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Ash Cans & Corn Fed Hares: Book One of the NY Explorer's Club

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Ash Cans and Corn fed Hares
Book 1 of the NY Explorer's Club

By

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Mentor Sam Brian

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Science in Education

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Project Abstract:

Ash Cans & Corn Fed Hares: Book One of the NY Explorer's Club

By: Corinne Flax

Ash Cans & Corn Fed Hares is a work of semi-historical fiction (set in the present, dealing with facts of the past), which can be used in a classroom or in a home to help students/children forge connections with past and present. The book also helps students find and use some of the research resources available in New York. *Ash Cans* showcases alternative methods of information gathering in the context of adventure and mystery, while focusing on the importance of individual meaning-making.

The seed for this book is a particular event in history, the construction of a subway tunnel by Alfred Ely Beach in 1870, and the events which surrounded it. These events along with the artwork that was being created, the shops that were open, the political temperature of the city, and the preexisting infrastructure of the late 1800s allows readers insight into the lives of New Yorkers in the late 1800s . The primary resources used were *The Gangs of New York*, the Transit Museum Website, forgotten-ny.com, and personal experiences as a museum educator at the NY Transit Museum and the NY Historical Society.

The end result of this is *Ash Cans & Corn Fed Hares*. *Ash Cans* follows two fifth grade girls and their friends as they unravel the mysteries of a poem left by Alfred Beach after his death. The poem itself is fictitious, but the references within it are not. The protagonists discover, through research, (using the same sources as the author), trips through the city, and the testing of hypothesis', come up with reasonable conclusions based on their evidence and a new sense of their place in the city.

Rationale

Intro

In *Ash Cans and Corn Fed Hares* April and Julia, two fifth grade girls and best friends, go on a school field trip to the New York Transit Museum. At the Transit Museum the girls are given a mysterious poem by their tour guide. This poem, a fictive work filled with historical facts, sends them on a scavenger hunt through New York City. As Julia and April try to make meaning out of the seemingly nonsensical poem, they are challenged by the changing dynamic of their friendship, their understanding of the people around them, and of course by the mysterious poem.

In many ways April and Julia's experience in *Ash Cans* is very similar to mine at Bank Street. I started with certain preconceived beliefs and notions and have found them challenged and changed time and again. This book contains many of the beliefs concerning museum education, adolescence, and historical fiction that I have come to hold. By incorporating these beliefs within a work of fiction I have found a way of sharing them, which I hope, is both entertaining and illuminating to its intended audience, the upper elementary student.

What originally appealed to me about Museum Education were the museums. There is a sense of mystery, magic, and perhaps romance which museums bestow upon their contents. Take an ordinary shoe, cup, or tire, put it in a Plexiglas case, put a label on it and it changes. Suddenly your everyday

object is something new, something special, something with a specific meaning to be studied and interpreted. The variety of ways an object can be interpreted have been explored by many artists over the years.

My focus, when it comes to museums, has always been less on the politics and more on the experience one has while standing in a gallery. Seeing and learning how students can react to museum visits with wonder and awe has made a deep impression on me. In *Ash Cans and Corn Fed Hares* I have tried to capture this wonder and connect it to a process of historical inquiry, discovery, debate and creativity. Romance and mystery are well and good, but practical habits like historical inquiry and debate will help harness these feelings and focus them.

In *Ash Cans* I have incorporated the elements of appropriate research methods, realistic travel goals, collaborative research, and age appropriate vocabulary with an appealing storyline. To do this I have employed and interwoven elements of mystery, romance, and the occult, historical fact, maps, illustrations, and dialogues. This rationale will illustrate how I have used these elements to create an original piece of historical fiction.

It is my hope that this book will be used both in the classroom and in the home. I believe the story itself is interesting in its own right. The fact that a family, class, or even a group of determined and creative fifth graders, can replicate all of April and Julia's research (except for the part with the ghost), makes the story not only a story but an invitation; an invitation to explore and discover on one's own. This is the museum educator's ideal, that visitors will

leave with the desire to further pursue the museum experience on their own. It is my intention that this book gives its readers some of the tools with which to do so.

Historical Fiction and Education

As educators we are always trying to get students to make connections between what they already know and what they are currently learning about. Whether these connections are text to self, text to world, or any other connection, depends on the individual and their experiences. My own commitment to historical fiction is long standing, going back to reading *The True Life Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* and *Island of the Blue Dolphins* when I was in fifth grade. These books, while not strict interpretations of real-life events, take elements of truth and weave engrossing stories from them. When I read these books, I stood with the characters, defending myself from wild dogs on a remote Polynesian island, or hanging from one hand in the rigging in a clipper ship. For me they were more than stories, they were experiences.

Not everyone accepts the place of historical fiction in the classroom. One teacher I read about believes that “stories are dangerous: they are fiction, not fact: they are contaminated by imagination.” (Martin & Brooke, 2002 p.1).

This point of view is luckily not shared by most educators, although there are differing conceptions of what historical fiction's role in a curriculum should be. I am inclined to believe that historical fiction "incorporates both the role-playing aspect of historical reenactments and the synthesis of interpretations from primary and secondary sources." (LaFaye, 2001, p. 2). Historical fiction is a powerful tool, combining imagination and reality in a way that can reach and teach students.

Imagination is indigenous in most children, and something that teachers should address and enjoy, not fear. "Teaching practices and curricula that are derived from research which views the child's imagination as largely irrelevant to learning are not calculated to either use or to develop the imaginative capacities of children." (Egan, 1986, p.10). If one considers imagination an integral component in childhood, as I do, one could go on to say that curricula that view imagination as irrelevant are, themselves, irrelevant to children.

When I began writing *Ash Cans*, I thought a great deal about the tone I wanted to set in my book. I wanted to write something that would be accessible and fun, while providing the reader with sound historical facts. LaFaye (2001), expressed it, "Historical fiction is a great way to allow students to create a personal connection with the historical period they are studying by teaching them essential skills in critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, research, empathy, and writing." (p. 1). This type of emotional and

mental reaction was exactly what I wanted to provoke from my student audience.

For writers and teachers it is important that readers make a personal connection with both the subject matter and the characters. In order to meet this goal I considered the facets of storytelling and history simultaneously. As Richard Peck (1995), so eloquently “I was trained to do research. Nobody is trained to write a novel.” (p. 2). When researching and writing about an event like the construction of Beach’s pneumatic subway or Boss Tweed’s ring of New York political power I experienced the same emotional and mental involvement I hoped to provoke in my student readers.

It was always my goal that this story would help students find meaning in the history. I knew that it would be hard to maintain the separation between self, past events, and present circumstances while I was writing *Ash Cans*, but I did not anticipate how involved I would get in my character’s lives. Writing historical fiction without letting your current opinions color your depiction of past events is difficult. At all times the author must “prevent their knowledge of present day society from coloring what they see and unintentionally filling in the holes.” (Schwebel, 2003, p. 2). Confronted with this problem, I decided that rather than writing a book of straight historical fiction I would create what I think of as semi-historical fiction: a book set in the present, but dealing directly with events long past.

What makes semi-historical fiction appealing to me is the way it side-steps some of the difficulties of historical fiction. In a work of historical

fiction certain assumptions are made by both author and audience. Authors assume, or perhaps presume, that they can channel a true sense of the past into their characters while keeping them accessible for present day readers. Readers assume that the author has done a realistic and open-minded job relating events and characters from the past.

Of course this type of separation between past events and present feelings is not always a reality. Nothing is truly free from the effects of its time period, and some of the most beloved and time-tested works of historical fiction show this. Schwebel makes the point that *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, a classroom favorite for decades, is not simply a New England tale, but also a retelling of what Schwebel calls the frontier myth, (p.198). The experiences of Kit, the protagonist, are anachronistic given the time period (the 1690s), in which the book is set, but extremely relevant for the reader of the 1950s, when the story was written.

It was this type of confusion between currently held ideas and past events which I wanted to avoid when I created *Ash Cans*. This is not meant to be a denigration of many of the works which are rightly beloved of teachers and students everywhere. Instead I hoped that by setting my story in the present I would be able to leave the events of the past to the interpretation of the reader. April and Julia interpret the past through the lens of their own experience. Their reactions are modern, but then so are they, and my intent is that readers will not take April and Julia's reactions on face value.

I have tried to give readers more scaffolding when it comes to questioning and decoding the book, *Ash Cans* should not be read passively. Readers are meant to be inspired by Julia and April's adventures, inspired to the point of setting off on their own adventures. It is my hope and intention that *Ash Cans* will, through its careful construction, "Allow students to do the work of historians, piecing together construction of 'truth' over time." (Schwebel, 2003, p. 214).

April and Julia: Collaborative Inquiry in the Classroom

Doing the work of a historian sounds like a difficult and complicated task for anyone, even a precocious fifth grader, but this is exactly what my characters do. The way that April and Julia go about decoding history is one in which students in real-life classrooms should be able to participate. While I have not had the opportunity/privilege to put this into practice I have built Julia and April's explorations on a sound base, one which could support real life history detectives. If however, time should prove that my idea of having students use the same inquiry methods as Julia and April, is a poor one, I still believe that their research tactics are strong.

In *Ash Cans* my characters use a mixture of research and debate in order to reach a fuller understanding of the mystery which has opened up before them. Their process is typified by trial and error, as well as long drawn out discussions of ideas and theories. Separately both girls come up with many interesting hypotheses. It is only when they come together, to propose

ideas, to argue, to hypothesize and to discuss, that they reach satisfying conclusions. This is, in large part, the process which is known as “Collaborative Inquiry.”

When I was writing this story I did not know much about collaborative inquiry. It was only as I began researching for my rationale that I came upon this phrase in the literature. Collaborative inquiry is defined as “a process consisting of repeated episodes of reflection and action through which a group of peers strives to answer a question of importance to them.” (Bray, Lee, Smith & Yorks, 2000, p. 13).

As I read more about this process I became aware that my characters had utilized it again and again as they strove to discover their own version of events. April and Julia engage in extended episodes of reflection and action over the course of *Ash Cans*, and this is natural given the mystery they are working on. What makes April and Julia’s research methods particular to collaborative inquiry is their ability to take part in that which they are researching. The girls are not simply commenting on pre-existing research, instead they combine analysis of pre-existing research with their own fieldwork.

Part of what defines and separates collaborative inquiry from other types of research is that “the line between researcher and subject is eliminated and all of those involved are full participants in the design, conduct and communication of the inquiry.” (Bray et al., 2000, p. 7). This type of research is something which April and Julia happen to excel in. They do not confine

themselves to libraries or computer labs; they get right out into the field and explore their ideas. Of course they are helped along the way by a third party, the ghost of Alfred Beach, but this only adds to the collaborative nature of their inquiry.

The beauty of collaborative research and inquiry is its seeming simplicity. Using principals of collaborative inquiry my two heroines, armed with few resources and a lot of questions, arrived at a sensible conclusion. So can anyone, as Julia and April's methods are easily reproducible in the classroom or for the family. Library research, trips out into the field, and prolonged and open-minded discussion to achieve answers are the key components of April and Julia's method. These methods are available to almost anyone who is willing to put in some time and effort.

With or without Beach's help I believe that April and Julia would have found many of the answers that they sought, because they approach questions in a methodical, well ordered, and creative way. As with their organic and unconscious use of collaborative inquiry, the girls also naturally use what authors Costa and Kallick (2000) have called the habits of mind. These habits of mind number 16 and are

“Persisting, managing impulsivity, listening with understanding and empathy, thinking flexibly, thinking about thinking, striving for accuracy, questioning and posing problems, applying past knowledge to new situations, thinking and communicating with clarity and precision, gathering data through all senses, creating/imagining/innovating, responding with wonderment and awe, taking

responsible risks, finding humor, thinking interdependently, and remaining open to continuous learning.” (p.xiii).

While April and Julia may not evidence all of these habits of mind, these attitudes and behaviors are all necessary for well developed group research and collaborative inquiry.

What does it mean that my characters naturally have or employ habits of mind and collaborative inquiry? I did not want to turn my book into a sermon, nor do I come from a classroom in which habits of mind or collaborative inquiry were made explicit in the curriculum. On the other hand I believe that these attitudes and behaviors are essential in group projects, and I will surely do whatever I can to foster these in any classroom, curriculum or students who or which I am responsible for. As April and Julia use these methods organically it is my hope that children reading this book will be guided to examine this process, and enabled to use it themselves.

April and Julia: Who are these girls?

Who am I talking about when I say that children will read this book and be guided by it? The specific age bracket that I wrote *Ash Cans* for is children between the ages of 9 and 11, although I am sure that it could be read aloud to younger children and enjoyed by older children and adults. My understanding of my audience is multi-layered. I have closely studied the literature on child development and spent the last two years in and out of traditional and non-traditional educational settings. This has helped me gain

an appreciation and understanding of adolescents, their tastes, and their abilities.

One of the most talked about, and clearest indicators of female entry into adolescence is the formation of strong friendships and the forming of cliques which “can result in a great deal of cruelty as well as wonderful friendship groups.” (Wood, 1997 chp. 10). These female friendships play a large part in my story, specifically the friendship between April and Julia and their interactions with another friend pair, Katherine and Maggie. April and Julia are both ten years old, and live within 10 blocks of one another. Although the girls are best friends, there are considerable tensions between them. Their internal tensions are caused by the usual culprits: socio-economic standing, value systems, social standings and interactions, and inter-gender relationships.

April and Julia are modeled after the girls I have met and worked with during my time as a student teacher and museum educator. They embody many of the characteristics that are culturally closely associated with ten year old girls. They talk a lot, (both on the phone and in person), are obsessive about their rooms, fight with younger siblings, are loyal to one another, and often dismissive of adults. It also means that they have huge imaginations, love mysteries and riddles, can use the Internet effectively, haven’t done too much research, and are surprised when adults are dishonest.

Other characteristics commonly associated with this age group are the ability to work independently or in groups for extended periods of time, the

development of what is known as meta-cognition and the growing importance of strong friendship ties. I considered these characteristics, among many others, when I was developing April and Julia as characters and when I envisioned future readers. These characteristics also make children in this age range (9-11) an ideal group for the type of historical research and reconstruction that this story advocates.

Meta-cognitive development, or “thinking about thinking,” (Berger, 2005, p.299), is an important component to collaborative inquiry and any type of open-minded research. Developmentally it occurs sometimes between third and fifth grade and enables children to “evaluate a cognitive task to determine how to best accomplish it, and then to monitor and adjust performance on that task.” (Berger, 2005, p.299). This ability allows April and Julia to change their approach and method several times throughout the story and gives them the opportunity to change their minds as well.

Readers who are developing their own meta-cognitive abilities will be able to relate to the missteps that April and Julia take throughout the story, while feeling sympathetic for their concern over these missteps. It is normal for children in this age group to worry a great deal about being correct or right, whether socially or in the classroom. Pre-adolescence is often a difficult time for children. As improved meta-cognition brings the ability to think objectively about events or work, so too does it bring inevitable comparisons between one’s self and the world.

Increased self-understanding comes at a price. Self-criticism and self-consciousness rise and self-esteem dips....this may indicate that they(children) are more realistic and therefore able to work on the skills they lack, or it may foreshadow the emotional uncertainty and psychic stress that many adolescents feel. (Berger, 2005, p. 316).

It was just this type of uncertainty that I tried to capture in my characters.

Julia, who is the narrator in this story, knows that she and April are good at different things. At the beginning of the story she makes an entire list of the things that separate them, intellectually, physically, and socially. Still, the two girls are friends, and try to use their different skills towards one another's advantage. By the end of the book both girls have stepped outside of their accepted places, and tried some new and different attitudes and outlooks. For pre-adolescent readers this type of character delineation and growth is meant to shed light on the changes they may, or will, be experiencing in their own lives.

These changes, which can bewilder many children, are part of what makes the bonds of friendship particularly tight in this age group, particularly for girls. "Cliquish behavior seems to be a way for young girls to practice forming deep attachments that generally characterize older female relationships and which differentiate them from the more distant and less effusive relationships of both young boys and older males." (Wood, 1997, p.

27). While I do not completely endorse such a dichotomous outlook on the nature of male and female friendships, I have noted the depth and intensity that girls this age put into their friendships. Throughout *Ash Cans* April and Julia use their friendship as a safe field for the interplay of their ideas.

The friendship between April and Julia is central to the plot of the book, but their relationship is not the one most changed by the end of the story. The biggest change of all is between Julia and Deirdre, the school bully. This change comes about primarily because of Julia's infatuation with George Starkis. It is this crush, and its fulfillment, which brings about some of the biggest personal changes in all the character's lives.

