believing firmly that every person has a basic choice when faced with difficulties: to quit or go on. From Montana to San Francisco, and Shanghai to Kashgar, he had always set his sights on what he wanted, and he never stopped until he reached them. He had always done what he thought was right and just, even when his life was threatened by corrupt politicians or highway bandits. Crossing China from east to west had been the most demanding challenge of his young life but, through thick and thin, Thomas had always chosen to go on. He never quit, and he never looked back.

The stories of his great-grandfather captivated Patrick. He visualized the breathtaking scenery that Thomas had witnessed along the way: the sun rising over terraced green rice fields to the east, beating down on the still silence of an empty desert, and settling behind snow-capped mountains to the west. Patrick imagined how Thomas must have felt alone in a strange land, danger lurking around every tree or rock, and knowing each day might be his last. Patrick often dreamed he was traveling by his great-grandfather's side, studying the horizon through binoculars or sharing rice stew by the camp fire under a cold, star-filled sky.

By comparison, Patrick's life seemed easy and uneventful. He could hardly fathom the courage and grit that Thomas must have possessed. Patrick had never weighed the risks of crossing a desert, decided whether to bribe a bandit or try to outrun him, or agonized over when to drink the last drops of his water. Patrick had never been on a steamship or tugboat, or packed or ridden a mule, let alone eaten one. His daily problems were confined to homework, getting to baseball practice on time, or deciding which girl to take to Candace Jenson's birthday party. Whenever

Grandpa finished a story, Patrick wondered if he actually possessed the kind of bravery and determination that seemed to be a condition for calling oneself an Eaton.

Since Patrick only visited Grandpa on weekends, it took nearly all of last summer to hear the full story of Thomas's journey across China. During their days together Grandpa would show Patrick some of the souvenirs from Thomas's travels. Patrick carefully examined a talisman of green jade worn by a Chinese warrior centuries ago. He scratched his head at the cryptic language of an ancient Buddhist scroll which Thomas had found in the ruins of a monastery. For hours at a time, he flipped through photo albums, intently studying the black and white images of Thomas in a heavy coat, boots and hat lined with the wool of yak, and the "fu manchu" that he had grown in an effort to blend in with the locals. Most intriguing was a bejeweled dagger given to Thomas by a fellow traveler, and which he had carried under his coat for protection.

After lunch, Patrick and Grandpa would play chess or devise a code. The old man was an expert at creating secret ciphers and encryptions. Apparently, Thomas had used them from time to time during his travels, and he had taught them to Grandpa as a boy. Three-quarters of a century later, Grandpa passed this knowledge on to Patrick. He showed Patrick how to write with invisible ink and then how to make it reappear. They toyed with transposition ciphers that involved switching letters, and substitution ciphers that made use of numbers and symbols. They made up brilliant key words based on information only the two of them knew. Each weekend, after he'd left the cabin and returned home, he and Grandpa would mail coded letters to each other. Reunited again the following weekend, they would laugh at the silly messages they'd sent.

Sitting in the hospital waiting room, Patrick felt a new, and much deeper, appreciation for his time with Grandpa. It sounded like Grandpa was going to be okay, after all. In a way, Patrick felt

he was being given a second chance. If so, he did not intend to waste it. He promised himself, then and there, that he would never again turn down an opportunity to be with Grandpa. In light of his new outlook, the idea of spending an entire summer at the cabin made Patrick smile in anticipation. What enthralling discussions they would share! What tricky codes and riddles he would solve! What incredible artifacts and photos they would investigate!

Best of all, this summer he would learn more about his great-grandfather's incredible adventures. Indeed, China had only been the beginning of Thomas Eaton's escapades through the Old World.

6 GO EAST, YOUNG MAN

“Man cannot discover new oceans unless he
has the courage to lose sight of the shore.”

– Aristophanes

“When can I see Grandpa?” Patrick asked his mom. She had just come out of the recovery room.

“In a few minutes, honey,” she smiled, patting his shoulder. “Let Dad talk with him a bit longer, and then you can see him briefly. He needs his rest, so we can’t make it a long visit.”

Patrick nodded. He realized his grandfather was not exactly in shape to run a marathon, but just the same he wanted to share his excitement about their upcoming summer together. Besides, if the thought had cheered him up, he figured it might do the same for his grandfather. So, his mom’s next words took him by complete shock.

“Patrick, honey, I need to tell you something. I realize you were looking forward to spending this summer with Grandpa. But this—” She waved her hands to imply the hospital and entire crazy day. “This changes things. Grandpa will be okay, but it’s going to take time. He’s going to need to rest this summer. He would absolutely love to take care of you, but he’s just not going to be strong enough yet.” She paused to look at him, her eyes full of sympathy.

Anger welled up in Patrick. “No! I have to stay with him this summer, Mom! You don’t understand. We made plans! We have stories to tell...”

His mother didn't argue with him. She sat upright, hands clasped tightly in her lap, and looked at Patrick without saying a word. Her eyes moistened as she nodded her understanding.

"Last summer, Grandpa told me all about his dad..." Patrick pleaded. "... how he traveled through China, the way he outsmarted bandits, and how he almost ran out of water in the desert. And Grandpa promised to tell me more this summer! I have to stay with him!" Mom listened, but did not move or speak.

"Mom..." he started again, this time beginning to cry. "Please! I have to stay with Grandpa. Today, I didn't think I would ever see him again..."

At this, his mom got up and came over to him. She knelt down, wrapped her arms around him once more, and whispered, "I know, sweetheart. I know... I know you're scared because Grandpa's old, and you want to appreciate every minute you have together. I know..."

They might have stayed like that for hours – Mom kneeling by Patrick, his head on her shoulder and her arms around him, as he cried. But after a few minutes, they were interrupted by his father. He had come out of Grandpa's room unnoticed, and now he spoke to Patrick.

"Son..." He rubbed Patrick's back. "Buddy... Grandpa wants to see you now. He's awake and he's asking for his favorite adventurer."

Grandpa looked lifeless on the white-sheeted hospital bed. He had hoses and wires attached to his nose and arms, and several machines next to his head ticked and beeped. The window curtains were open, and Patrick could see the rain beating silently against the glass.

Dad steered Patrick over to a chair next to the bed. Patrick sat down cautiously, unable to take his eyes off Grandpa. Dad pulled up another chair and they sat for a moment together, neither

saying a word. Then Dad reached over, gently put his hand on the back of Patrick's neck, and said, "You can talk to him, buddy. He can still hear you, even if his eyes are closed."

Patrick nodded, but all he could muster was, "Hey, Grandpa." He rubbed his hands together and looked back at his dad, who smiled and nodded reassuringly.

"Hello, my friend." The voice came very softly. Patrick had not seen Grandpa's lips move, and he wasn't certain whether he'd really heard the words or just imagined them. He looked at Dad, raising his eyebrows, and then turned back at Grandpa who was now smiling.

"How are you, Grandpa?" Patrick asked, immediately feeling silly for asking such an obvious question. "I mean, it's good to see you." He stopped talking, afraid of what ridiculous words he might utter next.

"I'm okay, Patrick." This time, Grandpa's voice seemed a bit stronger, though his eyes remained shut. "Just a little tired, but I'll be fine. Tell me... how are you?"

Without a sound Dad stood, patted Patrick's back, and left the room. The two old friends were alone with each other.

"I'm okay, I guess. Just worried about you, Grandpa. Dad said you're going to be okay."

Grandpa smiled again. "Yes, Patrick. I'm not as young as I used to be, but I'm not going anywhere, either. I'm happy to see you. Tell me more... how is school?"

Under the circumstances, Patrick felt embarrassed at sharing news as trivial as school. But he humored Grandpa anyway, explaining that he'd had an okay year. He admitted his grades would not be as good as his parents hoped, which seemed to make Grandpa smile again. He talked a little about some of his teachers, then switched topics to share a funny tale about Ryan. He briefly mentioned Candace's party, too, but his voice trailed off... His eyes moistened again.

“All day, I’ve been thinking about our summer together,” he blurted out. “I was so excited! I was remembering Thomas’s time in China, and how you said you’d tell me about his other adventures.” Patrick’s teary eyes beamed with love for his grandfather.

Grandpa listened with his eyes closed. His hand searched for Patrick’s, and he patted it when he found it.

“Yes, my dad had many other adventures,” Grandpa said softly. “China was only his first. But I think we’ll have to wait. There’s been a change in plans and –”

“I know, Grandpa,” Patrick interrupted, wanting to shield his grandfather from the pain of having to explain bad news which Patrick already knew. “Mom told me. It’s okay. We’ll still visit on weekends, like last summer. It’ll be great anyway!”

Grandpa turned his head towards Patrick and opened his eyes again. They seemed suddenly clear and full of life. When he spoke his voice was strong, just like the man Patrick remembered so well.

“Don’t you worry, my friend. I promised that you would learn about your great-grandfather this summer, and so you shall. But it will not be with me. The universe has conspired to deliver you a very special gift. This summer, you will go with your dad to the Old World.”

Patrick’s body stiffened at the news. He was stunned. His mom had said nothing of this. Patrick had just assumed she would wait to go back to work until after school started again in the fall. He’d never traveled alone with his dad, let alone on a trip to the far side of the world.

“Your mom has done a very good job raising you,” Grandpa continued firmly, locking eyes with Patrick. “She is an amazing mother. Now it is time for her to be an amazing lawyer, too. You have been a good boy, Patrick, and have made her proud. You are also becoming a young man with the heart of an explorer. It’s time for you to follow your dreams. And your dad...”

Grandpa's voice lingered for a few moments. "Your dad is a hard worker. He is also a passionate geologist, father, and son. Sometimes it's good to remember all of these things."

He paused for a moment, as if catching his breath. Then he said, "This summer, I think you will all learn something about yourselves."

Patrick still said nothing. He just stared at his grandfather – unbelieving, scared, and excited at once.

"You and your dad are going to Azerbaijan (AZ-ər-bye-JAHN) next week. It just so happens that your great-grandfather passed that way as he began his second voyage through Asia. You will discover far more about Thomas Eaton in the footsteps of his travels than you ever could with me." He paused, as if to let these words sink in. "But before you go, I must tell you what happened after your great-grandfather reached Kashgar."

7 IN AND OUT OF ASIA

“There are no foreign lands. It is the traveler only who is foreign.”

– Robert Louis Stephenson

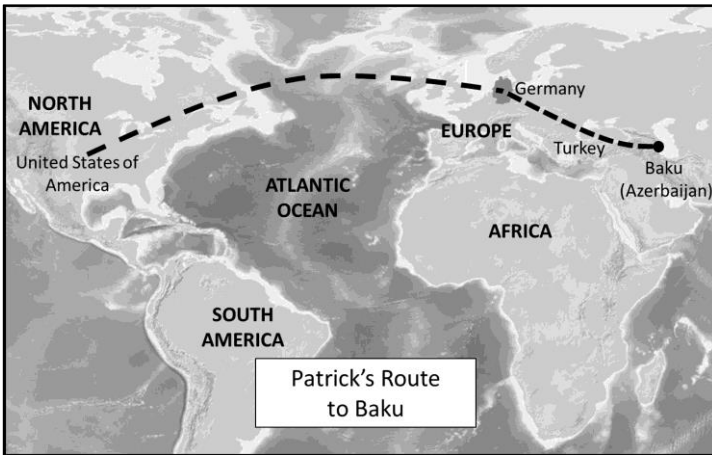
From the plane window Patrick could not make out exactly where they were. The ground below was a patchwork of mountains, rivers, cities and roads. At times, clouds veiled the landscape and their plane seemed to float on an endless white sea of cotton. For a pilot flying this route seventy-five years earlier, it must have been difficult to keep one's bearings and avoid getting lost.

Fortunately, technology had come a long way since then. Patrick shifted his attention from the window to a large television monitor in the front of the cabin. The screen displayed an electronic map of the world so that passengers could follow the plane's progress from Germany to Azerbaijan as a dotted red line. Based on the length of the line – which seemed to stretch about halfway between the two countries – Patrick estimated they had another few hours before they reached their destination.

It had already been a long and tiring day. After a grueling eight-hour flight from the United States, Patrick and his dad had landed in Germany, where they welcomed the brief layover as a chance to stretch their legs. But sitting in the airport lounge chair with his head propped against his coat, Patrick had begun to feel the first effects of jet lag. While it felt like midnight to Patrick – long past his normal bedtime – it was already eight o'clock in the morning in Germany. His body's internal clock was out of sorts. He had tried to take a nap in the terminal, but the sights and sounds

of the international airport were too alluring for a fourteen-year-old boy to be bothered with sleep.

As a hub for travelers from all over the world, the airport's assortment of exotic languages, colorful clothing, and mouth-watering restaurant aromas had dazzled Patrick. He had sat quietly observing the hundreds of people who passed back and forth in front of him on their way to far corners of the world. From time to time, he had entertained himself by assigning made-up identities to the more interesting-looking individuals.



For instance, he might imagine one person as a father on his way home to a family, another as an engineer off to build a bridge, and a third – the man with the curled mustache and heavy coat – as a spy looking to make a secret “drop.” He would barely begin to study this person's leather bag or moccasin shoes, or take note of that person's beautiful jewelry or striking facial features – and then make up a fitting story – before they disappeared into the crowd and were replaced with someone equally intriguing. All the while, in the background, an endless throng of busy travelers – hurrying this way and that – twisted and turned like the body of a huge snake.