George and Deirdre mean a lot of things different to Julia, one of the most important being the unknown. In George's case it is the desired unknown, and in Deirdre's the undesired. Yet, through experience, patience, open mindedness, and some machinations on April's part, Julia is able to get to know both George and Deirdre in a new light.

The story of the bully being rendered harmless by patience and kindness, and love being won by the righteous, is an old one. Old stories can have their purposes, and this one has a lot of resonance with children. Bullying is something which many students experience and one of its chief causes is misunderstanding. Deirdre is a both a physical and mental bully, but her aggressive power is neutralized when she becomes involved in the activities of Julia and April, and when George offers her understanding and acceptance. Deirdre's aggression may not have been checked, but it has been

redirected. “The impulse to dominate others must be redirected during childhood, for the sake of the bullies’ healthy development as well as that of their victims.” (Berger, K., 2005, p. 322).

Stories should have endings that, if not happy, are hopeful. All of the choices I have made in character and plot development were chosen to make characters who were realistic and relatable, characters with whom the reader could identify. At the same time as a writer I had to look towards a positive and growth-filled final outcome. My goal was, and is, for children to read this book and see themselves in it. In this way the actions of my characters will not seem too unusual or difficult to readers, and they will feel tempted to try out some history detecting for themselves.

April and Julia: Following their lead

Ash Cans is a story, a work of semi-historical fiction. Perhaps more importantly, it is a blue-print for personal and group exploration of New York’s diverse history and resources. As April and Julia explore the mystery of Alfred Beach, they are not only exploring history, they are exploring the very city they live in. Exploration is the true star of the book, the thing which I am trying to encourage most in my readers.

What could a museum educator prize more than students who use museums as a means of research? New York is filled with museums and other cultural institutions whose collections cover just about every time period in mankind’s history. As well as possessing a singular amount of museums,

New York is also has one of the longest and most catalogued histories of all American cities. There is a historical society in every borough, and a great deal of regional museums devoted to neighborhoods. Yet, it must be asked, how often does a student working on a history project decide to visit one of these locations in order to better inform themselves about their topic? The answer is, almost never.

New Yorkers walk by historical sites every day without giving the slightest thought or care to what or who had passed that way before. An ignorance or obtuseness towards history is only to be expected in a city which prides itself on cynicism and jaded amusement as much as New York does. This type of complacency can, and should, be shaken. I believe that to wake students up to the history all around them all that is needed are some well-planned trips to the library and historical sites throughout the city followed by open discussion.

The trips that April and Julia take to museums and sites throughout New York help them uncover the mystery of Alfred Beach, but they are also easily reproducible by anyone. The maps that are included in the book show readers how to reach these cultural destinations, either on foot or by subway. Every effort has been made to get readers of this story to go out and visit the sites Julia and April visit. This effort has been made because there is a specific sort of experience that can only be had at these locations.

By 'specific experience' I do not mean one type of reaction, or one type of action. Instead I mean a sort of generalized reaction that most people

have to museums or cultural institutions, if they give themselves the chance. It is a reaction that, for lack of a better word, has long been called “learning.” This learning comes in many forms, and can be difficult to pin down, but it is something that people go to museums specifically to do. As Falk and Dierking (2000) note, “most visitors mentioned that they go to museums to learn more about something.” (p. 3).

Learning takes many forms, and not all of them are as obvious as one would think. Often the form that learning in a museum takes is that of a conversation. These conversations can be very free ranging, incorporating aspects of the exhibit as well as the viewer’s shared and independent experiences. “It is amazing, throughout our study of museum visitors, to see the trajectories of conversations that begin with an object and end up in the recounting of a long-forgotten anecdote or personal memory. (Leinhardt, & Knutson, 2004, p. 16).

While these conversations may not focus specifically on the museum, I agree with Leinhardt and Knutson (2004), when they say that “these personal moments are just as important to the value of a museum experience as learning about the content of the exhibition per se.” (p. 16). These conversations are a way of talking about thinking, or engaging directly in meta-cognitive analysis. Additionally these conversations are a large component of the collaborative inquiry method.

Museums are more than mere repositories of objects. Museums are banks for our collective societal memory, but the objects in a bank are worth

nothing unless someone values them. Personal interaction, interpretation and discussion are necessary to bring a museum's objects to life. Conversation is the only immediate way a visitor has of sharing their feelings and interpretations of the objects in a museum's collection. Conversation in museums is the "primary mechanism of knowledge construction and distributed meaning making." (Falk and Dierking, 2000, p. 110).

Despite the large role conversation plays in "meaning making" in museums, many students think of museums as places where they are told to not speak above a whisper. This unfortunate reality is one of the reasons I have incorporated the New York Historical Society into my story. The Historical Society is the oldest museum in the city, and possibly, one of the stuffiest. It is there, within those venerable walls, that April and Julia made one of their biggest discoveries and experienced a collection in its fullest. The conversations they have at this museum with each other and Julia's mother help them a great deal as they try to make sense of all that they have seen.

April and Julia visit the New York Historical Society on a weekend, with Julia's mother. This is a big change from their initial visit to the Transit Museum. There is a huge difference between the school trip experience of the museum and the personal visit experience, and the importance of this difference cannot be over-emphasized. "Social context plays an important role in facilitating learning during children's field trip experience." (Falk & Dierking, 2000, p. 102). Too often students associate museums with school and schoolwork, assuming that every trip begins with a listing of the rules and

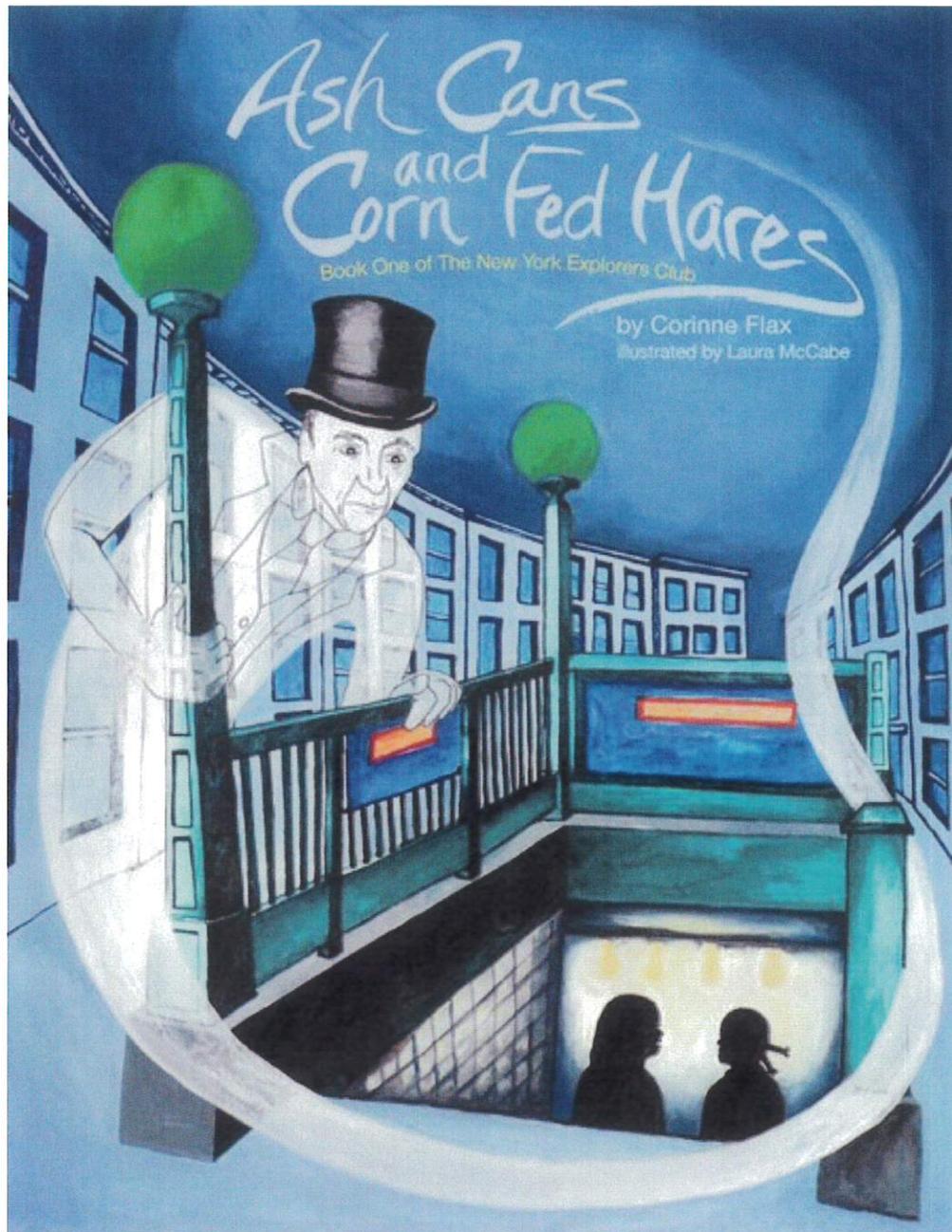
ends with a trip sheet. For April, school trips to museums are lacking in savor, but for Julia they are exciting: for both the girls it is a matter of context.

Given a comfortable environment and free range April and Julia are able to use conversation to construct and devise different concepts and theories about Beach's mystery. Because they are using museums and historical sites as the starting point the girls' methods are affected. This is part of the nature of museums and part of what museum educators are constantly trying to explain as the importance of museums in education. It is true that museum educators cannot "expect that each and every object, in each and every exhibition, will arouse the individual and inspire him or her on a life course of learning." (Leinhardt & Knutson, 2004, p. 6). Yet within this truth there is another, which is that there is an exhibit or object out there for everyone. If the person and the object can simply find their way to one another, then that magical thing called learning will occur.

Conclusion

What I have created in this book is one map, one story, one mystery. There are countless such mysteries and questions here in New York, and with the right preparation, anyone can go out there and try and discover them. My goal with *Ash Cans* has been for the book to not only be a story, but to be a key to exploration. I do not mean only exploration of New York City; I also mean the beginning of Julia and April's exploration of their friendship and their relationships with the world around them.

It is my intention to write further works of semi-historical fiction, all part of the same series as *Ash Cans and Corn Fed Hares*. As their stories, continue the experiences of my characters will cause them to grow and change, just as their knowledge and appreciation of history grows and changes. There are many more mysteries locked beneath the asphalt of New York City; April and Julia are just the girls to pluck those mysteries from their resting places and bring them to light.



Chpt. 1. The Closet

Julia woke up to the sound of her brothers fighting. There wasn't anything unusual about that, so she rolled over and tried to get back to sleep. Just as she was beginning to drift back into unconsciousness Ramon came racing in from the hall.

"Julia, I think we have a problem." he said

Julia opened one eye and looked at her brother warily. The new shirt their mother had laid out for him the night before was pulling free of his belt and he stood in front of her, hands twitching nervously, shifting back and forth. Julia's mother always laid out her brother's cloths before she left for the graveyard shift at the hospital, and she would have hated to see how the shirt was getting mangled.

"What is it Ramon?"

"I, well, I locked Jesus in the hall closet."

"So let him out!"

"I can't, the door is locked and I can't find the key."

Julia realized she had to get out of bed. It was almost time anyway. Julia liked to wait until the last possible moment to get out of bed.

Reluctantly she left her warm bed and followed Ramon into the hall. The closet door was closed and when she tried to yank it open she found that, just as Ramon had said, it was locked. "Jesus, Jesus are you ok?" She yelled.. What if her brother was really stuck in there? He had asthma and she knew he hated the dark. Julia began to worry.

"I'm fine," was his muffled answer "but it's really dark in here, and I don't like it..." She could hear his breathing and it sounded ragged and fast.

"Jesus do you have your inhaler?"

"It's in my pocket."

Relief mingled with Julia's fears, at least he would have his inhaler if he needed it. She shot a nasty look at Ramon.

"How could you put him in there?" she hissed, "You know how he is,

even after we get him out it's going to take him all day to calm down." Ramon hung his head, and Julia sighed.

"Well, we'll just have to figure this out." Louder she said "Ok Jesus, we're going to get you out of there...somehow." She turned to Ramon, "I know you know where the key is. Think for a minute, where does Mami keep everything we might need?"

Ramon turned and ran to Mami's room where he began searching through the top drawer of her desk. This was the drawer where you might find tape, pencils, spare change and, hopefully, a spare key.. Finally he came back with a big ring of keys. Julia and Ramon tried each key on the hall closet door, and on the twelfth try they got the door open. Jesus tumbled out of the closet, flushed and upset. He sat on the ground for a moment then surged up and tackled Ramon. The two of them fell to the ground where they wrestled at Julia's feet.

Julia looked at her brothers and sighed helplessly. One little brother would have been bad enough, but twins were nearly unbearable! Rolling her eyes Julia headed back to her room to get ready for school, she still had ten minutes before the bus got there, maybe it would be enough.

Chpt 2 The Bus

Julia made it onto the bus, with her bratty brothers in tow, just as the door was about to close. Ramon and Jesus went and sat in the front with a couple of their friends and Julia moved towards the back. Now that she was in fifth grade she could sit in one of the last rows on the bus. It was one of those unstated rules, only fifth graders could sit in the back. Sometimes Julia wondered why this was, after all, what was so great about the back of the bus?

Still, she was happy to be able to claim her seat, an undisputed fifth grader. The bus ride to PS 357 went straight up 3rd ave for about fifteen blocks and these were some of Julia's favorite blocks. It wasn't that these blocks were so beautiful, after all, to Julia's way of thinking there wasn't all

that much to see between 23rd street and 38th. No, it was that these were the blocks that led to April's house, and April was Julia's best friend.

They had been best friends this entire year, ever since they'd met at a bring your kids to work day at the hospital. Both their parents worked there. April's mom was a doctor, Julia's mom said she was "One of the very best doctor's in the whole place." Even though April was new to the school she and Julia had become friends right away. There was something special about April Moss, something that Julia could feel, but not describe. One thing was certain, wherever April went, whatever the two girls did together, something unexpected always happened.

Finally the bus stopped on 38th and April got on. Julia knew that when April got on the bus she would be spotless. Her hair would be, as always, braided so tightly you could almost hear it squeak when she walked, her uniform would be ironed so sharply it could have cut you, and her shoes would be shiny enough to see your own reflection.

Comparatively Julia was always a mess. Her blouse, just like her brother's shirt, was always coming untucked. She never had time to brush her hair properly and it stuck out all over her head like she'd stuck her finger into an electrical socket. To top it off her shoes were scuffed and cracked from playing soccer with her brothers.

The doors of the bus opened with a whoosh, and April came up the stairs, first as always. Julia watched as her friend peered through her glasses towards the back of the bus. The girls yelled each other's names and shared a quick hug before settling down into their shared seat.



After they managed to settled down April asked Julia “Did you get your mom to sign the permission slip? Did she give you the three dollars for the trip today?”

“Of course!” Julia said, “Mami would never let me or even my brothers miss out on anything!”

This wasn’t strictly true. Julia had remembered to ask her mother for the three dollars for the field trip, but (typically), had forgotten to get her permission slip signed, so she’d done it herself. It wasn’t the first time Julia had forged her mother’s signature, and she had a feeling it wouldn’t be the last.

“My mom is so excited about this trip” said April, “After all, this trip is kind of her idea, she talked to Ms. Smythe about it during parent teacher night. You know how she’s always saying we don’t have any idea about what this city is really made of, and how going to the NY Transit Museum is just the kind of thing that’ll help us. Plus my family feels a real connection with the subway in New York, some of my ancestors helped build it. ”

Julia was surprised, she hadn't known April's family was from New York.

"I didn't know you'd been in town for so long!" she said.

"Oh yeah....we go way back in New York." April answered.

"Well any way the museum is no big deal. It's just an old subway tunnel with some trains in it and stuff. Kid's stuff really. Ramon and Jesus used to love trains and Mami was always dragging me there with them."

Actually Julia remembered that she had kind of liked these trips to Brooklyn Heights with her family. Her brothers had loved to pretend they were driving the trains and she had been fascinated by the descriptions of life for a tunnel worker. Not that she was going to tell April about that. After all, part of being a fifth grader was keeping your cool, and not getting excited about anything.

"Yeah," said April "The museum is no big deal, but you know what's going to be cool? We'll get to take the subway there, and we get to go with our class and Miss Schem's class, and that means," the girls looked at each other and smiled and said in unison

"GEORGE STARKIS!!!!"

Julia had been crushing on George for years, an enthusiasm that April didn't share, but was willing to encourage.

Chpt. 3 Speculation

At PS. 37 mornings were disorganized to say the least. As the school buses pulled up and kids poured out onto the sidewalk teachers stood in their midst, like tall trees in a field of grass, trying to herd the students up the wide staircases and through the double doors towards their home-rooms. Of course nobody wanted to go straight to class, not without saying hi to a couple people and checking out what the competition was wearing. April and Julia soon found some of the other fifth graders who were going on the trip and formed a

little pod that slowly swirled it's way up the steps, towards their home rooms.

"I hear that the museum is in an old abandoned subway station, and the reason they abandoned it is because people died there!" said Katherine Peobles.

April rolled her eyes at Julia, and said "Come on Katherine, people die everywhere, I don't think that's why they closed the station."

"Hmph," grunted Katherine, "That shows what you know April Moss!"

"Yes, I guess it does." said April, and Julia had to stifle a laugh and shoot April a warning look. Katherine was a nice person and she always had interesting gossip, but she was really sensitive.

"Well I hear that the station is closed because they had a accident on the track right outside of it, like a total bash up, and a bunch of people died. Anyway those people who died? Their spirits couldn't get out of the tunnel and so they went and lived in the old station, and now it's haunted. So they made it into a museum." said Maggie, looking intently at the other girls to see if they believed her.

Julia could always tell when Maggie just wanted to say something, anything, and she knew that sometimes Maggie would just make up something that she thought other people would be interested in.

"Actually, I've been there before," Julia told them, "and to set the record straight I'm pretty sure the reason they closed the station is because nobody was using it anymore, because there's lots of other subway stops near it."

"See???" said April. Maggie and Katherine shrugged, both of them giving in to Julia much more easily then they ever would have to April. A lot of the other kids in their class thought that April was a know-it-all and sometimes a bit of a bully. Julia thought it was always better to take a gentler tack then April did, unless of course she was dealing with Ramon and Jesus. Julia knew that April was no bully, she just put a higher value on being right

then most kids did.

As the girls reached their home room they split up and headed for their seats. Julia put her coat on the back of her chair, and tucked her back pack underneath her chair and sat down. This year she had been lucky enough to score a seat by the window, so she could sit there and watch whatever was happening on the street below. April had been put right by the teacher's desk so she could help with attendance. April and Julia's seats had a direct line of sight between them, so they could sit and make faces at each other during morning announcements.

Chpt. 4 A change in Sachem's attire

One thing that Julia had always thought was weird about PS 37 was how the home-rooms worked. Even though Ms. Smythe was Julia's main teacher Ms. Sachem was in charge of Julia's home-room. It had been explained, at the beginning of the year, that this was so that both teachers knew all of the fifth grade. Both Julia and April had wondered how being around 30 plus kids for twenty minutes a day let anyone know anything about them, but that was how it was.

This morning Ms. Sachem seemed to be in an extraordinarily good mood. Normally Ms. Sachem liked to wear prim dresses in colors like 'Dusty Mauve' and 'Evergreen at Twilight', colors that your doctor used in his waiting room, at least that's what Julia's mother said they were. Even though she had long lovely brown hair Ms. Sachem always kept it pulled back into a low pony tail with a clip, and only wore sensible shoes with a low heel.

Mami preferred how Ms. Smythe dressed. Like Mami Ms. Smythe favored bright colors like electric blue and fire ball red. Her shoes sported high heels and she kept her wavy blonde hair short and loose. Typically most of the boys in Julia's class had crushes on Ms. Smythe.

Today Ms. Sachem had relaxed her normally subdued style and was wearing jeans and a black T-shirt with the A-train's icon on it. Even more

impressive was the way Ms. Sachem was smiling brightly and talking in an excited voice. Ms. Sachem told the home-room that she was,

“Ever so excited to be going on this trip today! Oh boys and girls I have loved the subway ever since I first came to New York and this museum in particular has always been one of my favorites. I’m just so excited that we are going! Now I’m going to come around and collect your permission slips. After the pledge of allegiance we will be going to the gym to meet up with Ms. Smythe’s home room, and then we are proceeding directly to the subway.”

Just as she said this a note flicked onto Julia’s desk. Carefully Julia slid her arm across the desk, depositing the note into her lap. From the way the note was folded and decorated: isosceles triangle with flowers drawn all over in pink marker, Julia knew it came from Maggie. Julia looked around the classroom, trying to keep her head down so nobody would notice. Note passing was strictly forbidden at PS 37 and Julia knew there were a few kids in her class who would like nothing more than to rat her out to Ms. Sachem.

Ms. Sachem had begun collecting permission slips on the opposite side of the room from Julia, so quickly and quietly Julia unfolded the note in her lap and read it.

Deirdre French, the nastiest of the nasty, says she is going to sit next to George no matter what, and that anybody who gets in her way is dead meat.

Who ever can sit next to George Starkis on the Subway is my personal Heroin!!!

Julia sighed. Everyone knew Deirdre French, the nastiest girl in fifth grade, had set her heart on George Starkis years ago. Anyone who got in her way was always dead meat! Julia couldn't believe Maggie thought this was a good enough message to warrant a note. Of course Maggie had never been the most practical of Julia's friends, that title certainly went to April.

Just as Julia was shoving the note into her pocket Ms. Sachem got to her desk.

"Do you have your permission slip?" she asked Julia.

"Of course Ms. Sachem!" Julia said, and handed Ms. Sachem the slip and her envelope with three dollars in it.

"Thank you," Ms. Sachem said, and moved onto the next desk.

Julia couldn't believe Ms. Sachem hadn't said anything about the note, normally she would have snatched the paper out of Julia's hand, but today she seemed completely distracted by the field trip.

Ms. Sachem finished collecting the permission slips and said,

"Class we are now going to get our coats and lunches. The cafeteria has packed lunches for those of you who normally get hot lunch, because we will be eating at the museum today. Please line up in front of the door with your buddy."

Julia grabbed her coat off the back of her chair, and headed towards the door.

"Just leave your bags here," said Ms. Sachem, "I will be locking the door, and we will be giving you clipboards and pencils once we get to the museum."

April and Julia were line buddies, and they fell into place, smiling at one another.

"Finally we get to leave!" whispered April.

"I know, I thought home-room would go on forever." Julia hissed back.

Ms. Sachem took her position at the head of the line and said brightly

"Are we all ready?"

“YES MS. SACHEM.” the class droned back at her.

“Alright then! Off to the gym!”

Down the stairs trooped the home room, past the nurse’s office, past the principal’s office, past the strange smelling cafeteria, and into the gymnasium.

Chpt. 5 Finally on their way

When they finally got to the gym confusion reigned. Both classes broke ranks and mingled at will, friends greeting each other with cat-calls, boys breaking into groups of five or six, girls forming clusters of three or four. April and Julia found a quiet spot under the basketball net and watched the maelstrom.

George Starkis was talking with a bunch of boys from their class, and Deirdre French and her posse were circling him like wolves around a lamb. George seemed to be completely unaware of Deirdre. In fact he was busy looking at a hand held baseball game that one of his friends had.

“You know I don’t understand why everyone likes him so much.”

April said.

Julia understood why everyone liked George. It was his sleepy good looks and the way he didn’t seem affected by most of the things that happened at school. He was also one of the fastest runners in fifth grade and could draw beautifully. Of course she didn’t say this to April, instead she made a noncommittal noise and was about to say something else when a loud screeching noise interrupted her.

It was Ms. Smythe, using one of the gym teacher’s whistles to get the groups attention. The group was suddenly silenced and all eyes turned to Ms. Smythe.

“Alright Ladies and Gentleman,” Ms. Smythe said, “We are now going to get into our lines and walk to the 6 train. We will be transferring to the 6 at

Union Square, and I want to make sure everyone knows the procedure. We will stay in our groups, there will be a chaperone assigned to each group of eight students. Stay near your chaperone at all times while we are traveling. Do not separate from the group. Do you understand me?"

"YES MS. SMYTHE." said the students.

"Right then!" said Ms. Smythe, "get into your lines and let's get out of here."

As April and Julia hurried to get into their lines Julia couldn't help but notice that Ms. Smythe was dressed the same as Ms. Sachem today. Had they called each other on the phone and agreed on jeans and sensible shoes? It was hard for Julia to imagine the two teachers being friends, after all, they were so different. Then she looked at April's tightly braided head bobbing in front of her and she thought 'Well maybe opposites do belong together.' and rushed to catch up with her friend. After a flurried three minutes the two classes were lined up, each with four chaperones as well as their teachers.

With Ms. Smythe leading the way they finally headed out the door. The walk to the 34th street six train was fairly standard, as was the ride to the museum. Of course there was some confusion when it came time to transfer and a homeless man began talking to one of the boys in Ms. Sachem's class (Billy Gonzalez), prompting a chaperone to pull Billy aside and give him a quick lecture on stranger danger.

Otherwise everything went smoothly. April and Julia spent their time watching Deirdre French trying to get close to George and having difficulties. It seemed each time she got almost close enough to say something one of the teachers or chaperones would come up and ask George a question or pull Deirdre back to her group. The chaperone for Julia and April was Mrs. Hartson, Trevor Hartson's mother. Mrs. Hartson worked in the cafeteria usually and had been given a special day off to accompany their trip. Julia thought Mrs. Hartson was a lot like Trevor, nice but dull.

Finally they got to the museum. It looked just like Julia had

remembered it, a subway entrance on a street, with a sign hanging above it that said NY Transit Museum in blue and gold. Julia could feel herself getting excited as they walked down the steps into the museum and she found herself grabbing April's hand and squeezing it. April smiled at her, Julia figured she was also feeling a buzz of excitement as they finally got to the museum. But then April whispered

"I bet we can get away from Mrs. Hartson once our tours start. Just follow my lead."

Julia's heart felt like a lead weight. Why did April always have to be so difficult? Never content to be just part of group, or one of the gang, April would always be pulling away.

Chpt 6: Dead Rabbits and Native Americans

Once the classes had gotten down the stairs and put their coats and lunches on a cart, apparently they would get them back later, a man named Virgil gave them a short lecture about visiting the museum.

"Ok guys, I know you came from PS 37 in Manhattan today right?" he asked.

"Yeah." the classes sighed back at him.

"Well you guys took the subway here right? So now you're old pros on the subway right?"

"Right." the class echoed.

"Ok then, I'll be brief with this! First off, the Museum is a real working subway station (called Court Street), so please be careful downstairs, our third rail is live and has 600 volts of electricity running through it, in fact that's how we power our whole museum. This is a very hands on museum but you guys still need to be careful about how you handle things. Please treat our collection with respect and touch things lightly. We also have a lot of other visitors here today, so try and keep your voices down. Today you guys are going to be working with two of our best interpreters, let's say hello to Polly

and Charles!!!”

A small woman with brown hair and a black man with long braids stepped up from behind Virgil.

“Ms. Sachem your class is going to be working with Polly, and Ms. Smythe your group is going to be with Charles. I hope you all have a wonderful time today.”

“Alright guys, we’re going to head into Steel, Stone and Back Bone, our exhibit on the building of the subway.” Charles said, “Could Ms. Smythe’s class please follow me?”

Soon Julia was learning all about the construction of the subway, of the dangers of working deep underground in the early 1900s, about poisonous air and cave ins, the dangerous work of using explosives and the use of child labor in the tunnels.

“It’s amazing how long ago they built the subways. Can you believe they made people work in those conditions?” April asked her.

“Yeah, it’s amazing,” answered Julia, “I mean it takes forever to get anything done in New York, and they managed to build most of the tunnels in less then ten years.”

“But you know what my mother always says, ‘haste makes waste’” said April.

“What does that mean?” Julia asked her.

“Well I just think, in terms of the subway, that sometimes the great speed they built the tunnels with could have led to some people losing their lives. Like Charles is saying, it wasn’t that safe a job.”

“That’s deep April.” Julia said.

After looking at the Steel & Stone exhibit Charles took their group downstairs, into the tunnels themselves. The first trains they looked at were old elevated trains, trains that had run on an above ground track on 2nd avenue in Manhattan. Julia tried to imagine a train running down the middle of 2nd avenue, but she found it impossible. It was hard to think about people riding in

these old wooden trains, going to work everyday just like her mother did.

As they walked to the next train April whispered, "I'm just about ready to ditch this tour, what do you think?"

Julia shrugged, but really she didn't want to leave the tour at all. This was a lot more fun than class and Charles seemed to know everything about the trains.

"Listen Julia, I just know we're going to do some activity in the next car, and I just am not interested. If we slip away we can see a couple more cars and maybe go find George. Come on, what do you say?"

"Fine," hissed Julia, "but if we get in trouble..."

"Don't worry! We won't get in any trouble, I promise."

Julia wondered how April could promise something like that, but again she shrugged her shoulders and nodded. She would ditch the tour with April.

When the class walked into the next car Charles gave them all special circular cards that had been broken up into sections. While the class sat on the low seats of the old subway car Charles explained what they would do next. "This activity is called a circle book. You guys are going to choose different parts of this car to illustrate and describe on the cards. By shifting the top level of the circle you can reveal different sections underneath. One half of the card is past, the other half of the card is present." He held the card up, making sure they were all paying attention, and went on, "Today we'll fill in the past, then, when you're riding back to school you can do the same with a contemporary car. It should be fun, or at least interesting, for you to see how things have changed. The car we're in now is a triplex, which means three interconnected cars, and it dates from 1927. Take some time and walk through the three cars, and make some good drawings and descriptions."

April gave Julia a meaningful look and began walking slowly towards the back of the car, hoping for an opening to scoot out and do some exploring on her own. Julia followed April grimly, thinking that it might be fun to actually just stay in the car and work on the assignment. Just as she was about

to tell April she didn't want to ditch the tour April darted out the door leaving Julia with no choice but to follow. No sooner had the girls gotten out the door than Charles was standing in front of them. How had he gotten out of the car so fast?



“So you guys aren't all that interested in the project?” he asked.

Julia was amazed to see that April looked apologetic. “I just want to look around.” April said.

“Well, I'm sorry but that's not a possibility.” Charles explained, “It is this museum's policy to only allow children to be on the platform when accompanied by an adult.”

April pouted, Julia looked down at her shoes, ashamed of having tried to ditch.

“Listen, you girls look like you are the types who like a good adventure, and a good mystery. Here's what I'm going to do, I'm going to tell you a secret.”

Julia was amazed! Here they were, completely caught out, and they weren't even going to get into trouble. April smiled at Charles and said “I love secrets.”

“Well, this isn’t exactly a secret, let’s just call it a little known fact. You know how I told you the first subway wasn’t built till 1901? Well that’s sort of not true. In 1869 a man called Alfred Beach built the first subway in New York. He built it down around Wall Street, and it was three blocks long. Beach had to build his subway in secret because the politicians in New York, especially this one politician called Boss Tweed, didn’t support the building of a subway, they wanted an elevated train only. So Beach had to build his subway at night, and then hope that once it opened it would be a success. To make his subway a success Beach spent a lot of time and money on designing his station. He put in fish tanks, a candelabra, even a piano to make his underground station look and feel luxurious. One thing he also did was to put beautiful mosaics up on the walls.”

“Seriously?” April asked.

“Serious as can be.” Charles said. “Unfortunately for Beach his subway was not the success he had hoped for. It was popular for a time as a curiosity but since it only went a few blocks nobody could use it for anything and the public lost interest. Eventually the place was closed off and bricked up and pretty soon everyone forgot about Alfred Beach and his subway. Then in 1912 the tunnel was found again during construction of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit system. Apparently they found the station in perfect condition, with the piano covered in dust, the fish tank empty and cracked, and the candelabra still hanging from the ceiling, their lights long unlit.

The other thing they found was a document written by Alfred Beach himself, in which he writes about how Boss Tweed stopped his plans and destroyed his dreams. He ends this document with a strange poem. It is said to read

Where Dead Rabbits and Native Americans come to rest,
That’s the place where the hunting is the best.
Don’t sing to me about ears of corn,
For wisdom, much like hare, has been shorn.

Down the halls of Tammany I wander alone
Inside my breast the call to freedom has grown
Look to the streets to find the rest
Although what you find in the ash-cans may be best.
What do you girls make of that?"

April looked at Julia and shrugged, Julia felt exactly the same way. Who sang about ears of corn? What was there to make of dead rabbits and Native Americans? She was trying to think of a polite way to tell Charles that she didn't make anything of it at all, and that further she wasn't much inclined to when Mrs. Hartson came out of the subway car.

"Here you are! For crying out loud girls, you know you were supposed to stay in the car! Thank you for catching them Charles, these two are always getting in trouble on field trips."

"Are they, hmm." said Charles. "Well, it's about time for us to get moving up to the workshop, think we can round up the rest of the class and get moving?"

"Of course." said Mrs. Hartson.

It took a few minutes to get the class into line, but soon they were going up the stairs. No sooner was Mrs. Hartson's back turned then April nudged Julia and, in an undertone, asked

"What did you think about that creepy poem?"