At last, unable to keep his eyes open any longer, Patrick had fallen asleep against his dad's shoulder. But after what seemed like only a couple minutes, he was awakened by the call to board their plane for the last leg of their trip to Azerbaijan. Now he sat in a cramped plane seat, tired but unable to sleep, staring out a tiny window at the scenery far below.

Throughout the day, Patrick had been too busy to think much about his conversation with Grandpa a week ago. Between playing video games, talking with Dad, and people-watching at the airport, he'd been completely distracted. But now, with the battery of his video game dead and his dad working on his computer, Patrick's mind returned to his grandfather.

It was hard to believe that only five days had passed since they had visited the old man at the hospital. Since then, Grandpa had continued to feel better and had returned home to his cabin. Patrick and his dad had driven up to Springdale yesterday to check on him and bid farewell for the summer. As they were headed out the door to return home, Patrick had gone over to hug Grandpa in his chair by the fire. The old man surprised him by slipping Patrick a fist-sized package wrapped in plastic. When Patrick drew back to examine it, Grandpa gestured to put it in his pocket.

"Take it with you on your adventure and read it as you go," he had said with a wink.

On the ride home last night, Patrick was nearly overcome with excitement. He peeled away the plastic slightly – just enough to detect what appeared to be an old book, its yellowed pages tightly bound in a worn leather cover. Despite his overwhelming curiosity, Patrick managed to control the urge to tear away the remaining plastic. He wanted to honor Grandpa's instructions and wait until his adventure began. So, when he got home he stowed the package in his luggage, fully intending to read it the next day during his long flight to Germany.

But with all the excitement this morning – calling Ryan to say goodbye, rushing to get the car packed, and satisfying Mom's

endless pleas for hugs and kisses – Patrick forgot all about the package. He didn't remember it again until after he had already checked his luggage at the airport. Consequently, his mystery gift sat in the underbelly of the plane, packed in with all the other suitcases. He'd have to wait until Azerbaijan to explore its secrets.

Patrick peered down at the landscape of Europe, which crept slowly past his window far below. In the distance the sun glinted off what looked like a large body of water. Looking up at the television screen, he could see that they were about to fly over the Black Sea. It wouldn't be much longer before they entered Turkey's airspace.

He turned back to the window. As clouds once again obscured the view below, his mind drifted back to his bedside talk with Grandpa one week ago.

As it turned out, Kashgar had been Thomas Eaton's home for five months. One reason was simply that he could not leave. After a long and arduous journey across China, Patrick's great-grandfather was too tired and weak to undertake another long expedition. Over the previous four months he had shed almost thirty pounds and suffered various ailments from insect bites, malnourishment, and drinking unclean water. While he expected to quickly recover his health, he was nevertheless confronted by a much larger problem, and one that ultimately forced him to stay put – geography.

According to many who have been there, Kashgar lies farther from the ocean than any other city in the world. Notwithstanding its actual distance from the Pacific or Indian Oceans, the natural barriers that surround it have made the city an oasis for most of history. To Kashgar's north, west, and south lie some of the world's tallest mountains. While a few narrow paths wind over and between these peaks, they are nearly impenetrable for much of the year due to heavy snowfall, avalanches, and

flooding from monsoon rains. To Kashgar's east stretches one of the world's most desolate and forbidding deserts – the Taklamakan. Travelers courageous enough to enter it must endure temperatures ranging from below freezing in the winter to over 120 degrees in summer. But perhaps more terrifying than its extreme cold or heat are the Taklamakan's epic sandstorms, which are said to have trapped – and even buried – entire caravans of unlucky voyagers.

Considering that winter had only just begun, Thomas's hosts in Kashgar insisted he remain as their guests until at least spring, when the frozen mountain passes would finally begin to thaw. In light of his condition, Thomas could hardly object. Looking up at the intimidating snow-capped peaks, he was not especially anxious to get on the road right away. Besides, he greatly enjoyed the warm reception given to him by the British consulate. After countless nights sleeping on the cold ground, eating plain soup and rice, and unable to let down his guard even for a moment, Thomas was grateful for a bed, nutritious food, and the protection of the consulate walls.

Consulates are diplomatic offices that one country establishes within the borders of another country. While similar to embassies, they are usually smaller. They are designed to help fellow citizens who are visiting or working in that foreign country, as well as to maintain friendly relationships with the local government. Consulates can assist travelers with obtaining visas (permissions to enter a country), help expatriates (citizens that live and work abroad), and assist migrants and refugees.

Since the 1800s, the British consulate in Kashgar did all of these things and more – and not just for British citizens. It was known far and wide as a safe haven in an otherwise harsh and dangerous Central Asia. Weather-beaten trekkers from all countries and walks of life could depend on a warm meal, soft bed, and friendly conversation in Kashgar. The consulate was also a jumping-off point for treasure-hunters who undertook expeditions

into Tibet and western China in search of buried artifacts. Finally, it was no great secret that the consulate was a listening post for British spies who kept tabs on their giant neighbor and rival to the north – Russia.

As an American, Thomas was somewhat of an enigma in Kashgar. Of course, he was not the first person from the United States to visit. But none shared his reputation as a world-famous journalist. The British were familiar with his newspaper stories from Shanghai, and they begged for one account after the next as to how he had out-witted and exposed that city's corrupt underbelly and yet managed to escape with his life.

His new friends were also interested to learn what Thomas knew about the rising Communist Party of China, the group that had formed in Shanghai while Thomas was there. Just a few years before, in 1917, another communist group known as the Bolsheviks (BOL-sheh-viks) had overthrown Russia's Tsar and established a new government, the Soviet Union. Since then, communism had begun to spread its tentacles into Europe and Asia.

Britain suspected that the Soviet Union was encouraging uprisings and revolutions in other countries. If so, then both communism and the new Soviet Union posed a serious threat to Britain. What would happen if the Soviet Union managed to replace the governments of China, India, Afghanistan, or Persia with communist systems? Would this cost Britain its colony in India? Might Britain be driven out of Asia entirely?

In 1924, these were big and important questions for those who worked at the consulate. For weeks, Thomas was plied with food and drink in return for entertaining and informing the lonely gatekeepers of this distant outpost. They never seemed to grow tired of this fascinating character from America. He told exciting tales and brought them valuable information – all with a larger-than-life personality and charming accent that could only belong to a man from Montana.

Over the next several months, Thomas also became friends with fellow travelers and locals. He even managed to get an invitation to dinner at the Soviet consulate down the road, whose chief was an arch-rival of the British Consul-General and understandably suspicious of travelers from Europe or America. As he had done many times before, Thomas loosened lips, gathered information, and brought smiles to the faces of all he met and wherever he went.

At some point during his stay in Kashgar, Thomas also developed an interest in archaeology. Perhaps the stories of buried towns and caravans had captured his imagination and thirst for treasure. Or, more likely, the rich history, culture, and art of Central Asia sparked an intellectual passion for discovery and understanding that he could not put to rest. In any case, events had transpired in Kashgar that were to forever change the course of his life.

The following April, at the first hint of melting snow, Thomas had tossed his pack onto his shoulders, bade farewell to his friends, and set off with a guide and team of yaks. His destination was south to the city of Yarkand (YAR-canned), and from there over the mighty Karakoram (CARE-uh-CORE-um) Pass – a well-known but perilous route to India that, at times, surpasses 19,000 feet in elevation. Over the centuries, countless locals, explorers, tourists and spies had perished trying to navigate the boulder-strewn crevasses and cliffs of this legendary route.

As Thomas stood atop the pass – straddling the border with India and high above all the world – perhaps he paused to look back at China and contemplate all he had seen and done there. More likely, however, he had only flashed a smile before hastily turning south towards his next adventure. Asia had gripped his heart and mind, and whatever his immediate plans, there was little doubt that he would soon find a reason to return.

8 LAND OF FIRE

"Geography determines the course of history."

– Herodotus

After arriving at their hotel in Baku (Bah-COO), the capital city of Azerbaijan, Patrick slept for nearly five hours. Although he managed to keep his eyes open during the taxi ride from the airport, his body collapsed as soon as it touched the satin sheets of the hotel bed. When he awoke later that evening, his dad was sitting at a table by the window with his laptop computer open and talking to someone on the phone – probably his boss. On the television, a soccer match between two European countries was narrated in a strange language.

Patrick threw back the covers and sat up, still in his traveling clothes. Even after his long nap he felt exhausted. He wandered groggily over to the window next to his dad and peered out at the bright lights of the city. He could have easily been looking at Chicago or Atlanta.

"Feeling better?" his dad asked when he hung up. Patrick shook his head and rubbed his eyes. "What do you say we go downstairs for a bite to eat? That might help. There are some folks we need to meet, anyway." Patrick yawned and nodded. His belly grumbled agreement.

The elevator doors opened to a lavishly decorated lobby. A vast mosaic marble floor spread out before them, surrounded by gold-trimmed pillars that reached the ceiling. Far above the lobby, a massive dome of brightly colored glass mirrored the patterns on

the floor. A pristine, white grand piano stood by itself in the far corner of the lobby.

Patrick and his dad hustled past the busy hotel attendants to a crowded restaurant on the other side of the lobby. They stood for a moment at the entrance as his dad's eyes searched the tables for a familiar face. Out of the crowd emerged a grinning, middle-aged man in a gray suit, his frosted hair combed neatly to one side, and a hand outstretched.

"Good to see you, Dan!" the man said loudly over the noise of the crowd.

Smiling in return, Patrick's dad shook his hand and replied just as loudly, "How are you, Roger? It's been what – a year?"

"Sounds about right. Things have been busy here. Lots of progress, as you may have heard. You'll probably see some things around town that make you think you've been gone longer. Baku continues to grow and grow." He stepped closer and lowered his voice, still smiling. "Behind me are the folks from British Oil and Gas, and over there is one of the Chinese companies." He paused, scanning the room. "There are the Iranians. Oh yeah, and the Russians are way in the back... as usual."

"Looks like everyone's at the party," Dad replied, nodding. "Roger, this is my son, Patrick. He's helping me out this summer. His mom's gone back to work and... well, he's along to keep me out of trouble."

"Terrific!" Roger beamed, turning to Patrick. "I'm Roger Neilson, U.S. State Department. I work here in Baku. When folks like your dad come into town, I like to meet with them, help out with paperwork and so forth, and fill them in on the situation here. What a great opportunity you have to see life on this side of the world!"

Patrick smiled and shook his hand. He recalled his conversation with Grandpa from the previous week. "Do you work at the consulate?" he asked.

Roger looked surprised for a moment, and then said matter-of-factly, “Nope, an embassy. Baku is too big a city for a consulate. But you clearly know your stuff, don’t you?” Patrick nodded proudly.

“I got us a table in the corner,” Roger continued, pointing to the back. “Skip hasn’t arrived yet?” Skip was Dad’s boss. “Well, it’ll just be the three of us then. You’ll meet your interpreter tomorrow.” He looked at Patrick, adding, “Unless you happen to speak Azeri.” Patrick shook his head. “No? What about Turkish? Hmm. Russian?” He chuckled as he led them over to the table where he had been sitting.

“Actually,” he continued once they had been seated, “You’ll be surprised to find that many people here – especially the younger ones – speak English, as well as French, German, and several other languages. Baku has become quite cosmopolitan over the past twenty-five years.” He hesitated, looking rather amused. “Although, I guess you could say it has always been a place of great diversity...”

The quizzical look on Patrick’s face encouraged Roger to continue.

“Azerbaijan has continually attracted foreigners. Over the past two thousand years it has been ruled by one empire after the next – the Greeks, Persians, Mongols, you name it... In the early 1800s, it was Russia’s turn.”

Roger paused to check his cell phone, and then took a sip of water. Seeing the interest in Patrick’s eyes, the diplomat continued.

“Azerbaijan’s geography has been valuable to the strategies of many empires. Think about it: the country lies directly between Europe and Asia. It borders the Caspian Sea, and literally sits right in the middle of Russia, Turkey, and Iran (Persia). Armies have crisscrossed the region time and again.”

Patrick tried to recall any mention of Azerbaijan in his world history class, but he drew a blank. He’d heard of the

Russian Empire of course, and the Persian and Ottoman empires, too. Roger carried on with the history lesson, obviously relishing Patrick's interest.

"Azerbaijan was part of the Russian Empire for a hundred years until it finally declared independence in 1918. However, its freedom was short-lived. The Russians returned less than two years later – this time as the newly formed Soviet Union. They came for Baku's oil, but eventually conquered the entire country. It was a very bloody and tragic affair for the Azerbaijani people. In the end, Azerbaijan became another cog in the Soviet machine. It wasn't until 1991 – when the Soviet Union was collapsing – that Azerbaijan finally became independent again."

Patrick recalled the Soviet Union from Grandpa's story last week. Centered in Moscow, the government was communist and sometimes encouraged rebellions in other countries in the hope that they, too, would embrace communism and fight against the capitalist West.

"But aside from geography, oil and gas are what continue to attract the world's attention. Even Azerbaijan's name comes from a Persian word *azar*, meaning *fire*. The name probably originated with the ancient Zoroastrians, who burned oil in their fire-temples. I believe Marco Polo even referred to Azerbaijan's oil way back in the thirteenth century, as well. But it wasn't until the invention of the internal combustion engine (in the 1800s) that Baku really grew. That was the beginning of its oil boom. All the world's oil companies came here, and soon Baku's population was growing faster than that of London, New York, or Paris. By 1900, this little city was producing half the world's oil!"

Patrick's dad nodded along. He must have heard this lecture before. Patrick sipped his water, riveted to Roger's explanation. It was incredible that a place he'd never heard of before last week actually seemed to be one of the most important cities in the world.

“And guess what? It’s no different today.” Roger tapped his empty water glass on the table to emphasize his point. “It’s still Baku’s oil and gas that gets the world’s attention. The Soviets had this place locked down for half a century, but since the 1990s it has been, well... open for business. And the economy has boomed as a result.” Roger gestured at the room of well-dressed business people. “No more communism. Azerbaijan is a constitutional republic now.”

Just then their waiter arrived with their food. Patrick had gone with a safe bet – a hamburger – which he was rather surprised to find on a menu so far from home.

“Are all these people here for oil?” Patrick asked when the waiter had left.

“Not quite,” Roger answered. “Azerbaijan is becoming quite the tourist attraction, too. Although, it still has a lot of work to do in that arena...” He took a bite of his rice dish and dabbed his mouth with a napkin. “Actually, that brings me to the reason for our dinner. I need to brief you and your dad on the current situation here.”

Roger straightened up and laced his fingers together on the table in front of him, temporarily forgetting about his meal. He launched into another talk – this time about modern Baku. As he spoke, his eyes frequently darted from Patrick and his dad to scan the room, cataloguing all who entered or left the restaurant.

“As I said, this city has grown tremendously. It’s a virtual metropolis. There are museums, galleries, malls, bowling alleys, cinemas, and fast food. The amount of wealth this city is attracting is astonishing. But it can still be dicey for travelers, so you should stay on your toes.”

Roger pointed out the dangers of exploring the city alone at night. He explained that the roads and traffic were inconvenient at best – and hazardous at worst – and recommended using the city’s metro instead. Above all, he insisted Patrick and his dad stay within city limits, as the regions surrounding Baku are

exceptionally risky, especially for Westerners. “Not that you plan to leave the city... but if you do, I can’t guarantee your safety.”

Roger spoke for a good ten minutes and then, as if to let his words sink in, returned to his dinner. A few bites later, though, he added a final point.

“Keep your passports and visas on you at all times – you may be asked by the authorities to show them. And you don’t want to risk having them stolen out of your hotel room. There have been reports of thieves posing as hotel room service or maintenance workers.”

With that, he leaned back in his chair and sipped coffee, satisfied his briefing was complete.

9 INTERESTS

“Few are those who see with their own
eyes and feel with their own hearts.”

– Albert Einstein

After they bade farewell to Roger and returned to their room, Patrick and his dad called Mom to let her know how their day went. Then Patrick stretched out on his bed and flipped through channels on the television while Dad took a shower. Only a few were in English, but Patrick wasn't really listening anyway. He was pondering Roger's dinner talk.

Roger Neilson seemed to be a walking encyclopedia of Azerbaijan. He'd answered every question Patrick had asked without so much as glancing at a book, map, or the internet. According to Dad, Roger had worked in this region for many years. He spoke several languages and had even adopted some of the local customs. For instance, when they were leaving the restaurant Roger had shown Patrick the traditional method by which men greet other men in Azerbaijan. He shook Patrick's hand, kissed his cheek, and said “salaam” (sa-LAHM), which in Arabic means both “peace” and “hello.” The display of affection caught Patrick by surprise, and he blushed. Roger laughed and assured him that this greeting was very common throughout the Muslim world.

According to Dad, he and Roger had become friends during many trips to Azerbaijan. Dad explained that Americans who work overseas tend to stick together. And they often get to know their embassy officials, too – especially in countries with

paperwork hassles or security problems. Roger had a good relationship with the oil and gas company Dad worked for, and he always did his best to smooth out any diplomatic wrinkles for its employees. But he was also available to assist any Americans who stepped on Azerbaijan's soil and asked his help.

Patrick was able to grasp most of what Roger shared with them about the relationship between the governments of the United States and Azerbaijan. On one hand, it made sense that the United States supported democracy here. In school he learned that the United States promoted democracy throughout the world. And it seemed logical, too, that the United States wanted to help Azerbaijan's free market economy grow. No longer suffocated by communism, the country could now sell oil to the world, which meant that the Azerbaijani people had more jobs and more money. These all seemed like good reasons for the United States to be involved in Azerbaijan.

But Patrick was a bit confused by some of the other things Roger said. For example, Roger kept referring to the United States' "strategic interests" in Azerbaijan. Patrick wasn't really sure what was meant by "interest." Roger had also repeatedly used terms like "regional cooperation" and "energy security." Patrick had heard these terms in the news back home, but he was unclear exactly what they meant, too. His teachers said that the United States' role was to keep the world free and safe – an explanation that had always seemed reasonable enough.

But now, sitting in a hotel room in Baku, he wondered if these U.S. "interests" had less to do with freedom and democracy, and more to do with geography and energy. After all, Roger had emphasized over and over that it was Azerbaijan's location on the map and its oil and gas – not its freedom or democracy – that had made it so valuable to empires throughout history. Patrick decided he would try to learn more.

"Find anything to watch?" his dad asked, drying his hair with a towel. Patrick shook his head. "Well, there will be plenty

of other stuff to do here. Tomorrow we'll meet our interpreter, and maybe even take a stroll around town." Patrick nodded in reply.

His dad sat down on his own bed, facing Patrick. "You haven't said much today. Are you all right?"

"Yeah, Dad, I'm fine. Just tired." He stared at the television for a while. "How long are we going to be in Baku?"

"For a couple months. But like I said on the plane, we might take a trip over to Turkmenistan at some point. It's still up in the air. But if we go, I think you'll find that place very interesting."

"Turkey?" Patrick asked, this time looking at his dad. He knew where Turkey was from the large map he'd seen on the airplane.

"No – Turkmenistan. Different country altogether. It's on the other side of the Caspian Sea – east of here. In the meantime, I need to spend the next few days at our local office. You can hang out here at the hotel. Between television, your video games and the pool, you ought to stay entertained."

"Can't I go to the office with you?" Patrick asked, hopefully.

"Maybe we can take a tour some day later this week, but the office here isn't really much of a place for kids. Just a bunch of people discussing where to put drill rigs and pipelines. I doubt you'd find it very interesting." He smiled. "Hardly the stuff of a fourteen-year-old boy's imagination."

"But I thought geologists did cool stuff outside, like look for gold or gemstones. Isn't that what you used to do?"

His dad had started to get up, but now he hesitated and looked over at the television for a few seconds. Then he turned back to Patrick.

"Yeah, at one time I did. But that was long ago. Field geology is a young man's game. I probably could have stuck with it, but that would have meant being gone all the time. When you

were born, I made the decision to work in an office, instead, so that I could be home with you and Mom.”

“But you’re never home, anyway. You’re always at the office,” said Patrick glumly, looking back at the television. “If you’re going to be at work, shouldn’t you just do what you love?”

His Dad watched his son for several seconds, as if trying to find his words. Patrick pretended to be engrossed in a Turkish game show.

“I *do* love my job, Patrick. But I love you and Mom more. I try my best to give you both a good life. I realize it’s not always a perfect arrangement. Believe me, there are times that I wish I could be out in the desert looking for gemstones...” His voice trailed off, as if he sensed he had gone too far. “It won’t be as bad as you think, buddy. We’ll have some fun, too – starting tomorrow.”

He went to brush his teeth.

Patrick rolled over and closed his eyes. Two months in Baku, sitting in a hotel room and watching television. What an adventure, he thought cynically. He could hardly wait to tell Grandpa of his wild summer. Gee, Grandpa, I learned so much about Thomas’s adventures in Asia while swimming laps in the hotel pool! Boy, it sure is exciting being an Eaton – what thrilling television shows we get to watch!

Frustrated, his thoughts turned back to his great-grandfather. Grandpa had explained that, after crossing the Karakorum Pass, Thomas trekked south through India to the coastal city of Bombay, now known as Mumbai (moom-BYE). From there, he had boarded an ocean liner back to the United States. He was only a year older than when he’d left San Francisco, but he now possessed what amounted to a millennium of wisdom.

His new passion for the ancient history and art of Central Asia led Thomas back to college, where he earned a graduate degree in archaeology. His research focused on the Silk Road, its

geography and importance to world empires, and the various goods that were traded by caravans between China, Rome, and Persia. Mostly, though, he became fascinated with Silk Road money: the gold, silver, and bronze coins that could be found strewn from one side of Asia to the other.

Thomas pored over the discoveries of other archaeologists who had searched the Taklamakan Desert decades earlier. Some of these pioneers had uncovered coins and jewelry, as well as paintings, sculptures, and texts that told the history of Western China. Many had stayed at the same consulate in Kashgar as Thomas. Nearly all were scorned by the Chinese government, which viewed them as irresponsible treasure hunters who had robbed China of its cultural wealth.

Thomas hungered to return to Central Asia and pursue the coins and other artifacts that still lay beneath its sands. Along the way, he also hoped to improve the reputation of archaeologists. Perhaps he would finally help dispel the label, *gweilo*, by which he and so many other Western travelers were known in China.

That was where the story of Thomas Eaton had ended. Grandpa explained that it was up to Patrick to learn what happened next. To do this, all that was required was for Patrick to keep his eyes open and his heart true. The secret gift that Grandpa had given him would serve as a guide. Keep it close, Grandpa said, but don't rely upon it completely. Many years have passed – and much had undoubtedly changed – since Thomas visited Asia.

Hugging him on their final night together, Grandpa had said, “You are an Eaton, Patrick, which means you must think and see for yourself. You come from a long line of explorers, but you must never forget that you are your own man.”

With that, Patrick smiled. Tomorrow, he would investigate Grandpa's gift. And, somehow – some way – he would make this summer about more than just an air-conditioned hotel room. The universe had conspired to bring him here, his Grandpa had told him. The rest was up to Patrick.

10 IN POLO'S FOOTSTEPS

“The world is a book and those who
do not travel read only one page.”

— St. Augustine

The next morning Patrick awoke early. His body was still struggling with jet lag – the tiring effects of traveling from one time zone to another. Dad had said it would take several days at least before his body would adjust.

Patrick crept across the dark room to the window and, peeling back a curtain, realized it was still dark outside. He sighed and rubbed his eyes, unsure what to do next. The clock by their beds showed 5:20. Dad was still asleep and Patrick didn't want to wake him by turning on a light or the television.

He stumbled back to his side of the room where his suitcase lay open near his bed. Groping around the clothes inside, his hands discovered the plastic wrapping of Grandpa's gift. Quietly, he retrieved it and made his way to the bathroom. After shutting the door, he turned on the light and looked down at the mysterious package.

Grandpa had told Patrick to open the gift once his adventure had begun. Well, according to his dad, sitting in a hotel room was about as much adventure as Patrick could expect this summer. So, he might as well have a look now.

He started peeling back the plastic where he'd left off a couple nights before. Within a few seconds he was left holding a

well-worn, leather-bound book. Imprinted on the front cover, in faded gold lettering, were these words:

**JOURNAL OF
THOMAS PATRICK EATON,
A SILK ROADS EXPEDITION, 1928-**

Patrick sat and stared at the cover for several minutes. He couldn't believe what he was seeing – his great-grandfather's journal! His pulse quickened and his hands began to sweat. Gingerly, he peeled back the cover to look inside. On the first page were the same words as on the cover, this time printed in dark lettering. Beneath the text was a hand-written message scrawled in ink:

*For my son (born 10/23/1927) -
May the road rise up to meet you·
May the wind always be at your back·
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
and rains fall soft upon your fields·*

Patrick recalled seeing these words somewhere else. Then it occurred to him they were framed in a picture at Grandpa's house in Springdale. These were the first lines of an old Irish prayer, his Grandpa had once told him. Patrick couldn't remember how the rest of the prayer went.

He continued to ponder the inscription. Something about the date grabbed his attention – 1927. If Grandpa was born in 1927, that would mean he was almost ninety years old. But that couldn't be right, could it? Patrick strained to remember Grandpa's age – it seemed like he was born during the Great Depression which, as best as Patrick could remember, took place during the 1930s. If so, then Grandpa couldn't be older than eighty

or so. Patrick shook his head in exasperation – he always had a hard time doing math in his head. He would have to remember to ask his dad later.

The next several pages were filled with his great-grandfather's handwriting. He had used pencil, and in some places letters were smeared. But Patrick could make out most of the words if he read slowly. They began like this:

April 25, 1928. It has been three days since arriving in Istanbul [is-tan-BOOL]. This old city lies on the western shore of Anatolia [anna-TOLL-ia: the traditional name for the region of Turkey], the crossroads of the world. For thousands of years, Istanbul – known in ancient times as Byzantium and then Constantinople – has stood guard over the land bridge between Europe and Asia, as well as the waterway that connects the Mediterranean and Black Seas. It has served as the capital of many empires and watched countless others pass by – both on foot and by ship – on their way to conquer distant lands.