"I didn't think anything about it, what did you think?" Julia answered.

April smirked at Julia and shook her head. "Well I think it might be a code. I bet we could figure out the code if we had a copy of the poem."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes I am. Plus we could work on it for our independent history project."

Julia had forgotten the independent history project. Every year the fifth grade would break into groups and choose some part of history to make a report on. The poem did seem like it would be a good thing to work on.

“I guess we could do that, but how do you know we’re going to get put in the same group? Last year nobody got to choose, and Donovan Saks had to work with Ester Venctor, what a mess that was.”

“Don’t worry Julia, I’ve got it all figured out. Leave it to me, all I need you to do is get a copy of that poem from Charles.”

Julia thought about it for a little, and realized she might as well get a copy of the poem anyway. What could it hurt? Even if she and April didn’t get to work together on the independent history project having a copy of the poem wouldn’t hurt anybody, and maybe she could show it to Mami when she got home.

“Ok, I’ll get a copy of the poem.” She told April.

“Good, leave the rest to me, I’ll take care of everything.”

Julia wondered exactly how April would take care of everything, but she decided not to worry about it.

Chpt. 7 The Awful Thing that Happened

It wasn’t hard for Julia to get a copy of the poem. While the class was making mosaic tiles in the Transit Museum workshop she asked Charles if he could make her a copy of the poem. He had smiled at her and said

“Thought you’d never ask.” And with a flourish he pulled a copy of the poem out of his pocket and handed it to her, saying “I figured I’d make a copy for you guys, just in case you decided you were interested in doing some historical detective work. If you and your friend figure anything out I hope you’ll share it with me.”

As Julia took the poem from Charles a shiver ran up her spine. For a split second she saw, instead of Charles smiling at her, a tall white man in a black coat, wearing a tall black hat. Instead of hearing the noises of the museum, the loud voices of children and the different recorded messages of the exhibit they were standing in, Julia heard nothing. It was a perfect silence so great that it seemed to smother her with its lack of noise. The man in black

seemed to take a step forward to say something and then, as suddenly as it had all changed, everything was normal again.

“Are you ok?” Charles was asking her, “You look like you saw a ghost.”

“Oh um, I’m fine. It’s just, I’m...so hungry!”

“Well then, you better get into the cafeteria and get some grub before your class finished without you.”

Charles pointed towards the cafeteria and Julia headed for it. Her head felt fuzzy and she was unsure of what had just happened. Had she seen a ghost? It seemed unlikely, but what other explanation was there for that moment of chill and the man all dressed in black? Julia shook her head, there was no way she’d seen a ghost, her imagination had gotten out of hand, that was all. Still, she would have to tell April about it once they were at lunch.

Julia never got the chance to tell April about the man, or the cold, or even the poem. Instead something awful happened. What happened was so bad, so terribly awfully bad, that long after the fact, when it was all said and done, it still gave her chills to remember what had happened.

When the classes were at lunch Julia had started rooting around in her pocket to show April the poem and the note (Julia couldn’t believe she had kept such a stupid, pointless and terribly incriminating note), that Maggie had passed her in home-room fell out of her pocket. It fell out of her pocket and lay on the ground behind her, open and proclaiming in Maggie’s big loopy handwriting that Deirdre French was the ‘nastiest of the nasty’ and worse that ‘she was going to sit next to George Starkis no matter what’ and that whoever took that seat was the note writers’ ‘personal hero’.

Julia didn’t notice the note fall, but one of Deirdre’s friends did. This girl, who’s name nobody seemed to know because of how she always followed Deirdre around and didn’t speak unless spoken to, swooped down on the note and carried it away to Deirdre like one of the Wicked Witch’s winged monkeys. Julia didn’t even notice it happening, when she turned to show April the poem she saw that April was staring at Deirdre.

“What?” Julia asked.

“She has your note!” April said, and her voice was dull with dread.

Suddenly the sandwich Julia was eating tasted like dirt. She slouched down and tried to become invisible, while simultaneously trying to see exactly what was going on at Deirdre’s table.

If Deirdre decided to get angry about the note than whomever she blamed for it would find their life considerably less comfortable in the near future. There weren’t any names on the note, except Deirdre’s and George’s, but everybody in the fifth grade knew Maggie’s ornate handwriting, and Deirdre’s minion had seen the note fall out of Julia’s pocket.

April, who was sitting right across the table from Julia, tried to comfort her. “She probably won’t do anything, I mean it’s all true right?” she said, “Plus you know I’ve got you if she tries to start something.”

Julia smiled weakly. Deirdre probably outweighed April and her together. The thought of them trying to stand up to Deirdre was so preposterous it was funny. Nervously Julia picked at her lunch, folding and unfolding her paper napkin. She could hear rumbles coming from the table where Deirdre was sitting. Nothing would happen at the transit museum, that was obvious, but what could be easier than a quick push while the class was walking to the subway or on the platform?

Julia knew she had to warn Maggie about their impending doom. Ms. Sachem stood up from the table where she was sitting with the Ms. Smythe and the chaperones and called out

“Who needs to use the bathroom?”

Hands shot up all over the cafeteria and two lines began forming.

“I’ve got to go warn Maggie.” Julia hissed to April, “Throw out my trash for me?”

“Ok, but be careful.” April replied.

Julia stood up and slipped into line behind Maggie. She knew it was

important that Deirdre not see her whispering anything to Maggie or even talking to her. Maggie turned and smiled at Julia,

“Where did you guys go when we were on the train? If you and April always sneak off like that you’re going to get banned from field-trips eventually you know.”

Julia laughed nervously and smiled. The lines started moving, and she knew this was her chance to let Maggie know that she had messed up, big time.

“Yeah we’re definitely going to get in trouble back at school.” then, leaning forward so her hair shielded her she mouthed “Deirdre got the note you passed me.”

Maggie’s skin turned a whiter shade of pale.

“You’re kidding right?” she said.

“No. So...we need to be careful.” Julia said.

“How? I mean did you...” Julia shot Maggie a warning glance. It did them no good to talk about it now. There were too many people around and you never knew who was listening.

“I’ll call you after school.” she told Maggie.

“Yeah, if there is an after school.” Maggie replied, and Julia shuddered.

They didn’t say anything to each other after that. The rest of the day Julia felt on edge, she kept on looking over her shoulder to see if Deirdre or any of her friends were around. April kept on trying to cheer her up. Saying things like,

“Don’t worry buddy, I’ve got your back!” and “I’d just like to see that cow try anything, she’s just a big puffed up nothing.” Julia would try and smile but she could tell it was coming out as more of a grimace than anything else. The ride back to school was a nightmare. Julia’s heart was in her throat the whole way and each bump on the train made her jump a mile.

Back at school Julia felt like she was walking underwater. Everything seemed to be happening in slow motion. All she could think about was how

this might be her last day at school for awhile, she would probably have to stay at home for awhile, since she would be covered in bruises from Deirdre's big fists.

By the time the classes were released to catch the buses Julia felt like there was a stone in her stomach the size of Alberta, Canada and that if something didn't happen soon she would surely die of fear and anticipation.

Nothing happened. She and April got on the bus without being harassed. From the window Julia could see Maggie getting onto her bus, and she didn't look damaged at all. As they pulled away from the school Julia saw Deirdre coming down the steps and she was walking with George Starkis!

"Do you see what I see?" April asked. "Guess you guys are ok now right?"

"Yeah...I guess we're gonna be alright." Julia said uncertainly. She knew that she should have been thanking her lucky stars. George had finally noticed Deirdre, and amazingly he seemed to like her, but Julia couldn't help feeling a little disappointed. After all, she liked George too, and now he was Deirdre's in a way nobody could have anticipated.

Chpt. 8 Back at Home

It wasn't until the bus had dropped her off at home and she was fixing a snack for Jesus and Manuel that she remembered the reason the note had fallen out of her pocket. It almost seemed distasteful to look at the poem now. After all, it had caused her nothing but trouble. Still, she thought as she put bread and cheese into the toaster oven, it would be silly to think the poem was jinxed or something.

After her brothers were set up in the kitchen with their snacks and their homework Julia headed to her room with a cup of iced tea and sat down at her desk to look at the note and think about it. Julia laid the poem out on her table

and read it again.

Where Dead Rabbits and Native Americans come to rest,
That's the place where the hunting is the best.
Don't sing to me about ears of corn,
For wisdom, much like hare, has been shorn.
Down the halls of Tammany I wander alone
Inside my breast the call to freedom has grown
Look to the skies to find the rest
Although what you find in the ash-can may be best

The poem didn't look like much she thought. First of all it was a rhyming poem, and Julia knew from school that rhyming poems weren't much respected. The best poems didn't rhyme, and they were a lot more obscure seeming than this poem was, at least that was what Ms. Smythe had told them. What kind of mystery could there be in a poem as straight forward as this one? Still there were some questions she couldn't help asking herself. Like: Why were the words Dead Rabbits and Tammany capitalized? That had to mean they were proper names, but names for what? There were also some other words Julia didn't recognize, like ash-can and hare.

Julia knew that words that were capitalized were usually proper names, so could Dead Rabbits and Tammany be proper names, and if so, for what? Julia pulled out the notebook she used in history class, a Mead Five Star three section with a blue cover that she had covered in stickers. She turned to a new page and put the heading 'Transit Museum Poem' on it. Then she copied the poem and wrote the name Alfred Beach underneath it. On the next page she started a list with the heading Questions. Her first question was 'Who or What were the Dead Rabbits?'

Then Julia stopped and started tapping her pen. She had begun to

wonder about the Native Americans. When Charles had read them the poem she had assumed that Native Americans meant the people who had lived in America before Columbus and the Pilgrims, and that meant Indians. But now she began to wonder about this. People still used the term Indians all the time, even though it wasn't technically correct. Was it possible that people had said Native Americans in the 1800s? Julia had a feeling people hadn't so she added that to her list too. Then she began to wonder if maybe she should call April and talk to her, but just as she was getting up to use the phone it rang.

"Hello?"

"Hey it's April, did you get a copy of that poem?"

"Yeah, hey I was about to call you!"

"Well you know, that's how it is with friends sometimes."

"Ok you want me to read you the poem?"

"Sure, let's go through it line by line and try and figure out what we think about each line."

"Ok, here's the first line.

Where Dead Rabbits and Native Americans come to rest,

That's the place where the hunting is the best.

What do we think about that? I noticed that Dead Rabbits is capitalized so maybe that's a name?"

"That caught my eye too. I mean obviously, hunting, dead rabbits, and Native Americans, it makes me think about Indians."

"Remember we did that unit on the Lenape last year with Mr. Kraus? Do you remember him saying anything about Native American burial grounds, maybe that has something to do with the Subway?"

"That's a good idea Julia, like, it could be that the Indian burial grounds are in the same places as the subway tunnels, and the tunnels disturbed the burial grounds."

"Ok I'm writing that down, what about the hunting though, I mean you

don't go hunting in a graveyard do you?"

"Good point. I think we should probably go to the library tomorrow, do some internet research or something."

"Good thinking, what do you think about this next line?"

Don't sing to me about ears of corn,
For wisdom, much like hare, has been shorn."

"I think it's a pun."

"A pun?"

"Yeah, you know, a play on words? Usually they use homophones, words that sound the same but are spelled different and mean different things. Like hare in this case is a kind of rabbit."

"How do you know that?"

"Guess I was paying attention during vocab."

"So wait a minute, what does this mean now. I thought it was like hair, hair being cut. Is it about shaving a rabbit? If it is about a rabbit does it connect to the lines before it, with the Dead Rabbit?"

"Good question, let's write that down too. What about the ears of corn, what songs do we know about corn?"

"Well, there's always the Lenape connection, after all the Lenape Indians ate a lot of corn right?"

"I don't think it's about the Lenape Julia, at least I hope not."

"Why don't you want it to be about the Lenape? That was a cool unit we did with Mr. Kraus, and we got to do that project where we made flint tools and everything."

"Yeah but that was last year. I am so over that, just like I hope you're over George Starkis now that he's all over Deirdre French."

Julia thought that was very tactless of April, she still really liked George, even if he was dating icky Deirdre French. Really it didn't matter what he did,

he'd always be the cutest guy in fifth grade.

"Whatever April, let's move onto the next line."

"You know I think they're called stanzas."

"What are called stanzas?"

"The different lines in a poem. I think each complete line is called a stanza."

"Ok fine, so let's look at the third stanza."

Down the halls of Tammany I wander alone
Inside my breast the call to freedom has grown

"What do you think Tammany is April?"

"I don't know, could be it's a building somewhere right? I mean it seems like Alfred Beach is mourning something doesn't it? He's talking about death and being alone. Maybe Tammany is a funeral parlor?"

"I don't know, but I definitely think we need to figure out what Tammany is. The thing is, since this is a poem, can't it all be metaphorical? Like in that poem we read in class that talked about walking through the corridors of someone's mind. Couldn't Tammany be something else, not a building?"

"I don't know Julia, write it down in the notebook."

"Ok." And down Tammany went into the blue notebook, right below Hare, Hunting Ground, Dead Rabbits, and Native Americans. Then Julia remembered the corn and wrote that too.

"So far I've got hares, hunting grounds, Dead Rabbits, Native Americans, Tammany, and corn. Anything else that you think I should put down?"

"Yeah put down singing songs of corn, not just corn."

"Alright. Done. So here's the last stanza of the poem.

Look to the streets to find the rest
Although what you find in the ash-cans may be best"

“Have you ever heard of an ash-can before?”

“No I’ve never heard of an ash-can, but we can add it to the list.”

“This is getting to be a long list April.”

“I know, but nobody ever said this was going to be easy, we just said it would be an adventure, and I think that’s going to be the truth.”

Just then Julia heard a knock at her door.

“Hold on a second April, ok?” She put the phone down and said
“Mami?”

“Who else could it be?”

“Listen April I’ve got to go, but I’ll see you tomorrow morning on the bus. Let’s go to the library and do some research on this stuff tomorrow ok?”

“Ok, I’ll talk to you tomorrow Julia.”

As she hung up the phone Julia realized she had forgotten all about that moment at the museum when she had seen the man in black and felt the chill on her spine. She had meant to tell April about it, at least so April could tell her to stop being silly, but she had completely forgotten. With a shrug she figured she could always do it tomorrow.

Chpt. 9 Mami Comes Home, answers some things, asks some more.

“So what was the three dollars for?” that was the first thing Mami asked Julia once they were in the kitchen and dinner was on the stove. Tonight Mami was making her famous ‘everything in a pot’ dinner. The recipe was simple: take all the leftovers, cut them up and mix them together on the stove. Julia watched her mother throwing rice, chicken, broccoli, some left over tomato sauce, a handful of shredded Colby cheese, and who knew what else into the simmering pot on the stove. It actually didn’t look that bad this time, better then when Mami had been putting yogurt in everything.

“We went on a field trip to the Transit Museum today. Sorry I forgot to tell you about it.”

“Did I sign a permission slip for you?”

“Umm...well, not exactly...but Ms. Smythe said it was ok for me to go since I had the three dollars.” Julia felt her face getting flushed, and turned away from Mami, as if she had suddenly becoming fascinated with the report cards and magnets on the refrigerator.

“Well then, ok.” Mami didn’t sound convinced, but she also didn’t sound like she was very worried.

“We used to go there a lot, to the Transit Museum, didn’t we? I mean when Ramon and Jesus were little. It’s been a while though, since I was back there, has anything changed?”

“Not really, I mean, there could’ve been different trains or exhibits but I couldn’t tell. Something sort of cool happened though. We were talking to one of the guides and he told us about a mystery.”

“A mystery? What kind of mystery hija?”

“Well this guy, Alfred Beach, he built a subway before there were ever subways. He used all his money up to do it, and some guy named Tweed or something tried to stop him and eventually he died bitter and alone. But he left this poem behind, and people say it has secrets in it. The guide even gave me a copy of the poem, check it out!

Julia spread the poem out on the table for her mother to read.

“Hmmm.” Mami said, scanning the by now wrinkled piece of paper. “Dead Rabbits huh? Tammany...hmm...oh that’s funny.”

“What’s funny?”

“Well just this reference to ash-cans. Ash-cans are garbage cans.”

“What?”

“There’s this new resident at the hospital, British, and he asked me the other day who was going to come around and pick up the ash-cans. I didn’t know what he was talking about until he explained to me that in Britain they call the garbage man the ash-man and that garbage cans are often called ash-cans. I guess it has something to do with chimneys or something.”

“Like in Mary Poppins?”

“Exactly Hija, like in Mary Poppins.”

“So if the poem says that what ever is in ash-cans is the best does that mean we need to look in the garbage to find the answers to this?”