Stepping off the boat, my feet were as light as feathers, as if rejoicing in their return to the Old World and the splendid quest that lies ahead. Although Istanbul is nearly 5,000 miles from Shanghai – precisely on the opposite side of the continent from where my previous journey began more than four years ago – I believe it is the ideal place to begin my second trek across Asia.

For one thing, Anatolia is the western starting place of the legendary Silk Road. From here, trade and culture spread east across mountains and deserts all the way to China, and back again. And this same city welcomed the great explorer Marco Polo when he returned from China over 600 years ago.

Anatolia is also the birthplace of coins. As early as the seventh century B.C., the people of Lydia minted coins made of "electrum," an alloy of silver and gold found naturally in the pebbles of the Pactolus River, just south of here. Over the centuries, Greek and Roman coins passed through Anatolia on their way to China, as well as to and from Mesopotamia to the south.

My goal over the next year is to follow the legendary Silk Road from one side of the continent to the other. I aim to retrace the footsteps of the traders and pilgrims who carried not only coins, but also goods, ideas, customs, religions, art, technology, and language across the world. I plan to experience for myself the tastes and sounds of Central and Eastern Asia, which in so many places have hardly changed over the past two thousand years. I hope to discover evidence of lost oasis towns and caravans, many of which were already buried and gone by the time Polo visited. With a bit of luck, I might also unearth some of their treasures and artifacts, which have been locked away for so long.

My mission will almost certainly call upon all the knowledge I acquired during my studies at university. It may also depend on my skills as a journalist, and the perspectives I gained during my other travels. But, without a doubt, the coming months will test all my courage, determination, and endurance. For now, I bid farewell to the safety and familiarity of the Western world, and once more enter Asia.

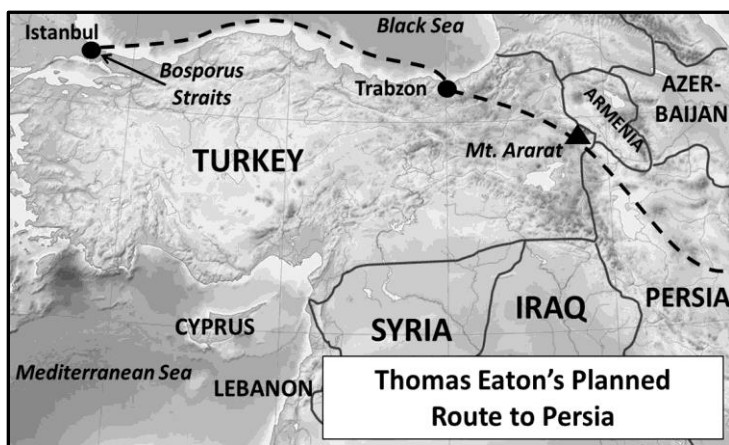
Awed by his great-grandfather's goals, Patrick put down the journal to reflect on what he had read. He heard his dad rustling about in the room, but after a few moments, all was quiet again. His dad was still asleep. Patrick smiled to himself. Some people just aren't cut out for life on the road!

He opened the journal again. The next several pages contained a lengthy "to-do" list of preparations for Thomas's journey. For example, there were supplies to be purchased and paperwork to be filled out and approved by local officials. A chart showed food items that he would need to buy – rice, flour, dried meat and fish – as well as cookware and containers for drinking water. He had brought with him from the United States all the items he would need for his archaeological research – a compass, field tools, maps, and various books.

On a following page, a map showed the route that Thomas intended to follow to China. First he would take another boat ride – this time north from Istanbul through the Bosphorus (BOSS-pore-us) Straits, into the Black Sea, and then east along the northern shore of Turkey. Thomas planned to go ashore at Trabzon (trab-ZONE), another old Silk Road city, to meet his guide. He would purchase the majority of his equipment and food there, as well as a crew of several locals and at least a dozen horses. From Trabzon, he would then head south over land. This route was one of many

that led from Istanbul (Constantinople) to the Silk Roads' southern destination, Persia (modern-day Iran). It was also the path taken by Marco Polo.

Patrick used his finger to trace the course his great-grandfather planned to take. According to a note which Thomas had scribbled at the bottom of the map, his trek from Istanbul to Persia would cover some fifteen hundred miles. While his boat ride across the Black Sea might be relatively easy, from Trabzon he would have to navigate a difficult mountain range before finally reaching the flat floodplains of Mesopotamia.



Along the way, Thomas planned a brief “side trip” east to Mt. Ararat in Armenia. In his journal he wrote:

Marco Polo stopped here, too, and described its natural springs and baths, which he believed were among the best in the world. However, I am drawn particularly to Mt. Ararat for its own historical importance. According to the Bible, this snow-capped mountain is the final resting spot of Noah's Ark. The region was also important in the development of coins -

its metalworkers fashioned various metals into currency and other items over two thousand years ago. I plan to discover whatever I can during my visit.

Patrick again heard his dad stirring. He closed the journal and opened the bathroom door. The curtains were open and the light from the window bathed their room in a soft orange glow.

“Well, look who’s the early bird!” said his dad, grinning. “What have you been up doing?”

Patrick shrugged casually and flipped on the television. “Nothing much. Are you going to the office today?”

“Nope. Today you and I will have a little fun around town. First, we need to meet our interpreter. Then, I thought we’d take the metro over to Old City and have a look around.”

“Old City?” Patrick asked.

“Yep. Old City is the historical center of Baku. Lots of interesting sights there. Then, I think we’ll meet Roger and Skip for lunch. After that, who knows?” Dad’s boss was a big, gregarious Texan whom Patrick had liked from the first time they’d met.

Patrick pulled on his clothes and grabbed his backpack. Slouching in a chair, he watched a Turkish soap opera while his dad shaved and got dressed. There was something Patrick had meant to ask him, but now he couldn’t remember what it was. Ten minutes later Dad was ready, and they left the room in search of breakfast.

Just before the door closed, however, it occurred to Patrick that he’d forgotten his passport in the room. Remembering Roger’s advice about thieves, he hurried back inside to grab it. Seeing the journal by his pillow, he decided to bring it, as well. Stuffing the items in his backpack while they walked to the elevator, Patrick found himself wondering which of the two he could least do without.

11 OLD CITY

“Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai Whose
Portals are alternate Night and Day, How
Sultn after Sultn with his Pomp Abode his
destined Hour, and went his way.”

– Omar Khayyam

Their interpreter was waiting for them in the hotel lobby after breakfast. A somewhat pudgy man in a baggy brown suit, he sat in a chair near the hotel entrance, sipping coffee and looking uncomfortable. He seemed to recognize Patrick's dad and stood up awkwardly – nearly spilling his drink – and extended his hand in greeting.

“Ah, Bey Eaton, so nice to meet you. My name is Ahmed Batuk [ÖHK-med ba-TOOK] – interpreter at your service.” He smiled enthusiastically.

“Greetings, Ahmed. I'm Dan Eaton and this is my son, Patrick.” He placed his hand on Patrick's shoulder.

Ahmed bowed slightly to shake his hand. “It is a pleasure to meet you, Patrick.” Patrick smiled back and, following Roger's example from the night before, blurted out “Salaam.”

Ahmed's face showed surprise at first, and then softened into a grin. “Wa alaykum,” he replied in Arabic. Translating to English, he added, “And peace be upon you.”

Turning back to Patrick's father, Ahmed continued, “Mr. Neilson has asked that I assist you in any way possible. I also have a car and will take you wherever you please.”

Dad looked at Patrick and grinned. “Well, I guess we’ll have to risk Baku’s roads, after all, won’t we? No metro for us today.” To Ahmed he said, “We would like to see Old City this morning. My son is quite a student of history.” Patrick blushed, unsure why his dad said this.

“Yes, of course, Bey Eaton. Old City is an excellent place to see the history of Baku. I am happy to take you there.” He escorted them through the hotel doors out to the busy street, where his taxi was parked nearby.

The ride to the Old City was terrifying. Ahmed could have been a world champion race-car driver anywhere else in the world. He accelerated quickly, swerved violently between cars and potholes, honked his horn relentlessly, slowed down only by slamming on his brakes – and always at the last second – and he did all this while speaking casually about Baku, as if he were simply sitting on a park bench sipping coffee and chatting with old friends.

Perched on the edge of the back seat, Patrick’s eyes bulged and his knuckles whitened from clenching the headrest of the seat in front of him. His body swayed with each hair-raising swerve or two-wheeled roundabout, and if it hadn’t been for his seatbelt he undoubtedly would have had a bruised forehead. During several close-calls, Patrick glanced at his dad sitting next to him, whose face wore a grin and seemed to be on the verge of laughter. Dad appeared to be thoroughly enjoying this crazy roller coaster ride! How could this be the same man that Patrick knew from home – the businessman and stickler for rules?

When his eyes weren’t focused on the traffic, Patrick glimpsed from his window a blur of high-rise buildings, richly decorated houses and shops, tree-lined boulevards, and sidewalks crowded with pedestrians. He could not recall visiting a city as large as Baku. Every so often, he caught sight of three colossal blue skyscrapers shaped like flames in the distance. He recalled Roger’s comment about the origin of Azerbaijan’s name – from

azar, meaning *fire* in Persian. Wow, Patrick thought, even its architecture reflects the importance of oil and gas to Azerbaijan.

“Yes,” Ahmed continued talking to Patrick’s father, “Baku continues to grow. Two million people now! The problem is the roads, as you can see. Very busy, very dangerous! The government has built walkways under them to keep pedestrians away. But every year many people are hurt, or worse, in traffic accidents.” He swerved to narrowly miss a car that was changing lanes.

“And what about you?” Patrick’s dad asked. “Are you from Baku?”

“Me? No, no! I am from the countryside to the west. I came to Baku many years ago, just before the Soviets left...” He pointed out his window to an enormous, drab concrete building covered in square windows, arches, and pinnacles on the roof. Surrounding it was an equally massive and monotonous wall. “Speaking of the Soviets, that is their former palace. Now it’s our House of Government. Most Soviet landmarks were torn down after 1991 to make room for all this.” With his other hand, he swept the modern architecture that pierced the skyline. “Even the Lenin Museum – once dedicated to the Soviet Premier – is now a museum for carpets and rugs!” He chuckled.

“I assume you speak Russian, too?” asked Dad.

“Yes, I am fluent in Russian. Most Azerbaijanis speak at least a little Russian. I also speak Azeri and Turkish. And English of course! What do you think?” He looked at them in the rearview window, eyebrows raised optimistically.

“Your English is good.” Dad replied. “Much better than my Azeri!” Ahmed laughed.

Through the front windshield Patrick could see they were approaching what looked to be a gigantic castle. “Is that a fortress?” he asked to no one in particular.

“Yes, indeed,” Ahmed replied. “Welcome to Old City, or Inner City as it is sometimes called. It was built in medieval times

– the twelfth century or so – although some say it is older. Very beautiful. Look over there.” He pointed again, his eyes seemingly never watching the road. Patrick found it amazing they had not hit anything yet. “That is the Maiden tower. Very old – fifteenth century perhaps. We Azerbaijanis are proud of that monument – her image is on our coins and paper money.”

“Why is it called the ‘Maiden Tower?’” Patrick inquired, peering at the tall, cylinder-shaped stone structure.

“Good question!” Ahmed seemed delighted that his guests were taking such interest in his culture. “Many stories exist. One is that the king – the Khan of Baku – forced his daughter to marry. She was so unhappy that she leapt from the tower into the Caspian Sea rather than live a life she couldn’t choose for herself. Another story says her brother locked her up, and she jumped to avoid a life of imprisonment. Yet another suggests that, because the fortress was never taken by force...”

Ahmed was interrupted by another driver who tried to cut him off. He shouted a stream of insults and abuses from his window, honking his horn and gesturing wildly with his hands. An instant later, he was calm and smiling again, and continued as if nothing had happened.

“Yes, many stories. But who knows?”

They parked on the street outside the fortress. Ahmed pointed out that they would have to pay a hefty fee to drive inside Old City. Besides, he said, they would be able to see more by walking.

As they strode through the thick stone entrance to the walled city, it seemed to Patrick they had been transported a thousand years into the past. The ultramodern buildings, sleek automobiles, and electric pulse of their taxi ride were gone. Here, the air was clear and calm, carrying only the echoes of their footsteps from the traditional stone structures, courtyards, and ornate fountains.

The three of them strolled down the main road, Dad and Ahmed talking while Patrick peered wide-eyed down narrow cobblestone alleys that curved out of view. On his right they passed a group of old men sitting at tables off the road, playing chess, drinking tea, and smoking cigarettes. To his left was a small stone building whose exterior was covered with hanging carpets and rugs. A smiling man sat on the doorstep and shouted to them as they passed, “Beautiful rugs. The best you will find! Very cheap!”

Ahead, they approached a massive square courtyard surrounded by a long, low-lying building with several small arched openings.

“Old City’s caravanserai [kara-VAN-sir-AYE],” Ahmed announced, halting to let them absorb the view. “In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Silk Road caravans from all over – Anatolia, Persia, China, and India – came here to trade their goods. Attendants watered and fed camels here in the courtyard while their owners rested inside after their long journeys.”

“Sort of like a roadside inn?” Patrick’s dad asked.

“Yes, that is a good way to think of the caravanserai. Traders might stay for days or weeks, selling their merchandise, buying other goods to take home, catching up with old friends, and sharing news from distant lands.”

Patrick scanned the empty courtyard, trying to imagine it full of bleating camels and shouting attendants working busily to unload cargo and feed the animals. It must have been a lively place in its heyday. Now it stood eerily still, and Ahmed’s voice echoed off the distant stone walls as he continued with its history.

“You see, this was a sanctuary for travelers in old times. There were many other places like this along the Silk Road – usually every fifty miles or so. Rulers agreed to protect the caravanserais that lay within their kingdoms. It benefited each of them to preserve the flow of commerce and knowledge through their lands. Many of these rulers also sent spies along the Silk

Road to gather information about other kingdoms – so they wanted to keep these roads open and safe not only for other travelers, but for their own secret agents as well.”

They lingered for a while without speaking. Patrick was struck by the contrast between old and new – between the empty caravanserai and the flame-shaped skyscrapers he could see in the distance. The two structures had been built nearly 800 years apart, yet stood within plain view of each other.

It was amazing to think that this city – known far and wide during the early Middle Ages as a hub of international trade – was still important to the world’s economy. Just as Baku had once attracted caravans from faraway places, today visitors like Patrick and his dad continued to visit, if for slightly different reasons. It seemed strange to Patrick that this courtyard had buzzed with world culture at a time when America had not yet been discovered by Europeans.

His thoughts were interrupted by his dad’s voice. “Hey, Patrick!” He looked up to see Ahmed and his father by one of the small openings in the building that surrounded the square. “How about we get something to eat?” Patrick nodded and hurried to catch up.

Patrick savored the cool, sweet taste of the pomegranate fruit drink, which soothed his taste buds after each bite of spicy *pilaf* – a traditional Azeri meal of rice, vegetables, and chicken. Drinking slowly, his eyes took in his surroundings.

He had followed Ahmed and his dad through a small wooden door in the building that surrounded the courtyard. Given the door’s plain appearance, Patrick had expected to enter an equally unremarkable room. Instead, the entryway opened into a high-ceilinged dining hall furnished with dark wood furniture, tiled mosaic wall art, ornate ironwork, and white-clothed tables. A stone fireplace in one corner glowed red, and the caravanserai

reeked of wood smoke and history. Several diners sat at tables, while a handful of old men rested on rugs on the floor, smoking cigarettes and sipping their tea.

“Can you imagine what this place was like centuries ago?” Patrick’s dad whispered, looking around the room. “The stories that these walls have heard...”

They were shown to a table where Ahmed translated the menu. When their food came Ahmed devoured his eagerly, but never missed an opportunity to describe yet another aspect of Baku’s history.

“All this was built by local Muslim rulers,” he said as he chomped away. “Baku was conquered by the Persians, and later the Ottomans. Finally, the Russians came. They built many of the buildings and roads surrounding Old City, or Inner City. So, the area just outside the walls is called Outer City.”

Patrick had heard all this from Roger’s lecture the previous night. “You must be tired of other people coming here and telling you what to do,” he said frankly, taking another sip of his drink.

Ahmed looked at him with eyes that seemed to soften, even in the dim light of the caravanserai. “We Azerbaijanis are both blessed and cursed by our geography. We are a small country in the middle of great powers. And we have oil, which all the world wants. We desire only friendship and peace. But sometimes our friends decide they want to be our parents, instead. Do you know what I mean?”

Patrick nodded yes, though he wasn’t sure he did understand. This was a perspective to revisit with Dad or Roger.

“So you’re from the countryside to the west?” his dad asked Ahmed. “I think that’s what you said on the ride here...”

Ahmed looked wary all of a sudden, and he lowered his eyes as he scanned the room. Speaking quietly – almost mumbling – he replied, “Ah, yes, to the west... from the countryside. But, like I said, I have been in Baku for many years. I am an Azerbaijani from my head to my toes!”

“Where in the west?” Patrick asked. “Like on a farm?”

Ahmed looked at the both of them for several moments. He tapped his finger on the side of his tea cup, as if trying to decide whether to go on or change the subject. Finally, he sighed and said quietly, “I am from a region in western Azerbaijan whose fate is...how do I put it, *uncertain*... My family is Armenian. For the past hundred years, Azerbaijan and Armenia have been fighting each other, especially over this little piece of land where I spent my childhood. In fact, this conflict has been going on for longer than any other in the world today, except perhaps the dispute between Israel and Palestine.”

The waiter returned with a plate of sticky pastries covered in nuts. The conversation paused while the waiter cleared their finished plates.

“Pahklava!” Ahmed exclaimed, his voice once again boisterous. “My favorite dessert! Very good – you must try this.” Again, he attacked the dish with gusto.

After a few minutes of silence, he cleared his throat anxiously, and then continued from before. “So, as I said, Armenia and Azerbaijan do not exactly see eye-to-eye. It is a very complex issue. Basically, the Russian Empire used to control this whole area. But when the Russians left in 1919, the Armenians and Azerbaijanis began to fight over this little region to the west. It is known as Nagorno-Karabakh [Na-GOR-no Car-a-BOK].”

Ahmed took a sip of his tea. “Then the Soviets came. They had bigger fish to fry, so they made us stop fighting for a while. But when the Soviet Union collapsed, we were back to our old ways again. It doesn’t help that Armenians are Christians, and Azerbaijanis are Muslims.”

“You’re Christian?” Dad asked.

“No.” Ahmed almost spit his drink out. “That’s what is so ironic. I’m Muslim. But I’m also Armenian.” He smiled and shook his head at the paradox. However, seeing their puzzled expressions, he added simply, “It’s complicated.”

“Why does everybody want the Naguro... Kara... Kara –”

“Nagorno-Karabakh,” Ahmed repeated.

“Yeah. Why does everyone want that area so badly?” Patrick asked. “Why doesn’t one side just give it up so that everybody can live in peace?”

“Ah, good question, Patrick. But it’s not so simple.” Ahmed licked the pastry’s sticky residue from his pudgy fingers. “For one thing, the region is home to many people. Some want to be part of Armenia, some want to be part of Azerbaijan, and some want their own country.” Looking at Patrick’s dad, he added, “Plus, there is the very important matter of oil and politics. But that is a conversation you should have with Mr. Neilson.” He wiped his mouth and looked around for their waiter.

With that, it was obvious Ahmed did not want to discuss the issue any longer. They paid for their meal and stepped back into the hot, bright sunshine of the courtyard. As Patrick stretched his arms and yawned, Dad looked at his watch and asked, “Back to our hotel for a nap?” Patrick nodded in agreement, and the three strolled out of the ancient walled city, returning to the hustle and bustle of modern Baku.

12 MISHA

“History is the consensus of survivors in authority.
Reality is the weighted mean of individual perceptions.”

– Author Unknown

Although Patrick was tired when they returned to their room, he was unable to take a nap. The combination of jet lag and another hair-raising taxi ride left him too jittery to sleep. Plus, the air-conditioned hotel room managed to recharge some of the energy drained by the hot Baku sun earlier this morning.

Dad opened his laptop and started to do some work. “We’ll meet Roger and Skip this afternoon,” he said. “Why don’t you go for a swim? There’s an amazing pool downstairs.”

Patrick grinned. He had brought his swim trunks for this very reason. After a quick change of clothes, he grabbed his backpack and headed out the door.

The pool was on the bottom level of the hotel – twelve floors below their room. As the elevator silently ticked past each floor on its way down, Patrick reflected on his morning with Dad and Ahmed. He had never experienced anything quite like the Old City and its caravanserai. The historic stonework, colorful languages and artwork, and exotic smells and tastes fascinated him. This part of the world really was ancient – a place where architecture and traditions could go unchanged for centuries, and memories and feuds often hang on from one generation to the next. As both Roger and Ahmed had pointed out, Azerbaijan was no stranger to the international spotlight. Patrick shook his head,

again wondering why he had never heard of this country in any of his classes.

The elevator dinged and its doors opened to reveal the most incredible pool Patrick had ever seen. It was enormous – virtually twice the size of his middle-school gym. Every inch was bathed in pastels: a cool blue glow reflected from under the water, while a warm orange radiated from lanterns that flickered on rows of floor-to-ceiling pillars. The pool itself was laid out as a long rectangle crowned on both ends by half-circles – it must have been at least 200 feet long. In the middle of the rectangle, two gigantic side-pools bulged out in the shape of oriental fans. On the mosaic tile floor surrounding the water, lined up neatly, were numerous cloth-covered beds.

Stunned by the magnificent view, Patrick wandered over to the nearest bed and stood there, unsure what to do next. His eyes returned to the breathtaking view. The entire arrangement was so flawless that he was afraid to take off his sandals or put down his backpack out of fear he would spoil it. Surely, the Khan of Baku's baths could have been no more extravagant than this masterpiece!

"May I help you, sir?" Patrick startled at the voice. He turned around to see a well-groomed man in an elegant hotel uniform and white towel over one arm. "I am the pool attendant. Can I get you anything?"

"Um, I, uh..." Patrick sputtered, unsure how to answer. "I just wanted to go swimming." He stared at the man, whose face softened into a polite smile.

"Yes, sir. Please – have a seat on the deck chair." He pointed to what Patrick had assumed to be a bed. "Your towels are here, and magazines there. Would you like something to drink? Perhaps a..." He looked Patrick up and down, guessing the young American's age. "...water?"

Regaining his composure, Patrick replied, "Pomegranate juice, please."

The man raised his eyebrows in surprise. “Excellent choice, sir.” He hurried off to fill Patrick’s request.

Patrick looked around again. He had the whole pool to himself! Grinning suddenly, he dropped his bag on the deck chair, kicked off his sandals, and tore off his shirt. Running towards the water he leaped high into the air, grabbed both knees, and splashed down the biggest “cannon ball” this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Half an hour later, Patrick reclined lazily in his pool chair, ankles crossed, sipping his favorite new drink while examining Thomas’s journal. After the morning in an Old City caravanseraï, and now a swim in a royal Azeri bathhouse, Patrick was beginning to feel like quite the world traveler. Of course, he had not even been in the country a full day yet. For that matter, he had not really given up any of the comforts of the modern world. Their luxurious hotel was practically a resort, and even Ahmed’s taxi was hardly an example of “roughing it.”

Even so, Patrick realized he had stepped outside of his normal ordinary life. He wasn’t exactly climbing the Himalayas or riding a camel across a desert, but on the other hand he wasn’t sitting around playing video games at home with Ryan, either. While it had only been one day, he was beginning to sense the mystical and powerful charm of the Old World. It occurred to him that this same feeling may also have captivated his great-grandfather three-quarters of a century ago. With that thought, Patrick opened the journal and continued reading.

From Trabzon in northern Turkey, Thomas had traveled by horse southeast to Mt. Ararat, a distance of some two hundred and fifty miles. The trip took two weeks – at a pace of only twenty miles a day – but Thomas enjoyed the convoy’s slow progress.

For one thing, it gave him an opportunity to test out his new guide. Thomas needed someone who knew the land, spoke Turkish and English, and could shoulder the responsibility for

managing a convoy of attendants, horses, and baggage. Furthermore, he was looking for a loyal and trusted companion – someone upon whom he could rely for advice and assistance if suddenly he found himself in a tight spot. When it came right down to it, he needed someone he could trust with his life. Thomas had already been betrayed by a guide once before in China. This time he planned to be more careful.

As it turned out, his British friends in Kashgar recommended someone to him. Before leaving the United States, Thomas had written to let them know he was planning a return to Kashgar – this time from the west rather than the east. Upon discovering that he would begin his journey from Istanbul, the consulate suggested Thomas contact a man named Misha (MEE-sha), who had also been of service to Her Majesty's Government in the past.

In fact, Misha, came very highly recommended. He descended from a long line of Turkic ancestors who had lived in Anatolia for centuries as fishermen by the Black Sea or as animal herders who wandered the Turkish Plateau. Misha did not know when, or from where, his ancestors had first arrived, but they had been in Anatolia long enough to survive the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century.

Misha had fought in the (First) World War as a soldier in the Ottoman (Turkish) army, where he was distinguished twice for bravery. Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and her allies, he returned to his village near Trabzon, and again took up the life of a farmer. However, just a few years later a group of British officers were on a tour of eastern Anatolia and needed a local interpreter. Misha volunteered, and within a short period of time his ability, courage, and loyalty had earned their deep respect. Although Thomas had known him for only a couple weeks, he was impressed with what he had seen so far.

A second reason Thomas was in no hurry to reach Mt. Ararat was that he wanted to learn more about eastern Anatolian

culture and history. Naturally, he had studied this ancient region in his archaeology classes at university. But it was while on the back of a horse or in front of the camp fire that Thomas truly learned about Anatolia from the mouths of its people.

Each day of their pilgrimage to Mt. Ararat, Misha would share with Thomas an additional chapter from the long history of this region. He sometimes began the day's lecture on horseback next to Thomas, although this was typically interrupted as he rode off to scold a careless crew member or galloped away from the caravan to scout ahead. He would continue after lunch while he and Thomas sat in the shade of a tree, taking refuge from the blistering midday sun. However, even then Misha was typically too busy making sure the horses were properly cared for, measuring their progress on a map, or inspecting the status of the convoy's food and water. Only at night by the fire, after camp was set up and the day's numerous tasks completed, could Thomas expect Misha to finally relax and finish that day's narrative. While the crew spread out around the camp – their conversation and laughter gradually dying out as one after the next fell asleep – the archaeologist and his guide would sit on rugs, drink their tea, and talk.