“Well that’s not something I want you doing, prying through the trash, there’s some dangerous things that get thrown away. Anyway don’t you think any garbage from the 1800s is long buried and gone?”

“I dunno Mami, this poem is from the past but April and I are going to try and figure it out.” Julia paused, should she tell her mother about that weird moment? Just as she was about to say something her mother interrupted her.

“There’s something else...something I’m trying to remember about ash-cans...they aren’t just trash cans. It’s like I’ve seen those words before, when the resident said that I could have sworn it was familiar...”

Mami went to the stove and stirred the pot, which was bubbling merrily and emitting gaseous puffs of steam. Looking into the pot she grimaced and said “I guess this is about done now. Can you go find your brothers?”

“Si Mami, no problem.”

Julia headed towards the back of the apartment to round up her brothers. They were in the living room with all the lights out, bathed in the blue glow of the television. “Come on guys, time for dinner.” she said to them.

“Oh no, what did Mami make tonight?” Jesus said, pulling a face.

“Is it snakes and snails and puppy dog’s tails?” Ramon asked, making a face to match Jesus’.

Julia sighed, it wasn’t that Mami was a bad cook, she just tended to get lazy. As long as the kids were getting all the essential vitamins and minerals she didn’t think too much about how food looked, or tasted At least that’s what she always told Julia...

Back in the kitchen the table was set and Mami was dishing out bowls

of 'dinner' and smiling a satisfied smile. "I remembered where I heard about ash-cans before Julia. It was on the side of a bus. An advertisement for Ash-can Artists at the New York Historical Society."

"Ash-can artists?"

"Yes, that's what I remember. Don't ask me what an ash-can artist is, I just read the ad, that's it."

Julia sat down to eat, feeling puzzled. Garbage can artists? Dead Rabbit hunting grounds? Finding the rest on the streets? Enough was enough, Julia decided that she'd had enough mysteries for one night, and there was no way she was going to tell her mother about the (had it been a ghost?), in front of her brothers. So she sat down to dinner, only to realize that there was at least one more mystery to deal with: what exactly the orange stuff oozing out of the green stuff her mother had served her was.

Chpt 10: New Day, A Few Answers

The next morning Julia and her brothers got off to school without a big hassle. They even made it to the bus stop with minutes to spare. While they waited for the bus Julia looked through her notebook, there were so many things they didn't know. How could she and April come up with the answers to so many questions? She didn't even really like history that much. Still, as she flipped through the pages and looked at the words Dead Rabbits and Tammany Hall a thrill went through her. Even if they only figured out a little part of the mystery they would be the first!

Being the first meant something, anyone with a brain knew that. Of course when it came to George Starkis Julia decided she wouldn't mind being the second, or even the third, as long as she was the last. On the bus Julia found a seat in the front and waited for April. When the bus turned onto April's block Julia could see her friend standing on her corner bus stop. April looked like she was about to pop like a piece of corn, that's how excited she

looked. Her hair was just as tightly braided as normal, but today she was carrying a book, which was unusual for her, and wearing the look of someone who had big news. This could only mean that she had found something out!

April sat down next to Julia and with a flourish produced her book.

“The Gangs of New York,” she said “A book my father had on his bookshelf, and he said it would help us.”

“Isn’t this a movie?” Julia asked.

“They made it into one, sort of, but my dad says the book is really different from the movie.” said April. “Look this book explains about the Dead Rabbits, the Native Americans and Tammany Hall! The first two are old-school New York gangs, and the third was a political machine!”

“A political machine?” asked Julia, picturing a factory that produced men in grey suits.

“Yeah a political machine. We don’t really have them anymore, although my dad says maybe we do, but anyway Tammany Hall used to run the city, it was like they owned all the political offices and anybody who didn’t pay them dues and give them support and stuff would never become a New York politician. That made them a political machine.”

“Is Tammany Hall a real place?”

“I’m not sure yet, we’ve got to do some research.”

“I’ve got some information too, about the ash-cans. My mom says an ash-can is a garbage can in England, or I mean, that’s what they call garbage can’s in England.”

“Do you have your notebook, because we’ll need it when I get Ms. Smythe to let us go to the library.”

Julia wrinkled her forehead, she knew it wasn’t that easy getting permission to work outside of class. “How are you going to get Ms. Smythe to let us go April?” she asked.

April just smiled slyly and said, “Don’t worry about that Julia. During

history today let me talk to Ms. Smythe and I'll make sure we're working together and get all the research time we need."

"Alright." Looking up Julia realized they'd made it all the way to school without talking about George or Deirdre even once, not to mention her ghost story. Sometime last night she'd realized that she was nursing a suspicion that April had done something to get Deirdre and George together. There wasn't anything Julia could put her finger on, just a nagging feeling that the hook up between those two couldn't possibly be natural. After all people like George didn't suddenly fall for people like Deirdre, just like they didn't fall for people like her.

But now wasn't the time to ask anything. Already they were off the bus and she could see Maggie and Katherine making a bee-line straight for her.

They converged on April and Julia in a whirl of squeals and high pitched giggles.

"Can you believe it???" tittered Maggie, "Deirdre and George are an item."

"Yeah have you seen them today? Holding hands and mooning over each other, who knew George was into her?" Katherine gushed. "I mean she's been pining away for him since third grade!"

"Well who hasn't?" Maggie asked.

"Well, April hasn't." Katherine said, shooting a glance at April to see how she would take this. Everybody knew April wasn't into George. The only people she ever expressed interest in were Forbes 500 company owners and basketball players, both far beyond the reach of your average PS 357 fifth grader. Still, Julia understood April's fixation, after all, George Starkis was as inaccessible as Bill Gates, or James Lebron so what was the difference?

"Anyway," said Maggie, "It definitely saved our butts, George suddenly discovering he was in love with Deirdre French. It put that note completely out

of her mind.”

“Which is a good thing for both of us!” Julia said.

The other girls nodded. As they followed the flow of students towards homeroom Julia looked around, trying to find George and his new Lady Love, but she didn't spot them until they were almost at Ms. Sachem's door.

There they stood, leaning up against a locker right outside of Ms. Sachem's homeroom. They were looking at some kind of magazine or something together, and they just seemed so intent. It made Julia's heart hurt to see it, but she told herself that this was how the world worked and at least she wasn't going to get clobbered. Then something happened that took her breath away. George Starkis looked up from whatever he'd been reading with Deidre and winked, winked right at Julia! She felt the blood rising in her face, her heart started beating like a drum in her chest. Could that have really just happened?

She turned to April to see if she had seen it too, but April was deep in a conversation with Katherine about why she (April), didn't watch the Disney Channel anymore. (It was all just a bunch of silly made up junk, plus April found Hannah Montana personally offensive).

As Julia took her seat in home room she had to pinch herself. It had happened, that wink had happened.

Now the question was why. She pulled out the notebook she was using for the poem and turned to a new section. On the page Julia wrote “why the wink?”.

Chpt 12 According to Plan?

In Ms. Smythe's class everything happened just as April had said it would. Julia stayed quiet while April did the talking and soon they had gotten approval to work on

a special 'top secret' independent history project. Not only had they gotten approval, they'd gotten permission to go to the library every day during history for research.

At first Ms. Smythe had been doubtful, "It is very unusual for students to work without direct supervision in the library, you know that April." She had said.

"I know that Ms. Smythe, I know it is unusual, but is it impossible?"

"Not impossible, no, not impossible....just very unlikely and unorthodox. If I were to give you special permission I would need both you and Julia to sign a waiver stating that you are aware of the implications of this special dispensation."

"Oh Ms. Smythe, we are certainly aware that by allowing us unsupervised library time you will have gone to unusual lengths to help us prepare an independent history project which will astound and amaze the student body at large, as well as reflect positively as to your own influence. We will certainly need your insight and input as we work on our project."

"Now girls, it would be my pleasure to be able to give you any guidance or input that you required, but this is a project you must complete on your own. We cannot rest on our laurels in the pursuit of historical knowledge!"

"I must tell you Ms. Smythe, I agree with you completely. There is nothing like the heady pursuit of knowledge to both embolden and enlighten a young mind, such as Julia's or my own. That is why we require this unprecedented access to the library.

With a dazed smile and a slight tremor in her hand Ms. Smythe nodded and acquiesced to April's request. April had out-talked her, using the very same language Ms. Smythe might have employed to deny them their request. And so the two of them packed up their books and headed for the library.

They found a table in a corner and settled down to start mapping out what they would do.

“Ok, so let’s take a look at the whole thing again.” April said.

Where Dead Rabbits and Native Americans come to rest,
That’s the place where the hunting is the best.

Don’t sing to me about ears of corn,
For wisdom, much like hare, has been shorn.

Down the halls of Tammany I wander alone
Inside my breast the call to freedom has grown

Look to the streets to find the rest

Although what you find in the ash-cans may be best

“Here’s what we know so far.” said April. “First off the Dead Rabbits and the Native Americans were gangs. According to The Gangs of New York they were actually rival gangs.”

Julia looked up from the notebook, “Why were they rivals?” She asked nervously. Julia’s mother had always warned her of the threats of gangs and gang violence, and Julia had seen evidence of gangs in the graffiti in her own neighborhood; it was hard to think that gangs had been around in the 1850s.

“Well, the book says a lot of it has to do with immigration and politics. It’s like a lot of it has to do with Tammany Hall, although why an politician would want gangs...”

“Were the gangs working for the politicians?”

“Julia, you never fail to amaze me! That’s what it says in the book. Apparently politicians from rival factions would enlist the help of different well established gangs in order to stop people from voting for the opposition. Actually, there’s a lot of crazy stuff that I never heard about before in this book.”

“Well what do you think I should write down?”

“Write down that the Dead Rabbits and the Native Americans were two gangs, set in a rivalry against each other. Write that the Dead Rabbits favored Tammany Hall.”

“Question: Where would the Dead Rabbits and the Native Americans rest?”

That had them both stumped. Obviously individual gang members would rest in their beds, but where would an entire gang rest?

Then Julia had a flash of inspiration.

“Maybe gangs would rest in a bar?”

“Yeah!” said April, “That’s a good idea, and I’ve got one too. What about a cemetery, isn’t that where you go for your final rest?”

“So what exactly does this mean for us?”

“Well...I think that this poem is pointing towards a location, and trying to give us a way of understanding whatever we find when, and if, we ever get to where the poem is pointing. That means that we need to start looking into old bars and cemeteries in New York.”

“Yeah but how many of those are there going to be?”

“Only one way to find out, the internet!”

The girls hustled over to one of the old PCs that stood in a line by the encyclopedias.

“I’m gonna look up old New York cemeteries, ok?”

“Good idea Julia.”

Soon they came upon a page called Forgotten New York.

“Whoa, check this out, there’s people out there interested in everything! This page, is all about stuff in New York that’s been hidden or forgotten.”

The page had information not just about cemeteries but about street lamps, train stations, old advertisements, everything.

“This page says there’s an old cemetery in the East Village, in fact two, one between 1st and 2nd ave on 2nd street and one on 1st ave between 2nd and 3rd street. You know the book on the gangs says they hung out in those areas, and the site says the graveyards were built during the 1850s and

60s. That would match right?" asked Julia

"You are correct! Julia I think we should go down there and poke around the graveyard. I mean, maybe we'll learn something about the Dead Rabbits or about Alfred Beach."

"Do you really think there is going to be anything to discover, after all this time?"

"Well, I don't know really, but I think we've got to try. Plus this site says there's a bar called McSorley's nearby, and that's one of the oldest bars in the city, I mean it was around when the gangs were active. If we can get in there we can ask some questions, maybe do some poking around."

Julia bit her lip, while this was all good and exciting she was beginning to get a strange feeling. Stoking up her courage she admitted her second thoughts to April.

"It all seems great and exciting, but honestly April I just, I just have a funny feeling we're getting into something that's too complicated for us. Something happened while we were at the museum that I still feel funny about."

"What happened?"

"Well I thought I saw somebody, somebody strange. It was like this, Charles was talking to me and I got a sudden chill, all over my body. Then I looked up and I saw a man all dressed in black with a black hat on standing in front of me, watching me. Everything was completely silent for just a moment and then, then, it was like he disappeared. The noises all came back and Charles was asking me if I was ok."

"Whoah. That is strange."

"I know!"

"But I don't think it's like, you know, a supernatural warning or anything. It doesn't mean we should stop. You probably just saw somebody who was at the museum or something. I'm not going to rule out that is was a

ghost, but it probably wasn't."

"What?" Julia was shocked. Had April, practical sensible April, just said she could have seen a ghost. "Are you serious April?"

"Certainly. I believe ghosts could be real. If this is a ghost than it probably has something it's trying to tell us, and it will no matter what we do. Ghosts are like that, very persistent."

"April, what are you saying?"

"I'm saying you probably just saw someone run by you in a black coat, but if you didn't it's no big deal. You know Julia, I think this is a good sign, and we've got to try and figure out what we are supposed to be finding."

Julia just nodded. She'd had no idea that April believed in ghosts, that she thought they were messengers from the beyond. Well, she thought to herself, there's no backing out now.

Chpt 13 You Did WHAT!!!!

Julia and April had decided to go to the cemetery that very afternoon. April would tell her mother she was going to Julia's, and Julia would tell her brothers not to let Mami know they hadn't gone straight home and stayed there. By the time Mami got home that night (at 9:00pm, she was working a later shift), they would all be there, snuggled up in front of the television, watching Law and Order. At the end of the school Julia hustled her brothers onto the bus, got them home, gave them snacks, started them on their homework, then ran to grab her notebook and backpack to meet April on the corner of 22nd and Lexington, where they grabbed the local 6 down town.

April was already waiting for Julia when she got there. She was carrying a large box of charcoals "For grave rubbings." she explained, a disposable camera "for pictures of whatever we find," her copy of The Gangs of New York, and a deck of index cards.

"What are the index cards for?"

“Sometimes if you write things down on cards it helps keep ideas straight.” April said.

“Oh, well, let’s go.”

The two of them walked down the stairs into the subway. Julia knew her mother would have been horrified if she’d known what Julia was doing, but somehow it didn’t bother her as much today as it should have. Sometimes you had to break the rules a little bit in order to achieve your goals, that’s what April said, and Julia had heard it so many times maybe she was finally beginning to believe it.

They got onto the down-town 6 and took it to Astor Place. Even though they were only a about twenty blocks from school both of them felt like they’d entered a different world. Down on St. Marks everyone looked like they thought they were part of a fashion show, or that it was Halloween, or that people were watching them.

“Wow.” said Julia as a guy with spiked pink hair, leopard print pants, and boots with three inch heels stomped by them.

“I know,” said April, “My mom says it’s because of NYU, she says this neighborhood is constantly getting new college students, so everybody is always dressing to get noticed.”

Julia suddenly felt uncomfortable in her school uniform, which she had not bothered to change out of. Not even on the first day of school had she been so self-conscious about the scuffs on her shoes.

The girls walked east on St. Marks, taking time to notice all the tattoo parlors, Japanese restaurants and crazily dressed locals (or were they tourists?), then turned south of 2nd Avenue and walked down town.

They were a few blocks away from the graveyard when the nagging question that Julia had been turning over since the night before popped out of her.

“What did you do to make George Starkis interested in Deirdre???”

“What makes you think I did anything?” said April. Something about the way she said it made it clear to Julia that she had done something.

“It just, I just, well I know you did, so tell me what you did.”

“I told him you liked him, and that if he didn’t do something to distract her Deirdre was going to beat you into a pulp.”

Julia stopped dead in her tracks. “YOU DID WHAT!” she shouted.

“Geez Julia, I’d think you’d be happy. Turns out George has always had a sort-of secret crush on you, he said something about how your hair makes him think about rolling hills of grain or something, sounded to me like he was getting you confused with America the beautiful, but anyway he was happy to help.”

“WHAT?!?”

“I said he was happy to help, now come on Julia, we’ve got to get there and get back before your mom comes home or we’ll both be in big trouble.”

“April you are in big trouble right now.” As steadfast as she tried to be Julia could hardly stay still. April was tugging on her arm, and slowly Julia started walking, but she didn’t stop yelling at April.

“How could you have done this April? It was my secret that I liked him, and you went and blabbed it. Fat lot of good it’ll do me now. He’s stuck with stupid Deirdre, and it doesn’t even matter that he likes me too.” As she said that Julia trailed off into silence. Had she really just said that out loud? George Starkis liked her. He had done a favor for April because it was for her, Julia Ramirez!

Part of her knew she should have been laughing with delight, but a bigger part of her felt scared. Scared that her secret was exposed, that April had thought to trade one of her secrets so blatantly (even if it had been for a favor for Julia...), it all seemed mixed up and wrong. Then she remembered about Deirdre and her stomach churned.

“Now he has to date Deirdre to keep her happy. Oh April this is

awful.”

But April just shrugged and smiled.

“Don’t worry about it Julia, it’ll all work out in the end, I promise you.”

“How can you say that? I mean honestly what do you know about stuff like this? And for that matter what do I know? Neither of us has ever had a boyfriend, and I mean, it’s just, oh whatever, words fail me.”

April just laughed.

“It’s worked out this far, just trust me and it’ll all work out in the end. Oh! We’re here.”

Julia looked up. Looming above her was a tall wrought iron gate, each post topped with a spike. It was strange to see it right there, wedged between apartment buildings and shops: a cemetery, complete with bare trees reaching up to the sky and crumbling stone monuments.

Chpt. 14 The Marble Cemetery

“Wow, they really want this place to be creepy, don’t they?” said April.



Julia could only nod her agreement. It really did seem as if the people in

charge of the cemetery had spared no expense on making the place dark and dreary. It was nestled between buildings and very little light got in. On the walls there was thick ivy and that, combined with the everything else, gave the place a dank and dismal air of neglect. Then Julia noticed the caretaker, a young guy with a glazed look, sweeping up in front of the gate.

Boldly April walked right up to him and stuck out her hand. “Hi, I’m April Moss, I hope you got word that we were coming here today?”

The guy looked down at April and Julia blankly, then shook his head, “Nope, didn’t hear nothing.” he replied.

“Well that is most unfortunate, Mr.....?”

“Tod, my name is Tod. Where’re you girls coming from today? The cemetery is only open to the public once a year, on All-Hallows eve, and we don’t do tours.”

“Well, you see Tod we are here from PS 357. We’re doing our history project on the cemeteries of New York. When the school called the Parks department they said we’d be able to come in today, because you’d be cleaning up, and have the gate unlocked. I promise that Julia and I won’t be any bother, we just want to take some pictures, and then we’ll be on our way.” “Well...I guess it’ll be fine. What school did you girls say you were from?”

Julia didn’t see how it had happened so fast, but suddenly April was showing Tod her school ID and asking him what side of the graveyard he thought they should start on.

“Well I always like the Rankin section, that’s over by the wall over there. Rankin’s were a big family, maybe nine or ten of them buried here.”

“Sounds good to me Tod, we’ll just be here for about half on hour.”

“Knock yourselves out.” With that he opened the gate to the cemetery with a loud squeal of protesting hinges, the girls walked through. and Tod went back to his sweeping. Julia couldn’t help noticing how many vaults they were walking over on their way to the Rankin section of the

cemetery. Every few feet there was another of the flat vault markers, with just a name and the number of the vault written on it. That meant that below their feet were rooms, whole rooms, filled with dead bodies. A loud noise made Julia jump, it was a raven in one of the trees that filled the space between the plaques. It seemed to be looking at the girls with menace and warning. Julia shivered, everything about this place was giving her the heebie-jeebies. From the moss covered walls to the rustling of squirrels in the dried leaves, and now this prophetic seeming raven. Why, she wondered, couldn't she be brave and steadfast like April?

Ahead of her April had already reached the Rankine marker. It was one of the largest in the cemetery, standing against a wall and almost completely covered in the creeping ivy which seemed to swallow the sunlight and muffle the city's noises. Using a stick she had picked up April pushed the ivy way from the stone, uncovering what was written underneath.

"Check it out!" she said "The first person from this family to get buried here was in 1907, but she was born in 1822! That's crazy."

"It's hard to imagine people walking on these same streets more than a hundred years ago. Did they even have running water back then?"

"You know Julia that's a really good question, I have no idea."

"Well I don't see how this is helping us answer any of the riddles in that poem, let's look at a couple more of these." The girls looked at statue after statue, plaque after plaque. There were many beloved wives, darling daughters, devoted husbands and the like in the cemetery, but they could find no references to Dead Rabbits or Native Americans, let alone Tammany Hall.

"Well, this seems pointless, but we might as well make some grave rubbing right?" asked April.

"Yeah, why not, we can always use them in our display when we present our lack of findings."

They were both feeling discouraged, but when they made their first

rubbing, of a Beloved daughter named Hannah's memorial they found something strange.

"What does that look like to you?" April asked, pointing to the upper left corner of her rubbing.

"It looks like a rabbit!" Julia said, excitedly, "Do you think it is a rabbit?"

"I'm nearly sure of it. Let's do some more." Roughly half of the stones they made rubbings of yielded the same result, a tiny image of what had to be a rabbit, located on the upper left, above the stone's inscription.

"Does this mean that this is a Dead Rabbit graveyard?"

"Either that or the friends and family of Dead Rabbits."

"We've got to go check out the other cemetery!"

Thanking Tod for allowing them into the cemetery in the first place the girls walked two blocks to the Second Marble Cemetery. Both of them were feeling excited by what they'd found and curious about what it meant.

"Strange that they have the same name." remarked April, and Julia had to agree, it was strange. Not as strange as having secret images of rabbits on the stones, but still strange.

As they walked the two blocks to the second Marble cemetery both girls could feel a rising sense of anticipation.

"It's just almost too perfect to believe." remarked April, "After all here we are trying to find the resting place of the Dead Rabbits and we stumble right into their burial ground. How come ever found it before?"

Julia considered this for a bit. It was unlike April to express doubts, about anything, but it did seem strange to find such a big clue so quickly. Was it possible that nobody had ever noticed the rabbits on the plaques before? After further consideration she decided it wasn't impossible that no one had ever noticed.

"April, the situation is strange but think about it, how many people are

looking that closely at those old plaques? The rabbits are very faint, and we probably saw them because they were something we were looking for. Besides, the cemetery is really only open one day a year, we only got in there today because you overwhelmed Tod. How many people even get the opportunity to go there?"

"Wow, you're being awfully positive about the project suddenly. What's up with all the optimism?" asked April.

"I guess I didn't think this was going to work, but since it is..."

"You thought it wouldn't, or you hoped it wouldn't. Whatever you saw had you pretty spooked, remember?"

Julia Grimaced, April was right. "Yeah well, now that I know George has the hots for me, it changes things."

"So you're glad I told him?"

Julia had to admit it was true. "I guess so." She said.

"Good! Wait until you see the next cemetery!"

The girls smiled at each other, and pushed through the cemetery gates with new resolve. When Julia saw what was waiting for them on the other side she nearly fainted.



“Hi Julia, Hey April.” said George Starkis. He smiled and got up from the marble bench her was sitting on. “I’ve been waiting for half an hour, what took you so long April?”

Chpt 15 NO WAY!!!

Julia knew then that she would die. Her heart was just not strong enough for this, it was not made to bounce this wildly, her heart would surely explode.

“W-w-what?” she stuttered.

George gave her a friendly look and said “Well I live right here, just above the cemetery.”

“What?” it seemed to be the only thing Julia could say.

“I said, I live right here, so when April told me you guys would be coming here working on your project I figured I could help you out, or at least say hi.”

“April told you what we were doing?” Julia couldn’t believe it! Their project was supposed to be top secret! She looked at April, but April just stood there smiling.

“It doesn’t sound all that exciting to me, doing grave rubbings at all the old cemeteries in the city. But if you can get Smythe to give you credit for it, I say go for it.”

“Right...” Julia said.

She was going to go on but April jumped in. “Yeah, it’s not as exciting as it could be, but hey, if we get an A it won’t matter. Why don’t you show Julia some of your favorite stones, I’m going to get started right here.”

“Ok,” George said brightly, then he grabbed Julia’s arm and started pulling her towards the back of the cemetery. “This cemetery is unusual isn’t it? Do you notice how there are no headstones? Instead the names of the families who own the vaults are all built into plaques on the walls.”

Julia felt like George’s words were a wave that was crashing down over her. She hadn’t even known that George and April knew each other! Now here she was, walking with him over marble vaults, filled with the dead, moving towards a wall of plaques. It was all too much. Too much intrigue, too many

questions, too many coincidences. Stopping dead in her tracks Julia swung and looked George right in the face. His beautiful brown eyes looked back at her, filled with concern. "Is something wrong?" He asked.

"This is wrong! This is all wrong! Since when are you and April friends? Why are you talking to me like we're friends? We don't even know each other."

"Jeez Julia, it's not like we've been going to school together since second grade or anything. I'm not a stranger who just wandered up to you on the street."

"But we've never even talked before."

"Well there's always a first for anything. I'll be honest, April and I aren't friends, or at least haven't been friends for long. I've been tutoring her in math. I didn't realize you and her were Best Friends until a few weeks ago when I noticed I'd never seen you apart, that was when I told her about how I have a crush on you."

Julia turned bright red.

"It's not a big deal, I just like you."

"What about Deirdre?"

"Deirdre...well that is a problem but I'm sure it's one we can work out soon. I get the feeling she's going to break up with me soon anyway."

"What?"

"I think she just wanted to try it on for size you know, dating me? We don't really have much in common, although we both love zombie movies. I'm sure we'll be good friends someday, but she doesn't really like me, not like that anyway."

Julia decided she would just roll with it. After all there were worse things than having the guy you'd been pining over all year tell you he liked you and would soon be single.

"Well then, let's make these rubbing and get out here then. Zombie

movies are one thing but I don't want to face the wrath of my mother if I don't get home in a couple hours."

As they made rubbing after rubbing Julia found herself getting very excited by what they were finding. About half of the plaques had a tiny star and three small stripes carved into the upper left corner. The carvings were rough and hard to see, George didn't seem to notice them at all. Instead he told Julia about his family (big, Greek, crazy), his goals (soccer or a doctor), his favorite foods (chocolate peppermint ice-cream and eggplant, not together), and his favorite book (Swiss Family Robinson). Everything was so wonderful she was sad when they were done and getting ready to leave.

As they walked towards where April was working she noticed what looked like a long black shadow moving between the trees.

"What is that?" she asked George.

"What's what?" he asked her back.

"That..there's something here in the graveyard. It just ducked behind that tree over there." Julia said pointing at a large oak about twenty feet from there."

"I didn't see anything." George said, "But I'll go check it out. Probably just a crow or something." He turned and run towards the tree. "There's nothing back here." he called to Julia.

Of course Julia had already known that, because the man in black, who she now knew had been the person behind the tree was now standing in front of Julia.

Chpt 16 The Man in Black

Time stood still. Julia knew this because everything around her had stopped. The wind, the noise of traffic, the crunch of leafs beneath George's feet as he walked back towards Julia, all of it had stopped. The man in black stood before her, and the first thing she noticed about him was that he was not

breathing. No, he was not breathing, nor were his feet quite touching the ground.

He was also looking directly at her, and his eyes held hers, it was like looking into a deep dark well. Julia couldn't find the bottom at all.

"You are trying to solve my riddle." he said.

"Mr. Beach?" said Julia.

"But of course," he said, flourishing his long dark coat. "You may call me Alfred if you wish. Normally I would never allow a child to address me in such a manner but, well, times are not what they were, nor are manners."

Julia looked closer at Alfred, he was wearing black pinstripe pants and a coat made of the same material but lined with apricot colored silk which showed considerable water damage. His shirt had been white, but was badly yellowed with age.

"You're looking at the clothes eh? Everyone is always intrigued by the clothes. I often wonder why the clothing shows the signs of decay which our faces do not. To tell you the truth I've not got much of a face left, and my clothing is in just as bad shape, but, what can I say."

Julia could not believe she was talking to a ghost about clothes.

"At any rate I'm here to officially warn you ladies off. While I appreciate your efforts I must tell you that you need to stop, there are forces at work which do not wish to be disturbed, and certainly do not wish to be uncovered. Already you have found out more than most are comfortable with."

"Most of who?" Julia asked.

"That's not important just now. Unofficially I have to tell you that I am thrilled with the progress that you have made so far, and would like you to keep up the good work. After all, it's not all that often that the mysteries of the past are brought to light, and I would love to see some of those old blowhards turning in their graves."

“Who are you talking about?”

Alfred sighed, “Who do you think? Tammany Hall!”

“Oh...right.” Julia couldn’t believe she was having this conversation.

“So, or at any rate, I’m going to give you a gift and you can decide to do with it what you wish.” The ghost of Alfred Beach appeared to rummage around in his waist-coat pocket. “Here it is!” he said “The key!” He had pulled forth a normal looking door key. It was attached to a green and yellow plastic lanyard, which looked familiar to Julia.

“You thought it would look old huh?” asked Alfred. Julia could only nod. “Well you see the door you’re going to open isn’t old, so why would the key be old?”

“I...I don’ t know.” Julia said.

“Alright then, better get things moving again. It’s a tremendous strain keeping things slowed down this much.”

“Slowed down?”

“I can’t really stop things but I can slow them down considerably. Look at your boyfriend over there, he’s only taken two steps in all this time.”

“He’s not my boyfriend!” Julia yelled.

“Whatever you say, no need to get so upset.” With that the ghost disappeared and suddenly George was at Julia’s side.

“I didn’t find anything over there.” He said, sounding disappointed.

“Guess it was just a trick of the light.” Julia replied, pocketing the key. “We better get out of here, it’s going to get dark soon.” She hoped her hand wasn’t shaking. Had she really just talked to a ghost? Was she really walking with George Starkis? Was he holding her hand? She looked down and saw that at least the last part was true, she was holding George’s hand. Together they walked over to where April was finishing a rubbing.

“So what graveyard are you guys going to hit up next?” asked George.

“No more today.” said April. “If Julia and I don’t get home soon we’re

both going to be in trouble. It was good to see you George, but we really have to be going now. Why don't you two talk on the phone later?" with that April grabbed Julia's free hand and pulled her away.

"Bye Julia, Bye April, see you guys on Monday!" George called after them.

As soon as they got a block or so away from the cemetery Julia had to tell April about the ghost. "He came out of nowhere, he made time stop and he gave me this!" She held up the house key and the lanyard.

"That doesn't look old" April said.

"I know, he said that the door we would open with it wasn't old, but that what was behind it was."

"Hm, well, just hang on to it, I guess. Did he tell you anything else?"

"Yeah, that Tammany Hall is not happy with our progress, and that they sent him to warn us."

"Well, guess we'll just have to see what happens next." April looked at Julia and began laughing. "Oh man Julia, you should have seen the look on your face when we walked in and you saw George, whoo! That was priceless. I don't even know," April laughed some more, "I don't even know the last time I've seen you look so surprised."

Julia felt herself go from cool, to warm, to burning. She could tell April was skeptical of her ghost story, and now she was teasing her about George!

"That was some trick you pulled April, sometimes you are too much. Why do you have to be so secretive? Why do you need to meddle with everything?"

"But aren't you happy now that you and George know that you both like each other?"

"Of course that makes me happy, I just don't understand why you always have to keep secrets. It's tacky of you, and it's hurtful to me."

“Well if that’s way you feel about it than forget it, last time I try and do you a favor!”

“Don’t get mad, it’s not that I don’t appreciate it, it’s just that you’re always doing this, playing puppet master or something.”

“Julia you’ve really got to get over yourself. Things don’t always get done by going in through the front door, sometimes you’ve gotta find an alternative route.”

They faced each other, two girls, stuck at an impasse. Finally Julia sighed.

“Come on, let’s try and get into McSorleys and then get out of here. If we’re not home by 6:30 Mami will definitely know we were up to something, and then not even you will be able to get us out of trouble.”

Chpt 17 Are you of Age?



When the girls turned the corner of 7th street they heard McSorley’s before they saw it. There were a bunch of guys standing outside arguing.

“I told you to back off, ok buddy? She’s my girlfriend and I don’t want to have to make a big deal of this ok?” The speaker was a tall white guy with obvious muscles.

“Well if she’s your girlfriend why was she with me last night?” the other

guy was little and wiry, but he looked like he could put up a good fight if he wanted to.

“Mistakes were made, but she’s staying with me, so you should just stay away from where you’re not wanted.”

“Whatever man,” said the smaller guy “whatever you say, but I bet you she’ll be coming crawling back to me before you know it.”

With that he turned on his heel and walked away, leaving his adversary in front of the bar, alone. Then he shrugged his shoulders and went inside.

“Looks like it’s still a rough spot, huh?” said April.

“Yes it does.” said Julia, nervously. She wasn’t sure if she wanted to go in there or not, but April was already pushing through the door.

The room they entered was filled nearly to capacity. Everywhere they looked people were drinking mugs of beer, either at rough wooden tables or standing three deep at an old bar. The walls were just as populated as the room, covered in a thick layer of memorabilia. In the center of the room was an old black pot-bellied stove with glowing orange coals inside. McSorleys smelled like onions, beer, and the sawdust which covered the floor.

No sooner had they entered when a man with white hair and a greasy white apron tried to push them back out the door. “You girls can’t come in here!” he said. “You aren’t old enough to be drinking.”