Misha told Thomas about the region through which they were traveling, known as the Armenian Highlands (among its many other names). It includes eastern Anatolia, as well as the present-day countries of Armenia, western Azerbaijan, southern Georgia, and northwestern Iran. In 1928, when Thomas passed through, the region served as the border of three great powers: Turkey, the Soviet Union, and Persia (Iran). Long before that, however, the Armenian Highlands occupied a prominent role in history. In fact, today the area is referred to by many archaeologists and historians as “the epicenter of the Iron Age” because metallurgy (the art of metal-working) is thought to have begun here. Over thousands of years the region has been fought over by the Byzantines, Persians, Ottomans, and many others.

Of the region's entire history, however, perhaps its darkest chapter was written only a few years before Thomas arrived.

On our thirteenth day together - a day before reaching Mt. Ararat - Misha shared with me his memory of a horrifying incident that had happened here not long ago. He began his story with great reluctance, and I was soon to understand why. It seems that in the year 1915, the government of Turkey established a new policy for its eastern lands. This area, which includes our present location, had been occupied for centuries by Armenians, as well as Assyrians and Ottoman Greeks. The Turkish government decided to claim eastern Anatolia for Turks only, and it set about removing - or eliminating - all non-Turks from the region. The tragic result was that hundreds of thousands of people - perhaps millions - perished in this government-sponsored genocide. Many others were marched to Syria or elsewhere and told never to return.

It seems this monstrous act occurred during the First World War. Apparently, Misha did not learn of it until after leaving the army in 1918. When he returned home, some of his non-Turkish friends had already been expelled from the country. He told me that he was - and still is - ashamed of his government's actions. While he swears to me he had nothing to do with the ghastly affair, he nevertheless

asked me to forgive him and his people. He emphasized that Turks are by nature a very warm and thoughtful people, and he feels this incident will be a permanent scar upon their honor.

As he spoke, Misha shed tears of shame and regret – the first and only hint of emotion I have seen from him since beginning our journey together. I was unsure what to say, and so I merely offered my opinion that governments rarely act on behalf of the people they claim to represent. He is no more to blame for the actions of the Republic of Turkey than I am to blame for the United States' massacre of the Native Americans or enslavement of Africans. In any case, I am of the opinion that my guide is a good man, and I will maintain this faith in him unless he gives me reason to believe otherwise.

Understandably, that was a long and restless night for me. I lay awake for many hours thinking about Misha's heartbreaking story. As an archaeologist, I have studied numerous massacres carried out under the auspices of empire. But practically all of them occurred very long ago – usually hundreds or thousands of years. This has perhaps caused me to overlook the fact that those ancient people had families, friends, and dreams, too.

In contrast, the Armenian genocide that Misha described occurred just fifteen years ago. It remains fresh in his memory, and most certainly in the minds

and hearts of the Armenians, as well. While I had hoped the morning sun would chase away these melancholy thoughts, I was distressed to find they were very much still with me when I awoke. As we approached Mt. Ararat, I was considerably less cheery than when we had begun our journey. What had begun as a grand adventure now seemed more like a funeral procession.

Patrick closed the journal and gazed across the pool. He sat silently for several minutes, contemplating his great-grandfather's words. During the past day he had been so focused on the excitement and old-world charm of Azerbaijan that he had not considered the less glamorous aspects of the region's history. He recalled Ahmed's story from lunch. Here was a man who, even in the twenty-first century, was afraid to admit out loud that he was Armenian.

Once again, it occurred to Patrick that, despite all its evidence of modernization, Azerbaijan was at its heart an ancient place with a very long memory. Even with Baku's skyscrapers, luxurious hotels, and fast-food restaurants, this region of the world was still very much defined by its geography and history.

13 CHANGE OF PLANS

“BOUNDARY, n. In political geography, an imaginary line between two nations, separating the imaginary rights of one from the imaginary rights of the other.”

– Ambrose Bierce

Patrick fell asleep when he returned to their room. The swim had relaxed his muscles, and the background noise of the television temporarily drowned out his excitement about Central Asia.

When he awoke in late afternoon, his dad was talking on the phone. Noticing Patrick stirring, he put the phone on his shoulder. “Hey buddy, do you want to say hi to Grandpa?”

Patrick threw back the covers and rubbed his eyes, still trying to adjust to his new sleep schedule. He smiled groggily and reached for the phone.

“Hey, Grandpa!”

“Hello, my friend!” Despite the long-distance connection, the old man’s voice sounded strong. “Are you enjoying your adventure so far?”

Patrick glanced at his dad. “Yeah, it’s pretty cool. We visited a caravanserai this morning – sort of like a roadside inn for the old Silk Road caravans – and then I went swimming in the most amazing pool. You would love it!”

His grandfather laughed. Patrick imagined him sitting on his porch looking out over the lake. It seemed so strange that he was on the other side of the world at the very house where Patrick had first learned about Asia.

“As nice as swimming in the lake?” he asked.

“Um, well, not better – just different,” Patrick replied.

“I’m just giving you a hard time,” his grandfather chuckled.

“Yes, I’ll bet it is very different. That’s the beauty of traveling – you get to see it first-hand instead of just hearing about it through stories. Speaking of stories, what do you think about the package I sent with you?”

“Awesome!” Patrick replied, cupping the phone with his other hand. “I accidentally packed it on the plane, so I didn’t even get to look at it until we got here. But I’ve been reading it ever since.” He saw his dad’s forehead furrow and Patrick changed the subject. For some reason, Patrick hadn’t felt like telling his dad about the journal. They spoke for a few more minutes before Patrick handed the phone back to his dad, who hung up a short time later.

“Well then,” his dad began, leaning back in his chair. “We’re meeting Roger and Skip for dinner downstairs in an hour. Hungry yet?” Patrick nodded. “Good. We can talk some more about our plans. I’ve got a lot to get done in the next few days. But I thought you might come to the office with me later in the week.”

Patrick looked up and managed an “okay.”

“Sounds like Grandpa has gotten you started on some sort of a project...” Dad looked at Patrick out of the corner of his eyes while he put away his laptop. “Think you’ll be able to stay busy for the next few days?”

“Yeah, I guess. Can we go see some more stuff around Baku? That was fun!”

“Of course we can, but probably not until the weekend. There’s just too much I have to get done before then. Hang in there buddy. Things will pick up – I promise.”

He patted Patrick’s shoulder and headed off to shower.

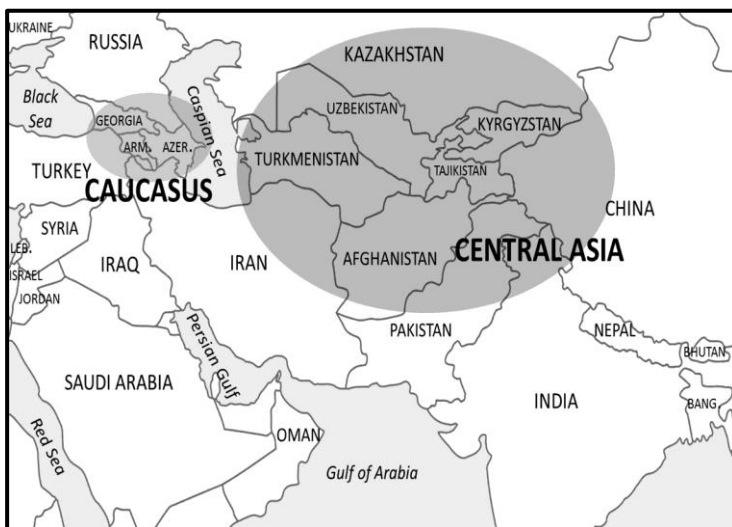
Dad's boss, Skip, was waiting for them at the entrance to the restaurant, which was once again noisy with travelers from around the world. Skip was a decade or so older than Dad – and was another geologist who had “hung up his boots” long ago. Now he was in charge of the company's Caspian Sea division. Dad's company drilled for oil and gas all around the world, and the Caspian Sea was just one of the company's many projects. Patrick had met the man on several occasions and really liked him. A native Texan, Skip sported jeans, cowboy boots, a handlebar mustache and perpetual grin. He talked a lot, and loudly – frequently telling jokes that Patrick didn't always understand, but which put everyone else in stitches.

With ruddy cheeks and gleaming eyes, Skip shook his dad's hand and high-fived Patrick. “I can't tell you how glad I am that you're with us on this one, partner,” he boomed at Patrick. “Last time we were in Baku, I told your dad he'd better bring his assistant on the next trip. Now you get to see where the oil business really began. Although, I always point out that we Texans did oil bigger and better than anyone else!” His laugh roared high above the noise of the restaurant crowd.

Roger had called to say he was running late, so the three of them went ahead and ordered their food. Patrick's eyes lingered on the menu's hamburger option, but after a few seconds they settled on the rice dish Roger had tried the night before. He also requested a large pomegranate juice.

Throughout the meal, Skip and Dad chatted about work – contracts to be signed, wells that needed replacing, budgets and costs, and geology. The details were mostly beyond Patrick's comprehension, but he knew his Dad's company drilled for oil and natural gas throughout the region – both on land and over water. Modern technology allowed them to continually find and extract new energy resources from regions where the “easy” oil was already gone. At the moment, Skip was griping about politics – by far the biggest challenge to drilling for oil.

“Let me break it down for you, Patrick,” Skip said, looking at him the way he might a business partner. “Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been a lot of argument over who controls the Caspian Sea. In addition to Russia and Iran, three other countries share the shoreline – Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan [CAUSE-uk-stan], and Turkmenistan [turk-MEN-eh-stan]. The argument centers on whether the Caspian is a sea or a lake. Some countries claim it is a sea because it’s big and salty. Others say it is a lake because it’s surrounded by land.”



“Why does it matter?” Patrick asked.

Skip grinned at his dad, and then turned back to Patrick.

“The Caspian Sea sits on top of one of the world’s largest reserves of oil and gas. It is also full of sturgeon – fish whose eggs are harvested to make caviar. Whether the Caspian is a sea or lake determines who owns these resources.”

“Who gets to decide?” Patrick pressed.

Skip shot another look at Patrick’s dad, and then answered, “That’s the trillion-dollar question. Currently, there are many treaties – some nearly a century old – that divide the Caspian

among its neighbors. But the problem is that none of these treaties agrees with each other. Some were written when Russia and Persia controlled this region. Others were signed between the Soviet Union and Iran. More recent treaties have been created by the newly independent countries like Azerbaijan.”

Seeing Patrick’s puzzled look, Dad added, “It can be exasperating for us geologists, Patrick. We study science, but politics rule the day.” Looking down at his dessert, he added, “Everyone wants a slice of the Caspian pie... if not the whole thing.”

As they enjoyed Azeri pastries, Roger blustered in, looking troubled. He apologized for being late and jumped immediately into the latest news. A couple of research ships owned by a British oil company had just had a close encounter with Iran’s military. As the scientists aboard the vessels were mapping the seafloor, an Iranian warship passed close by. Soon after, an Iranian fighter jet buzzed overhead. Nobody had been hurt, but the encounter served as a grave reminder that the quarrel over the Caspian Sea could erupt into violence at any moment.

“These things happen from time to time,” Roger continued. “The Iranians want the southern half of the Caspian. They argue that it has belonged to them for centuries – back when they were the Persian Empire. Of course, Azerbaijan has a different perspective of history.” He laughed nervously and then added, “Probably nothing will come of this but finger-pointing and more arguing. But it has caused me quite a headache – I’ve been on the phone all day trying to get this sorted out. Anyway, that’s why I’m late.”

He took a deep breath, laced his fingers together on the table in front of him, and looked from Skip to Dad. “Not to worry. You guys should be fine to go ahead with your trip to Turkmenistan next week.”

Patrick nearly choked on his drink. Turkmenistan? He looked at his dad, who was smiling at him.

“See? I told you things would pick up.”

The next few days were relatively uneventful. The surprise news that they were headed to another country at least helped Patrick contain his restlessness. After their dinner with Roger and Skip, he had examined a map to find Turkmenistan. It lay to the east, on the other side of the Caspian Sea. Twenty four hours ago, Patrick had never even heard of the place. But according to Skip, Turkmenistan was a bonanza for oil and gas. In addition to drilling there, his company wanted to build a pipeline that would transport the Caspian Sea’s oil and gas to the ocean, where it could then be shipped to other parts of the world. Roger planned to meet them in Turkmenistan, where he would give another briefing on the country’s history, politics, and security.

In the meantime, Patrick had five days to kill before they left Baku. He had hoped to visit more sights around the city, but since Dad would be at the office, this idea was out of the question. His dad did not like the idea of his fourteen-year-old son roaming a foreign city. Although Ahmed volunteered to accompany him, Dad ruled against this option, as well. So, a week of hotel life it was...

Fortunately, Patrick was not starved for entertainment. Sitting by the hotel’s lavish pool, sipping sweet pomegranate juice, he continued his great-grandfather’s journal.

Reaching Mt. Ararat on May 1, 1928, Thomas devoted several journal pages to his brief stay there. Mostly, they focused on geology and geography.