“Wait sir!” said Julia, “We’re here for a school project.”

“What kind of a school project do you do at a bar?” he asked loudly. This solicited some laughs from the crowded room.

“We wanted to see some paintings, we read on your website you’ve got some of John Sloan’s paintings here.”

“And if we do?”

Julia looked at April nervously, what should she say next? Normally she would have let April do the talking, but after everything that had happened today she felt she needed to assert herself. April was already meddling with

her life too much, a ghost had appeared to her and well, she needed to show that she could take the reins. So she took a deep breath and said

“If you do have the paintings we’d like to be able to look at them and maybe talk to someone about them? We read on your website that there’s only been three families who ever owned the bar and we were wondering if there had been some stories passed down over the years.”

“Hmm...” said the man. “Well Missy you are in luck, because I happen to be the current owner of the bar, Mathew Maher at your service.” He stuck his big red hand out at her and Julia, with as much strength as she could muster, grabbed it and gave it a shake. This made Matthew Maher laugh.

“Quite a grip you’ve got there Missy. Alright ladies, I’ll tell you what I know about the place, and show you the pictures to-boot. Let’s go to the back room where we can get a little privacy.”

The girls followed Maher through the bar and the kitchen into a tiny back room filled with papers and folders. Maher shoved some boxes off of the folding chairs and told them to make themselves comfortable, he’d be right back. Nervously the girls perched on the chairs, looking around the room and it’s dusty contents with wide eyes.

“That was almost too easy.” said April.

“I know what you mean.” said Julia.

“Why do adults go to places like this? It’s crowded and noisy and there’s nothing to do here but drink, talk, and look at the walls.” April asked.

Julia shrugged, “I guess we’ll understand it better when we get older.”

“I hope not.” April said dryly.

With a loud bang Maher came back into the room. He was carrying a several pictures in frames. These he put down on the ground in front of the girls.

“These here are the paintings you were asking about. Take a look at them and see if you can make out anything important, then I’ll give you ladies

some history and send you on your way. Just so's you know, these are copies. If you wants to you can go and see the originals, their at the New York Historical Society."

Julia and April gazed at the paintings. Each depicted the dark and smokey interior of McSorleys's, looking not much different then it did now. Men in bowler hats stood at the bar lifting pints of light and dark ale, the coal burning stove smoldered away in the corner and an air of warmth and comradery seemed to fill the air.

"Why are there no women in these paintings?" April wanted to know.

"Because women weren't allowed in here until 1970, well before these paintings were done. Tell you the truth, it wasn't til the whole thing went to the courts that we finally started letting women in here, and to tell you the truth, I'm glad of it." The girls continued to examine the paintings while Maher gave them a brief history of the bar. "We opened up in 1854 as an ale house and except for a brief period when they tried selling harder spirits, that's all McSorley's has ever sold. There's also a kitchen in the back and there's a custom of having a snack of crackers, cheese, and raw onions while you're here. McSorley's was an East Village mainstay in no time, in fact in 1871 a play was written about it and performed in the local theatres. Even e.e. Cummings wrote a poem about the place. We've only ever had three owners and that helps keep the history in the place. This has always been an Irish Ale House, and if I get my way, it'll always be one."

The girls shared a look, the Dead Rabbits had stood up for Irish immigrants. Could they have done it here? "Was there ever any trouble here? I mean, the East Village was a rough place in the 1800s, were there brawls?" Julia asked.

"Yes of course, what bar hasn't seen it's share of brawls? But we've got this motto here, Be Good, or Be Gone, and we've stuck to it pretty closely over the years. If you can't keep yourself to yourself then you've got no

business at McSorley's."

Julia tried to think of another question to ask Maher, she knew their time with him was running out and that there must be something that they were overlooking.

"Besides the cheese and onions has McSorley's ever had another traditional snack, like maybe corn?" asked April.

Julia smiled, trust April to remember the details.

"Nope, can't say we ever did. Although I've heard that there used to be girls who sold ears of corn out on the sidewalk, of course that was before my time." Maher smiled, "Can I help you girls with anything else?"

"I don't think so, except, could we maybe have a little more time with the paintings?" asked Julia boldly.

"I don't see how that could hurt any. Here's what I'll do for you ladies. I'll let you sit back here, I'll even bring you a plate of cheese and onions, on the house. You can take your time with the pictures, just let me know when you leave, and no beer!"

"Thank you so much Mr. Maher, you've been really great."

"No problem ladies, I always enjoy helping our local youth."

Chpt 18 Factually Speaking

Once Maher had left them (and come back with a plate of crackers, raw onions, and slices of cheddar cheese and some bottles of McSorley's root beer), Julia and April got down to business.

"Today has been hectic!" April said, "And we've got about half an hour before we have to get out of here and get us both to your house."

Julia hadn't even been paying attention to the time, but now she saw it was almost 7:00pm, and that meant they had to really get their act together. April knew it too. "Pull out your notebook and let's try and see if we know what we know." She said.

While Julia rummaged through her bag finding a pen April helped herself to a cracker with cheese and onion and pulled out her index cards. “Hey this is actually kind of good,” she said “weird but good.”

Julia tried one too, and had to agree. “The onion kind of balances the cheese huh? I guess they were on to something in 1854.”

“Wish I could say the same for us.” April said with a sigh. “This thing is getting complicated now. Each new fact triggers a bunch of new questions.”

“I know what you mean. Here’s what we know: The Dead Rabbits and Native Americans were rival gangs who worked on the lower East Side. The Native Americans were against immigration, which at the time meant the Irish. The Dead Rabbits were actually mostly Irish and they worked for Tammany Hall.”

“Sounds good so far, keep going.”

“Alright, so we’ve found that the rival gangs were buried in two cemeteries in the East Village, almost side by side with each other, and that’s about all we’ve got on the gangs.”

“Hmmm...well maybe it’s not about the gangs you know? I mean maybe the gangs are kind of a marker, to point us in the right direction.”

“So what, you think we should just forget about the gangs now?”

“Well, not exactly, I just think we should look to see which way the poem is actually pointing us. See we started off in a tunnel in Brooklyn, then we got sent to cemeteries in the East Village, and now we’re sitting in a bar. I don’t really see a clear connection between any of those places, but there’s a sort of common thread, or at least I see one.”

“What’s that April?”

“All of these places are kind of underground. The tunnel and the cemetery literally, and a bar is sort of because bars aren’t, or at least weren’t, all that respectable right? Maybe you wouldn’t want people to know you went to an ale house regularly.”

“So...”

“So I’m saying these are all hidden places, in their own way.”

“And....”

“And maybe we need to start taking our search to the streets, literally. We’ve gone to the place where the gangs came to rest, either their final rest or just a temporary break, and we’ve found some stuff out. I think it’s time we take this to the streets. I want to go down to the Lower East Side, poke around a bit. I think we should stop by the Tenement Museum and see if they can help us, I’m sure they’d be interested in the poem.”

Julia thought that sounded good, but she also knew that it wasn’t enough, and she told April so. “That sounds good, but I think we need to look more closely at these paintings, and maybe also at some other Ash-can Artists, if nothing else it’s a good way to see how people lived. It’s one thing to recreate the past, and it’s another to be able to see pictures of it.”

“Good point Julia, which means we need to visit the New York Historical Society.”

“This sounds like a lot of visiting....”

“Well, we might not have to go everywhere, it depends on what we find, right. I hope someone can shed some light on this whole corn thing. Do you think Maher is right and people sold corn on the streets? They still do that in El Barrio, but I don’t think they sing any songs about it.” April paused to help herself to another cracker. She chewed thoughtfully, looking at the paintings in front of them and rubbing her finger along the paths of her braids. “I don’t know what I think about all this Julia, but I do know that once we’ve got the whole poem decoded we’re going to have to figure out how to present the whole thing to the class.”

“Don’t even remind me. I’d rather feel like we’re just doing this for fun, and not for a grade.”

“Wishful thinking.”

“What about the key?” Julia asked, pulling it out of her pocket. It looked like any other house key, with nothing special about it at all. The plastic lanyard made the idea that ghost had given it to Julia seem unlikely, even to her.



“I know it doesn’t look like much but I swear to you, a ghost gave it to me.”

“Well, I don’t think you’d make something like this up, so I’ve got no choice to believe you, preposterous as it seems.”

“Guess I appreciate your vote of confidence. Maybe we’ll know what to do with it when the time comes”

The girls finished off the crackers and cheese and headed out of the bar. On the way out they paused to thank Maher.

“Alright ladies, and listen, when you’re 21 feel free to come on back here and have a drink, on the house. But until then I don’t want to see either of you in this bar again. Understand?”

“Yes Sir!” the girls answered.

“Good. A bar isn’t any place for young ladies, or ladies in general, you ask me.” Muttering, Maher moved off towards the back of the bar, six glasses of beer in each hand, heading for a loud table of what looked like NYU students. The girls hurried to the St. Mark’s station and were soon heading

back to Julia's apartment.

Chpt. 19 General Julia

They got to Julia's apartment at 8:15. Inside April and Julia found utter chaos. The twins had turned the place into a battle ground. Forts were built here and there with cushions and furniture, mines (made of balls of duct tape and pointy plastic soldiers), littered the ground and the first thing that happened when they entered was that Ramon pegged April right in the chest with a Nerf foam arrow. "Ow!" said April.

Julia looked around the place in dismay. Mami would be there in less than an hour, how could they possibly make the apartment presentable in so little time? She resolved to teach her brothers a lesson in discipline that they would not forget anytime soon.

Taking a deep breath Julia bellowed "Soldiers fall in!" April looked at her skeptically but Julia was fairly sure that this would work, that her brothers, deep in their play acting would have no choice but to follow her directive.

It took a while, and several calls to attention, but in the end Julia was proved right, and the boys fell into line.

"Attention Soldiers!"

"Hut!" replied the twins, and snapped to attention.

"At ease men. As your corporal it has come to my attention that the bunks here at Camp Ramirez have become, shall we say, run down. Clearly it is time for you bottom feeders to learn a little bit of discipline."

The twins shot each other a look of worry. Julia went on,

"Today at 0-900 hours we will be receiving a visit from the Major General, AKA MOM. We must get these barracks into tip top shape before the Major General arrives. To that end I will be deputizing all three of you," she looked seriously at April as she said this, the mess was at least partially April's fault, since if Julia had been home it would never have happened "to

different cleaning details. Are there any questions?" One of her brothers mumbled something and Julia swung around to face him, "Did I hear you say something Private?"

"N-n-no!"

"Excuse me?"

"No! No Sir!"

"At ease private. Alright, Private Jesus, you will be on mine detail. Get these pesky land-mines cleared out of here ASAP. Private Ramon you are going to be on furniture detail. Make sure everything is back in its place with pillows, you got that?"

"Yes Sir!"

"Colonel Moss and I will be on KP detail, as I can see the two of you have made a mess of the mess-hall. Alright men? Get going!"

As soon as the boys had left run to get started on their tasks the girls dissolved into laughter.

"Oh, the looks on their faces!" said April. "I thought I was going to die when you yelled at Jesus."

"I know," said Julia, "But, I am serious about us cleaning the kitchen.

"No problem. Anything to keep the Major General from getting mad at us, right?"

The girls spent the next half an hour cleaning up ketchup spills and cracker crumbs, sticky juice rings and scuff marks. Then they did a whirl-wind straightening job on the twins work, finishing just as Mami opened the door.

"Hello April, good to see you, Hija, I hope you had a good day. Where are the boys?"

"Watching TV as always Mami. How was your day?"

"Long, difficult, and tiring, just like normal. Are you girls having a sleep over tonight? I know it's Friday night, but I wish you would have told me Julia, I'd have gotten snacks or something for you. Have you even had

dinner?”

“Don’t worry about us Ms. Ramirez, we’re fine.” said April

“If you say so, are you sure I can’t make you girls some popcorn or something? Are you going to watch movies?”

“Popcorn would be lovely Mami, we’ve actually got work to do on our independent history report, so we’ll be upstairs.”

“Ok *Hija*, get to work and I’ll bring you that popcorn.”

The girls trooped up into Julia’s room. April threw her stuff in the corner and flopped onto Julia’s bed. “I am exhausted!” she declared, and turned onto her back with a sigh.

“Me too, do you think we could just watch a movie and go to sleep?” Julia asked.

“Sounds good to me, I don’t think I could do any more work on the poem right now. Let’s get up tomorrow, lay out a plan of attack, and get to work.”

The girls giggled, and shook hands. “Agreed.”

It was a relief that for the rest of the night the biggest question they had to answer was “What movie should we watch?”

Chpt 20 You call that art?

The next morning Julia woke up with scratchy eyes and the greasy taste of her mother’s popcorn still lingering on her tongue. As she carefully stepped over April, who was sleeping on a pile of couch cushions and blankets on the floor next to her bed, something nagged her. It was the last threads of a dream, fleetingly making themselves visible to her. There was something that Charles had said.

As she fumbled with her toothbrush in the bathroom she thought about the ghost. She had seen him twice, he had not seemed like an angry or spiteful ghost, but there had been something profoundly upsetting about his

appearance. Part of it was that this whole ghost thing was so nonchalant. April seemed to accept it off-handedly, if not whole-heartedly, and Julia didn't seem to be able to escape it. In her dreams she had felt not just the presence of Beach's ghost, but the ghosts of all those who had lived in New York over the years. They had surrounded her like a crowd at a stadium, watching her every move.

Could it be true that she was part of some great otherworldly plan? With a sigh she finished brushing her teeth and pushed her hair out of her eyes. It was depressing to feel like a pawn. Still, Beach had said that he was formally there to warn her away, but that he wanted her to continue on her path. That, at least, was comforting. After all, Beach was the hurt party in this story, and standing up for the little guy was always the right thing to do.

April liked to sleep later than Julia did, so Julia headed to the kitchen instead of her bedroom. Mami was already up, sitting in her fluffy yellow bathrobe and drinking coffee. Saturday was her day off and she liked to get up early so she could do all the stuff that piled up during the week in one big day of errands and cleaning.

"Good morning Mami. How are you this morning?"

"I slept well darling, how about you?"

"Fine, I dreamed a lot, but otherwise fine. April and I were planning on going to the New York Historical Society today to look at the paintings by the Ash Can artists. Do you think you could maybe give me some money to get in?"

"Sure *Hija* as long as it's for school. Actually I've got some free time today, would you girls be interested in having an adult along? I think it would be better if I went with you anyway, after all the society is all the way across town, and I don't really want you girls traveling all that way on your own."

"Would the twins have to come?"

Her mother laughed. "You don't want your brothers to come?"

Julia smiled at her mother, “No Mami, I do not. The twins are a royal pain.”

“Don’t worry *Hija*, they have hockey practice today and then they’re going to a friend’s house after. It’ll just be the three of us, we’ll call it a girls only afternoon.”

“Really Mami? Are you sure you have the time to take us?” Mami was usually so busy on Saturdays, doing laundry, running errands, fixing things that had broken during the week.

“Yes *Hija*, don’t worry, I want to do this.”

Julia smiled and gave her mother a quick hug. It would be great going to the historical society with April and Mami, it was such an unexpected treat. She hurried down the hall to wake up April and tell her the good news. A few hours and train transfers later the three of them were walking up the steps of the New York Historical society.

“It’s a cool building.” April said “I wonder how old it is.” While Mami paid for their tickets the girls read about the beginning of the society.

“Look, this is cool!” said Julia, “This was the first museum in New York. It opened in 1804, and has been open since then.”

“That’s pretty damn old.”

“It also means Alfred Beach could have been a member or at least visited here.” Julia pointed out.

“Yeah, that’s true, was it always a public museum?”

“I don’t know, we’ll have to ask somebody, but I bet it was always open to Alfred Beach. And look, it says here it used to be located down town, and then they moved up here.”

“Are you girls ready to go into the museum yet?” asked Mami. She had come up so quietly behind the girls that Julia jumped. “*Hija* are you ok, you look like you saw a ghost.”

Julia wished people would stop saying that. “You startled me Mami,

that's all, let's go in."

Even though they had come to see the Ash-Can artists the girls wanted to see all the different parts of the building. As they wandered the floors they saw beautiful stained glass windows and lampshades made by the Tiffany company, a collection of different objects from restaurants and bars going back 100 years, snuff boxes and handkerchiefs with names painstakingly embroidered on their corners and many other things.

Finally they were ready to see the Ash Can Artist's work, but when they went to enter the show they were confronted by a closed door. "Oh no!" cried April, "it's closed."

"No!" Mami replied, "This sign says it's just closed for climate control reasons, we can still go in. Come on girls, let's check this out."

So they pushed open the heavy door and went in.