The Mt. Ararat area contains two mountains, which in fact are really volcanoes. The larger one, Greater Ararat, reaches almost 17,000 feet above sea level and is the highest point in Turkey. To its east

lies a smaller volcano, Lesser Ararat, which is nearly 13,000 feet tall. Several eruptions have occurred throughout human history and, on occasion, have buried towns with their explosive force and pyroclastic flows. One of the earliest recorded eruptions was approximately 2500 B.C. - nearly five thousand years ago. It is thought to have buried an ancient settlement and killed many people. More recently, in 1840 A.D., another major eruption occurred - this time with an earthquake - killing as many as ten thousand people and covering several cities.

Thomas went on to describe his efforts to locate some of the buried towns at the base of the volcano. Unfortunately, since these were deeply entombed in ash or pyroclastic rock, he found very little of archaeological interest. Perhaps frustrated – or just tired – Thomas decided to spend his last couple of days relaxing in local hot springs, which Marco Polo had named the finest in the world.

Patrick laid the journal on his lap and gazed at the mirrored surface of the pool. He felt a little confused about his great-grandfather's intentions. Given how little Thomas actually accomplished at Mt. Ararat – and how out of the way it was from the rest of his journey – it seemed strange that he had made this side trip. Aside from the fact that Polo had once visited this Biblical landmark, the two-week journey to Mt. Ararat seemed to be a waste of time – and completely unrelated to Thomas's goal of retracing the Silk Road. It just didn't seem like the behavior of a man who Grandpa had described as clear-minded and goal-focused, and certainly not a drifter or prone to dilly-dallying.

On the next page, Thomas answered his great-grandson's suspicions, as if he had anticipated the inquisitive mind of a future young Eaton when he wrote the words long ago.

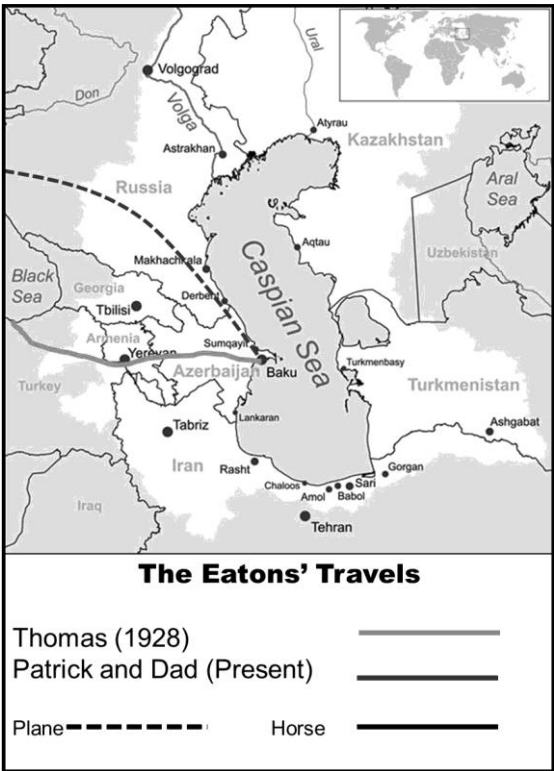
May 8, 1928. After great deliberation, I have decided to amend my travel plans. Whereas my original intention was to proceed south from Mt. Ararat to Persia, I have decided instead to go east to Armenia. Misha's description of that land and its people has captivated me - and convinced me to see them with my own eyes. From there, I will continue to Baku in Azerbaijan - another ancient city with its own fascinating history and archaeological treasures.

But Thomas acknowledged that this new route brought considerably more risk. In 1928, the Soviets were solidifying their control over the Caspian Sea region. Unlike Persia, Armenia and Azerbaijan had already been absorbed into the Soviet Union. Their citizens were under total surveillance by the Soviet secret police. Freedom of speech was strictly prohibited, as was celebration of traditional culture. People who spoke out against the new communist government – or expressed any desire for their traditional way of life – could be arrested and sent to concentration camps in Siberia, or worse.

In addition to suppressing the local population, the Soviets were also on high alert for spies sent by other countries. It was rumored that secret agents from Europe were sneaking around behind Soviet lines, inciting rebellion against the communists. For this reason, any Westerner caught traveling here without paperwork risked being charged with espionage – a crime punishable by death. Thomas had no papers – after all, he had just made up his mind to go to Armenia and Azerbaijan. As an illegal

visitor, he could not afford to get caught. If arrested, it would be difficult to prove he was not a spy!

Once again, Thomas had to rely on his talents for making friends and blending in wherever he went. Just as importantly, he would depend upon the help and loyalty of his new friend, Misha.



14 ENERGY MOVES THE WORLD

“The healthful balm, from Nature's secret spring,
The bloom of health, and life, to man will bring;
As from her depths the magic liquid flows,
To calm our sufferings, and assuage our woes.”
– Seneca Oil Advertisement (circa 1850)

The company office occupied three floors of a high-rise building in modern downtown Baku – just a few miles from the caravanserais, fortress walls, and cobblestone roads of Old City. In true Azeri style, the office's interior décor blended east and west, old and new. A large hexagonal lobby of polished stone greeted visitors at the elevator. In the tradition of the Byzantines, tile mosaics and floor-to-ceiling pillars graced the area. Ornate fountains and lavish gold trim gave the receptionist area an Ottoman feel. A large Persian tapestry covered an entire wall, while local art and architecture lined various alcoves and bookshelves. Offsetting them were digital clocks, computers, flat-screen video monitors, and other features common to a modern office.

A young blonde woman in a smart black suit and phone headset greeted Patrick and his Dad when they entered. Sitting behind a large mahogany desk – its front emblazoned in gold with the company logo – she recognized Dad, smiled and waved them past. As they strolled down the hallway of offices and drawing rooms, Patrick tried to absorb as much imagery as he could. He wanted to remember where his dad spent his days when he was away on business.

Today was Saturday – a day of rest in many industries, but not for Dad’s. As he so often pointed out, energy powers the world... and the world never stops. Oil and gas was an around-the-clock business. Besides, Dad and Skip needed to tie up loose ends in Baku before taking a boat across the Caspian Sea. This required getting paperwork in order, making phone calls, and fine-tuning goals and priorities. It also involved looking at maps – lots of maps.

“Howdy, boys!” Skip’s voice boomed down the hallway when he saw them coming. Hanging out of a door and grinning widely, he waved one arm for them to join him, and then disappeared back inside. When they caught up, Patrick saw they were entering what looked like some sort of planning room. Compared to the rest of the office, it seemed rather modest. The area was clearly not for hosting guests – it was simply a place to get things done.

The tile floor, such as one might see in a grocery store, was crowded with ordinary brown office mats and plastic roller chairs. Rolled-up drawing papers leaned against every available corner of the room. An industrial-size coffee maker purred atop a stained kitchen counter. All types of maps covered the walls – physical, political, and geological. A few of Dad’s coworkers sat at a long table discussing a large chart spread out before them. Between them, Patrick could make out red and blue lines showing the paths of oil and gas pipelines across Central Asia. Skip munched on a donut he had retrieved from one of several boxes on the counter, dribbling crumbs down his shirt as he spoke.

“Welcome to our ‘war room,’ Patrick! Nothing too fancy, but this is all we old geologists really need. Coffee, donuts, and maps.”

“What about rocks?” Patrick asked. A couple heads at the table turned to look at him, plainly amused by the interrogation of their boss.

“Aha!” Skip replied, laying his donut on the counter. Wiping his mouth with a napkin, he crossed the room and pointed to a collage of maps on the wall. “All the rocks you need are right here! Carbonates, salts, sands, and lots of clay! Plus basalt, way below...” He hesitated while trying to figure out how to condense hundreds of millions of years of geologic history into a two-minute lecture. Seeing the look of interest on Patrick’s face, he decided to give it his best shot.

“All right, partner, basically it’s like this. The entire Caspian Sea sits in a topographical basin – that is, a gigantic depression in the earth’s crust. This basin was forming as early as Paleozoic time – say, 400 million years ago. At one point, the Caspian Sea was part of the Black Sea. On its bottom, thousands of feet of mud and dead plants and animals settled on top of each other. At various times, the Caspian even had reefs growing in it – just like the ones you see today in the Caribbean Sea. Eventually, the mountains around the sea rose up again, cutting off the Caspian from the Black Sea. It was no longer part of the ocean. It became a lake, the way it is today.”

“I thought it was a sea,” Patrick interjected, one eyebrow raised. Skip laughed and slapped him on the back.

“Only the politicians care about the difference, buddy! I’m only concerned with the geology here. Lake, sea, whatever you want to call it... Essentially, the Caspian became land-locked.” He pointed back to the map. “Then it started drying up. Sea water is very salty. As it began to evaporate, lots of salt was left behind. This salt settled on the bottom of the sea, on top of all the other mud, dead fish and plants, and so forth. Well, as the mountains continued to grow, more and more sand washed down into the sea, where it settled on the seafloor. Now think about the incredible weight of all those sediments (carbonates, salts, and sands) sitting on top of all the old mud and dead stuff. That’s going to create a lot of pressure and heat. What’s it all mean to a petroleum geologist?” He looked at Patrick, who shrugged.

Skip's smile widened and his eyes danced with excitement. "We've got a perfect oven for making oil and gas! All that pressure and heat essentially 'cooked' the mud and rotting plants and animals into oil and gas – over millions of years, of course. Now, we geologists are working to figure out where the sweet spots are – areas where the oil and gas have been trapped under the sediment. Once we find them, we drill down, tap into the reservoirs, and bring that precious cargo to the surface!" He stepped back and grinned at Patrick, looking proud of his explanation. But then he frowned and added, "Of course, that's assuming the politicians don't get in the way."

Patrick looked at the wall again. It included brightly colored maps, sheets with squiggly black lines, and various charts showing columns of rock types. He had seen stuff like this at his dad's office back home, or rolled up in the back of one of the closets in their house.

On another wall, framed black-and-white photos showed wooden oil derricks and shacks. There looked to be hundreds – or even thousands – of these towers packed together in a messy jumble of equipment, mud, and oily ponds. Some of the scenes were crisscrossed by railroad tracks, while others showed workers turning hand cranks, carrying pipes, or coaxing mules to pull carts through the thick sludge. Not a single tree could be seen in any of the photos.

"Is this Baku?" Patrick asked. Skip nodded, and they crossed the room to examine the pictures more closely. Meanwhile, Dad had joined his coworkers at the table.

"The land of eternal fire," Skip continued, cupping his coffee mug in both hands. "Baku has wept oil since long before humans walked the earth. These pictures show her back in the late 1800s. Quite a mess, huh? Back then, folks didn't understand the environmental impact of an oil operation. They would pump this stuff right into ponds, as you can see here." He pointed to one of the photos. "The effects of this damage lasted for a long time."

“But Baku doesn’t look like this today,” Patrick said.

“Nope. Technology and environmental awareness have come a long way. The oil and gas business is extremely clean and efficient now. Even if companies wanted to pollute – and I honestly don’t know of any that feel this way – they would never be able to get away with it. People don’t want to buy from a company that mistreats the environment.”

“Earlier this week, Roger Neilson told me that, a hundred years ago, Baku provided half the world’s oil,” Patrick said. “But I always thought the Middle East was where oil comes from. I had no idea that the Caspian Sea was such an important place.”

“You’re exactly right. The Middle Eastern countries are big producers of oil – Saudi Arabia, in particular,” Skip replied. “So are other countries around the world, like Russia and Venezuela. And, for that matter, so is the United States. However, in terms of natural gas, the Caspian Sea area is a monster. Look over here.” He pointed to another map of the Caspian region.

“Russia owns a lot of territory in the Caspian region. And Russia has a third of the entire world’s proven gas reserves. That’s a lot of natural gas! The only country with more natural gas is Iran, which also happens to own part of the Caspian.”

Patrick quietly studied the map. He had heard about oil and gas in the news and at school. But this was a lot of information, and he wasn’t sure quite how to make sense of it all. Looking at him, Skip seemed to anticipate the boy’s struggle to wrap his head around the issue.

“It’s complex,” Skip empathized. “Believe me, I have a hard time keeping track of it all, too. Here’s what you need to know. Energy moves the world. For a country to prosper, it has to produce goods and services. And in order to produce these things, it has to have energy. There’s no getting around this – that’s just the way it is. Now, there are lots of other sources of energy: nuclear, wind, solar, hydroelectric, geothermal, biofuels, and others, too. But fossil fuels (oil, natural gas, and coal) provide

over ninety percent of the world's energy. Ninety percent! So, regardless what anybody *wants* for the environment – and no matter what you *hear* on television or in school – fossil fuels are not going away for a long time.”

He took a sip of his coffee, and then looked at Patrick again before continuing.

“But oil and gas are only found in certain places in the world. Many countries don’t have them. Even if they do, it’s not easy to get them out of the ground. Developing an oil or gas reserve takes an incredible amount of time, money, and work. For example, Europe may be sitting on lots of energy resources, but it may be many years before they are able to access them. In the meantime, where are they getting their oil and gas?”

Looking uncertain, Patrick pointed to Russia.

“That’s right!” Skip beamed. “Much of Europe is dependent on Russia for its energy.”

“Okay,” Patrick said, nodding. “But doesn’t that give Russia a huge advantage? I mean, can’t they basically call the shots?”

“You got it, buddy. Politics again! What happens if Russia decides to stop selling gas to Europe? Not good – maybe the lights go out in Budapest, or Prague, or Warsaw...”

Patrick nodded along.

Watching him, Skip decided to press on.

“But it’s not just Europe that wants to buy the Caspian Sea’s oil and gas,” he said. “There’s China and India, too – they need more and more energy to power their growing economies. Altogether, there is a lot of demand for oil and gas. And this means there’s a lot of competition to control it. Whoever controls the oil and gas controls the world.”

“So... this is why all these countries are arguing about who owns the Caspian?” Patrick asked.

“Yep. But like everything else in this part of the world, the issue is complex. Half the game is getting the oil and gas out of

the ground, and the other half is getting it to market. It has to be transported by pipeline to the ocean, where it can be put on ships. But look at the geography of this region. There are as many as six or seven wars going on in the countries to the west of here. To the north and east of the Caspian are Russia and her friends, all of which are historical rivals of Europe and the United States. To the south is Iran and Afghanistan – another dicey part of the world. So when you look at the Caspian neighborhood, you can see that it's not exactly the safest or friendliest... That's where the politicians enter the game – they control the oil and gas."

A voice from the table called Skip's attention. He looked at Patrick for a moment longer. "That's a heck of a lot to think about, isn't it?" Patrick nodded slowly, still staring at the map. "When you get a chance, ask Roger to explain. That guy knows all about the politics and geography – and history, too. I'm just a geologist, after all. I try to leave the rest of this stuff to politicians and engineers!"

He smiled, slapped Patrick on the back, and joined the others at the table.

15 SHIFTING THOUGHTS

“Three things cannot be long hidden:
the sun, the moon, and the truth.”

– Buddha

Leaving the geologists to their maps, Patrick decided to explore the office. Drifting through the hallways, he soon found a lounge area with vending machines and a television. Grabbing a candy bar and bottled water, he sprawled in an oversized chair to watch an American news channel. After a while, he got up and wandered over to the room’s large window, where he stood peering out at the city. Far off, stretching across the horizon lay the dark, glimmering Caspian Sea, dotted with the black silhouettes of oil freighters and fishing trawlers. Nearer, he could make out the fortress walls and towers of Old City. Directly below him, cars and pedestrians marched along like thousands of worker ants. Baku was busy today, as it had always been.

He wondered what Grandpa would think of the city. Perhaps he had once visited with Grandma. After all, they seemed to have been to every corner of the earth. Patrick wished his old friend was here now. Together, they could explore the busy markets, poke around the alleys and back rooms of Old City, or stroll along the harbor to watch the hustle and bustle of exotic goods and people. Maybe they would simply spend a day at the beach, staring up at the clouds while sharing another of Thomas’s grand adventures.

It would also be nice to have someone to explain everything he had heard and seen over the past week. Patrick’s

head was spinning with the details of Thomas's journal, Roger's lectures, Skip's talks about geology and pipelines, and Ahmed's account of Armenia and Azerbaijan. As best he could figure, Asia was not just old; it was really complex, too. There were so many perspectives to consider – culture, geography, history, politics, religion, and energy. He had studied Asia in his history classes, but the complexity of this place could hardly be packed into a library, let alone a few chapters of a textbook.

In any case, Patrick's time in Baku was at an end, at least for now. Tomorrow he would take a boat to Turkmenistan, where Dad assured him things would get more interesting. Patrick certainly hoped he was right. He wasn't sure he could bear another week of hotel life. What he craved was real adventure: wavy-dune deserts, camels and nomads, buried treasure, and danger lurking around every corner. That was the stuff of Eaton lore!

Recalling Thomas's journal, Patrick stepped away from the window and went to his backpack. Getting comfortable at a table, he opened the journal and continued reading.

May 9, 1928. After careful thought, I have decided to disband the caravan before entering Armenia. For one thing, the Soviets control the border with Turkey. Therefore, the likelihood of sneaking across with such a large a group is small. Secondly, while I trust Misha, I am not so confident about the dozen other members of our party. They have performed admirably thus far, but how will they react when confronted with the rifles and rough interrogation of Soviet border guards? Might a frightened Turk hand me over, perhaps naming me as a spy just to save his own skin?

Given the risks, I have decided to proceed with Misha only. My attendants and most of the baggage and horses have been dispatched back to Turkey. Keeping only the most important belongings - my digging tools, writing and mapping instruments, a handful of books, a few horses, and food and water - Misha and I can travel light and fast.

To minimize suspicion, it is imperative that I disguise my identity. We have agreed Misha will adopt the appearance of a local trader, while I will play the part of his humble servant. Maintaining this ruse will not be easy, as it requires me to perfectly mirror the dress, mannerisms, language, and customs of the local population. One slip-up (an out-of-place scarf, improper hand gesture, or misspoken phrase) and I could be discovered, arrested, and perhaps never seen or heard from again. As my accomplice, Misha would no doubt suffer a similar fate.

As luck would have it, there is probably no better place in Asia for a white-faced man to blend in than the Caucasus [CAW-keh-ses]. This geographic region comprises the three countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. It is also thought to be the place of origin for the Caucasian race. Therefore, I will be surrounded by people who look very much like me (as opposed to when I was obviously gweilo in China). Also, Russian is commonly spoken here. If the worst

occurs - I am stopped and questioned - my fluency in this language may be just enough to save my neck.

Misha has been extremely helpful with our preparations. His talent for clandestine operations is both impressive and surprising. For example, he has made several fine-tunings to my clothing - adjustments so slight that I would have overlooked them, but which he assures me a local would notice right away. He has fashioned a walking stick from a tree limb, atop which he fixed my compass so as to appear an inconspicuous decoration. How clever! After all, possession of a compass would be undeniable evidence that I am here on a covert map-making mission.

With each day, it becomes more obvious why Misha earned his military honors and the respect of the British. He is intelligent, perceptive, creative, thoughtful, steadfast, and honorable. I am very fortunate to have him along to keep me out of trouble these next few months.

Patrick laid the journal on the table in front of him and looked out the window. He tried to imagine the excitement and determination that must have coursed through Thomas's veins as he stole through Soviet territory disguised as a lowly servant. It was extraordinary the way his great-grandfather made decisions quickly and then turned his full energy and ambition toward accomplishing whatever new goals he had set. Self-doubt seemed to have been completely absent from the man's thoughts. Either he did not sense fear, or he simply chose to ignore it.

Grandpa once explained to Patrick that the key to success was to shift one's thoughts: to recognize a negative or fearful thought and to consciously choose its positive alternative. To focus on what you want, rather than what you don't. He must have learned this from his father. Indeed, Thomas had mastered the art of positive thought. Once he decided upon a goal, he refused to entertain any possibility of failure. He trained himself to view success as his inevitable destination.

Shaking his head with admiration, Patrick stretched his arm towards the water bottle on the table before him. Engrossed in his thoughts, Patrick misjudged his reach and knocked the drink over, gushing water onto the old yellowed pages of the journal. Leaping forward, he frantically wiped the pages with his shirt sleeve. Then he grabbed at the pile of napkins stacked nearby. His exasperation growing, Patrick switched from rubbing to dabbing, desperately trying to keep from ruining the gift that his Grandpa had entrusted to him.

Finally, Patrick collapsed in his chair and stared in horror at the smeared mess. A pain began to form in his stomach, followed by a lump in his throat, and then the burn of tears in his eyes. How careless and stupid. This was how things went for him at home and school, too. As soon as he thought he'd gotten on track and done something right, he would inevitably screw up or forget to turn in an assignment. But those failures paled in comparison to spilling water all over his great-grandfather's journal. How was he going to explain this to Grandpa? He cursed silently, laid his head in his arms on the desk and looked out the window.

In fact, he knew what Grandpa would say if he was here. *Shift your thoughts, Patrick. Stay positive.* His eyes returned to the journal. The writing had smeared into a large black stain in the middle of the page. Some of the letters were still readable, while others bled together. But in other places, letters appeared that were not there before! As the page dried, the letters faded away again.

Patrick lifted his head and wiped his eyes. There went another letter, and then another. What was going on?

Another sensation coursed through him – exhilaration. Picking up one of the wet napkins, he dabbed the top of the page where he had seen the writing. Nothing happened. He dipped the napkin and tried again. A couple of characters reappeared. Patrick heard his pulse pounding in his head. He knew exactly what this was – invisible writing!

Patrick dabbed more of the writing, and a line of characters became visible. He excitedly searched his backpack for a pencil and paper, and then began to write down the letters before they dried up again.

FOGK ZEBR NUUL MKAH LEMR SQXS

Patrick was looking at a cryptogram! Grandpa had taught him this four-group system of code writing. Putting letters in “fours” made the cipher easier to *encode*, and more difficult to *decode* – that is, except for someone who is familiar with the cipher. But how was Patrick going to crack this cryptogram? He did not know what code-writing method had been used, nor did he have the key for deciphering it. Or, did he?

Patrick leaned back in his chair, thinking. Thomas had instructed Grandpa in code-writing, and Grandpa had passed along this knowledge to Patrick. So, it was entirely possible that Patrick did possess the knowledge to crack this code.

But, he still needed the *key* – a word or phrase that would unlock the seemingly random arrangement of numbers or letters. Thomas could have chosen virtually anything as his key: the name of a friend or pet, his birthplace, favorite color, title of a book, acronym, or even a word spelled backwards. How was Patrick supposed to guess this? A trained code breaker might have a chance, but Patrick was merely an amateur. The task was impossible.

Shift your thoughts. Stay positive.

Patrick got up and paced the room. Why would Thomas have used a cipher in his journal? What kind of information would he have wanted to keep secret? And who was he afraid might discover it? The communists? Or perhaps bandits, which had been a threat during his travels in China?

In all likelihood, the key required some piece of knowledge that belonged only to Thomas. Perhaps he had committed it to memory. On the other hand, maybe he had hidden the key elsewhere in the journal. This way, if something terrible befell him, a trusted person would be able to retrieve the information he had encoded. It was a slim possibility. Putting a key into the same document as its cipher is risky. But Patrick decided to give it a shot. What did he have to lose?

He began flipping through page after page of writings, scribbles, and drawings. The journal was at least a couple hundred pages long. Thomas's cipher key could be hidden anywhere among all this information.

Then Patrick heard the faintest whisper somewhere deep in his mind. Ever so soft, he could not make out the words at first. Again, slightly louder this time, it toyed with him. Then, once more... That was it!

For my son (born 10/23/1927) – May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind always be at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face, and rains fall soft upon your fields.

Something about this passage had grabbed Patrick's attention a week ago. For the second time, he found himself staring at the first page of Thomas's journal. 10/23/1927. Was that his Grandpa's birthday? He'd had his doubts from the beginning, and now his suspicion was boiling.

He glanced back at the letters he had discovered. A shift cipher, he heard his Grandpa say, is a method of code writing often used by the Roman emperor, Julius Caesar, to write secret messages. The code writer begins by writing the alphabet across a

page, and then below this message another alphabet is written – but shifted over a certain number of letters. The code letter is substituted for the real message letter. To decode the cipher, one must simply “shift” back over the correct number of letters. But how many letters to shift?

A date shift cipher is a clever variation of this method. The code-writer uses the numbers of a date as the key: each digit tells the decoder how many letters to “shift” each letter in the cipher.

Patrick began by writing out the alphabet as a guide. Below, he copied the four-group combination cipher. Then, beneath the cipher he wrote the date “key” (Grandpa’s so-called birthday) back-to-back. 1-0-2-3-1-9-2-7, followed by 1-0-2-3-1-9-2-7, and then again. Slowly, he translated the cipher by shifting each letter to the right by however many spaces were indicated by the date key. For example, for the first letter, “F,” Patrick shifted one letter to the right – “G” – because the first number of the date key was “1.”

When he finished, his sheet looked like this:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

F O G K Z E B R N U U L M K A H L E M R S Q X S
1 0 2 3 1 9 2 7 1 0 2 3 1 9 2 7 1 0 2 3 1 9 2 7
G O I N A N D Y O U W O N T C O M E O U T Z Z Z

Putting the letters together, the message spelled:

GOINANDYOUWONTCOMEOUTZZZ

Patrick stared at the characters. *Go in and you won’t come out. ZZZ.* The last three letters might be “nulls” – space fillers that meant nothing.

“Patrick! There you are!” His dad stuck his head around the doorway. “We’re ready to head back to the hotel. Ahmed’s outside waiting for us.”

“Okay, Dad,” Patrick fumbled, cleaning up his mess of papers and napkins.

His dad moseyed in, looking down at the table. “What’s this you’re working on?”

Patrick slid the journal into his backpack and hastily stood. “Just messing around... Yeah, I’m ready to go.”

“Good. I thought we’d head back in time for a swim and dinner. Then we need to pack. Tomorrow we’re off to Turkmenistan.”

Patrick grinned back at him and slung his backpack onto his shoulder. “Sounds good.” Then, he halted to ask, “Hey Dad, when was Grandpa born?”

His dad gave him an amused look. “Grandpa? Um, 1932. Why?”

Patrick smiled. “No reason.” As he brushed past his dad, it occurred to Patrick that there might be an adventure ahead of him, after all.