Chpt. 21 Hidden Rooms and Secret Notes

The first image in the show was of a man in brown and black, sitting with one leg nonchalantly crossed over the other. Looking at him Julia felt her heart beating fast. His clothing was so similar to how Beach's had looked, and the dark colors made her think of the thick air in McSorley's.

"It's so quiet in here, I feel like I'm walking on someone's grave." said Mami. Julia and April shared a look. Just yesterday they had walked over lots of graves, had they disturbed any of them?

The exhibit was not what either of the girls had expected. Their readings on the Ash Can artists had prepared them for gritty scenes: cobblestone streets covered in grey snow, children sitting on curb-sides wrapped in rags and blankets. Instead they were confronted by lobster dinners being served to fur wrapped pretty young things and their banker boyfriends, pastel scenes of central park in spring, horses jumping fences and half dressed dancers striking poses.

“It’s hard to believe these pictures are a hundred years old,” Mami said, “it seems like they could have been painted last month.” she was looking at a painting of two boxers in a ring, surrounded by cheering fans.

“There’s one thing that let’s you know it happened a long time ago.” April replied.

“What’s that?”

“Well, Ms. Ramirez, there are no Black people in any of these paintings.”

“April you’re right, I hadn’t thought of that. Sometimes it’s easy to ignore what you don’t see.”

Even though she wasn’t finding anything that seemed important Julia did feel like she was learning a lot. There were movies to watch, photos of Longacre Square which, as it turned out, had become Times Square, images of all the popular bars and water holes in the city, and information about all the Ash Can artists.

Julia had quickly decided that her favorite was John Sloan, the artist who had done the painting of McSorley’s. His work seemed to be almost over-represented in the show, and Julia thought this was because he had such a wide repertoire of themes. Plus, he had painted the image of McSorley’s, and that made him special to her. When they had looked at the painting at McSorley’s she had thought that it had become darkened with age, sitting in the bar. Now that she was in the actual gallery she saw that it was intentionally dark and murky, with no one face or figure highlighted or picked out in great detail.

“Hey April, what do you think it means that we can’t see any of the faces in Sloan’s painting of McSorley’s?”

“Does it have to mean something?”

“It doesn’t have to, but I think it’s a choice that he made, something he decided to do on purpose, I wonder why he would do that.”

“There’s a lot of reasons. It could have been he just wasn’t good at painting faces.”

“April! Be serious.”

“Ok, alright, just saying, well maybe the people in the painting didn’t want their faces to be shown. Look it says right here that the Ash Can artists were often condemned for the amount of drinking that went on in their paintings. Maybe he wanted to preserve the an-ano-anonymity of his subjects?”

“That’s what I’m thinking. I wonder if there’s any way to find out who these guys are. Like for example, this guy all the way at the end, with the hat on, he’s taking a sip of his drink, but you can hardly even see him.”

The girls contemplated the picture. It was hanging next to a smaller image of McSorley’s by another artist. Even though they looked similar the paintings were filled with differences. In Sloan’s painting everything was brown, blue and white, and some of the men had their hats or jackets off, and these hats and jackets looked rumpled and worn, their fabric was depicted as rough and woolen. Comparatively the other image depicted men dressed much as the ghost had been, with long black coats and top hats, proper jackets, and tall walking sticks. The wall text claimed that the images showed how McSorley’s had been a pub of the people.

“Not really much of a pub of the people if women couldn’t get in, was it?” Mami said. “These pictures make it seem like the only things women did in the 1900s was dance on the stage and go out to dinner. Weren’t these artists supposed to be depicting real life? Where are the mothers, the washerwomen, the fruit-sellers, all those women who worked in the home and outside of it, where are they?”

Julia loved it when Mami felt passionately about things.

“You know, I work hard every week to provide for you and your brothers. When I look at art like this I get angry. These men thought they

were depicting the grittiness of life, but they hardly wanted to get their hands dirty. I don't think mingling with show girls makes you real, or depicting people in white sitting on the beach. Those movies they're showing are closer to reality than anything else is in here."

"Which videos, Ms. Ramirez?" April asked, politely. Julia could see that April felt awkward about the strength of her mother's anger. Julia thought Mami was right to be angry though.

"Oh there's videos that were made by Edison, you know, Thomas Alva Edison, the guy who brought us electricity? He made a bunch of movies in the 1900s, and they've got a couple of them here."

"I can't believe there were movies in the early 1900s!" exclaimed Julia.

"Well, they're not like how movies are now. Much jumpier, in black and white, no sound etc. But they are still movies. Come on, you should see this one called 'A Night on the Tenderloin.' it's about New York."

Chpt 22 Tender is the Loin

It was not the sort of movie Julia or April would have paid to go see in a theater. It was only about three minutes long, there was no sound, and the film seemed to jump around so much that the actor's movements reminded them both of a flip-book. In those three scratchy minutes the film showed someone walking into a bar, drinking a drugged drink, passing out, getting his wallet stolen, waking up, getting into a fight, and finally being carried away by the police. After the poor guy got carried out by the police, the three women in film performed a can-can.

"You think this is close to reality Ms. Ramirez?" asked April.

"Well...not exactly, more the sentiment than the actions, you know what I mean? Those girls are working women, they're not famous ballet dancers and they aren't wearing fancy clothes. I know that all those layers and those

huge hats look fancy to us, but I bet anything that's just what people wore back then."

"I think it's interesting the way the different hats the men are wearing tell us about their, you know, place in society. There's the guy in the bowler; he looks like maybe he's a banker. And the guy in the straw boater, he's probably a...what's the word April?" asked Julia.

"Fop, the word is fop. I had to look it up, but it means somebody (a man), who dresses to impress, and probably doesn't have much of a real job."

"Yeah, he looks like a fop. And then that poor guy who gets robbed, he's wearing a big broad brimmed hat, makes him look like a farmer or something."

"That's what he's supposed to be, a farmer, getting taken advantage of in the big city."

"What's the deal with calling it the tenderloin?" asked April.

"That I don't know, let's see if there's any answers in the exhibit." said Mami, and she and April wandered off to try and find some answers. Julia, on the other hand, was completely mesmerized by the movie.

"Imagine," thought Julia, "seeing people walking and moving who had lived a hundred years ago." It was miraculous that the films had survived. Just as she was about to pull herself away from the screen to go find Mami and April, something strange started to happen. The air in front of her began to ripple as if it had become liquid. Stifling the cry that rose to her lips, Julia watched as the rippling air began to darken and spread. Soon distinct forms began to separate themselves from the chaotic darkness that was blossoming in front of her. For the third time that week she watched as the shape of Alfred Beach materialized.

Julia looked at Beach warily. She was beginning to get tired of the way he kept on popping up with cryptic messages and obscure requests. What was she, some sort of errand boy for the restless dead? She prepared herself for

another barrage of questions and instructions, but received only one sentence.

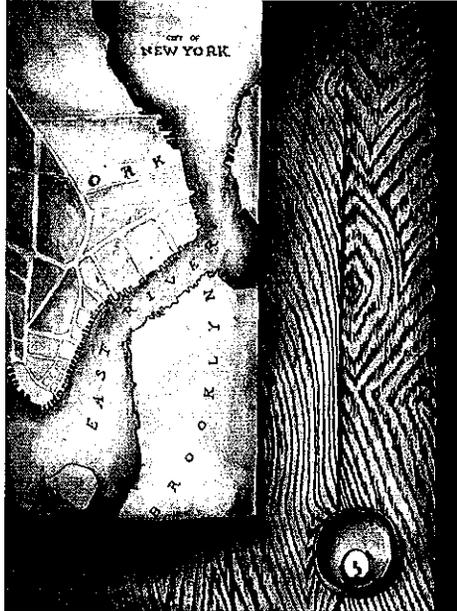
“Pay attention to the key.” Beach said, and he vanished.

Julia was astonished and irritated. “What a pain in the butt.” She muttered to herself, couldn’t that ghost stop harassing her? She was paying plenty of attention to the key, which she could feel as it sat in her hip pocket. What was she supposed to do, walk around with it out and ready, waiting for the right door to come along?

“Hey Julia!” April hissed from across the gallery. “Come over here, we figured out what the tenderloin is!” Julia walked over to her mother and April, who were standing in front a large map of New York City.

“*Si hija*, we’ve got it all figured out. The Tenderloin was what we now think of as Chelsea, going all the way up to Times Square, which used to be Longacre Square. It was known for the violence of its inhabitants and infamous for its dance halls.”

“See, look, this section was called the Tenderloin.” April said, pointing at the map. Julia looked at the section of the map April was pointing at, but something else caught her eye. A key hole, right there in the wall next to the map! It wasn’t a real wall at all, but a panel door. The key in her pocket felt warm and heavy, she knew she had to get behind that door. But how? She couldn’t just pull out the key and open the door, especially not with her mother there. Furtively Julia looked around the gallery, Mami had moved on to another display a few feet away from them, but Julia knew that Mami was still too close to not notice her daughter opening a door in a wall and disappearing through it.



“April,” Julia hissed, “April, this is the door I’m supposed to open.”

“How do you know?” April hissed back, “After all there’s a million doors in the city, and this one is probably new, how do you know it’s the one to open?”

“Because the ghost of Alfred Beach told me so, what did you think?”

“Ok, but this is a great time to find something you know. You mother is just around the corner.”

“Just get Mami out of here so I can open the door OK?”

“And how am I supposed to do that?”

“Come on April! You’ll think of something. This is what your good at.”

April smiled, “A least you recognize when a girl’s got skills.”

“Just do it!” Julia hissed.

Smilingly April put on her best innocent face and walked over to Mami. “Oh Ms. Ramirez, did you see the movie in the next room? It’s ever so charming.” Taking Mami’s hand April led her out of the room. Swiftly Julia pulled the key out her pocket, thrust it into the keyhole, turned it, and opened the door. The door opened inwards to a room that was dark, and without thinking Julia stepped into the darkness and closed the door behind her.

Chpt 23 And from Darkness there came Light?

As her eyes adjusted to the light, Julia found herself in a small storage room. Stacks of paintings lined the walls, pedestals and placards of different sizes and shapes cluttered the room, and in the center was a dusty table covered in sheaves of paper. Julia delicately stepped over objects shrouded in dust cloths and made her way to the table. She knew that whatever she was supposed to find was somewhere amidst the clutter

Carefully she began sifting through the papers that covered the table, aware that outside April was doing her best to keep Mami in the dark about her absence. She could actually hear Mami and April talking through the walls. "Oh no, Ms. Ramirez," she was saying "I think she already went into the next gallery. Should we try and catch up with her? There are still some things in here which I'd like to look at in this gallery though. Like this beautiful sketch, who is it by? Don't you find the lines exciting?" April prattled on and on. Julia figured she probably had about five more minutes before Mami would realize she had disappeared.

The storage closet was so dark it would be nearly impossible to figure out which one of the papers on the desk was important. With a sigh Julia began sifting through the pile, holding sheet after sheet of paper up to the light. In the dim light she was able to see that most of the papers were deeds, declaring who owned which property where, and how much they had paid for the acquisition. Julia could almost hear the minutes ticking away. Soon she would be out of time and Mami would start raising holy hell.

Just as she was about to despair she came upon a sheet of paper which seemed to crackle with electricity. Holding it up she was just able to make out the name Beach in the heading.. This one had to be it! Guiltily she rolled up the page and shoved it in her back pack. Was she really going to steal it? With a sigh she knew that yes, she was really going to steal this possibly

historic object. Julia resolved to try to bring it back, although part of her knew this would probably not happen. Then, with a deep breath, and a quick prayer that no one would be looking, Julia stepped out of the storage closet, back into the gallery.

“Look Ms. Ramirez, there she is. I guess she was behind us all along, not in front.”

“*Hija!* You had me so worried. Where did you run off to?”

“Mami I was here all along. How could you have not seen me?”

“Well, it doesn’t matter now, it’s time for us to go. Your brothers will be home in an hour and a half, I want to make sure I’ve gotten some housework done before they come back.”

As they left the museum Julia kept on patting her bag, making sure she could still feel the outline of the paper through the nylon of her bag. April was looking at her suspiciously.

“Did you get something?” April asked her quietly when they were waiting for the bus.

“Yes, it’s right here. I couldn’t read it though, we’ll have to wait until we get back home.”

The bus ride felt like it went on forever to Julia. Mami tried to pull her out her head by pointing out the still working stables, asking questions about what they had seen in the museum and teasing both April and Julia about how silent they had become.

“*Hija*, the two of you are acting like you saw a ghost!” She looked expectantly at them, waiting for some kind of response. Julia just shuddered, and April could barely muster up a response of “Just tired Ma’am.”

When they finally got back to the apartment the two girls bolted up the stairs and into Julia’s room. Julia hurriedly opened up her bag, pulled out the paper, unrolled it and lay it out on her bed. Written on the yellowed piece of paper in large looping letters was this:

In my day I have been lucky enough to know one of those women who many would call 'of ill repute'. When my fortunes turned and I became a mere shadow of the man who I had but once been, I turned to her for solace and respite. Through her kind words and ministrations I returned, if not to my proper place, then to a place of comfort. It is to her that I would bequeath whatever legacy I may have. Since it would not be honorable to do so publicly, I leave this note, with the accompanying poem, for her. She shall know what it means, and know that I honored her to the last.

Below this, in the same handwriting was the poem which had started Julia and April's quest. "So...this means...what now?" Julia asked.

"Well let's see..." April pondered. "Remember how Charles told us Beach fell from grace? I guess someone helped him find a softer landing."

"Oh, like Mami was saying before, where are the women, right?"

"Exactly"

"So this person, she wasn't of as high a social class as Beach?"

"It would seem that way."

"So what's the deal with him leaving her his legacy? That sounds like money to me."

"Maybe, or maybe, like he said, he just wanted her to know that he cared about her."

Julia sighed. Again and again a piece of the puzzle would fall into place, and it would simply reveal how much more they had yet to discover.

"Don't feel blue," April said, "we're onto something here."

"Yeah, but there's just one thing," said Julia "what's this something we're onto?"

The two girls sat in silence for a while, contemplating whether or not they had what it took to continue their pursuit for the truth, whether they would be able to follow their hunt to its conclusion. After many moments had passed April began to speak, slowly. “If there’s one thing I’ve learned from this...project...it’s that knowing where to look is almost as good as knowing what you’re looking for. We didn’t know what we were looking for at the cemeteries, but we found the gang markings on the headstones. At McSorley’s, what did we find at McSorley’s?”

“I don’t think we found anything at McSorley’s, except a nice bartender who let us gather our wits in the backroom and gave us a bit of history. Maybe that was what we found, a bit of history? Plus I feel like we wouldn’t have been as prepared to go to the Historical Society without McSorley’s under our belts.” said Julia.

“Look, there’s got to be something we picked up there. We’re collecting pieces as we go, we’ve just got to figure out what we’ve got, and where we got it from.” said April.

Julia was sitting on the end of her bed and April was sitting in the little chair that fit in the corner. They had Julia’s blue note-book open on the floor between them, and it lay there like a white beacon among the grey and black grave rubbings and the postcards they had picked up at the New York Historical Society.

“Wel-l-l-l...” said Julia, drawing out the word until it was more of a noise than a piece of vocabulary. “I don’t know if we got any hard facts from McSorley’s, but it felt kind of like going back in time there. It made me feel like maybe I understand a little bit better about what Alfred Beach’s life might have been like, who he spent time with, where he liked to be and who he liked to hang out with.”

“What do you mean, who he liked to hang out with?” April asked.

“I’m thinking about the paintings at the Historical Society. A lot of

those paintings were of fancy things, maybe not high class, but fancy...flashy. Beach had a lot of money, he could have been hanging out at those outdoor gardens with actresses or dancers or whatever.

Instead he seems to be sticking with the common, or at least the commoner people. That statement he left explaining the poem's purpose seems to point to that pretty clearly."

"So let me get this straight," said April, "You're saying Alfred Beach: Man of the People?"

"He did have a deep interest in public transportation and city planning, which would qualify him as a man of the people wouldn't it?"

April sighed "I guess you're right. I don't like it though. I've been thinking of him as a man in a tall black hat, who stood apart from the common things that existed in New York during his life."

"Common things like political corruption?" Julia pointed at the grave rubbings, "These tell the tale of a man who knew something about the underworld in his city."

"So, back to what we know. We know where the gangs were buried, we know Beach was involved in the gangs in some way, we know that he had a friend, or maybe girlfriend, who helped him when he was down and out. We know that Beach's ghost apparently cannot rest and is busy bugging you all the time."

April wrote down each thing they knew, when she was done she looked at the list and laughed "You know, at first I was completely weirded out by this whole ghost thing, but now I've started to take it for granted. Doesn't everyone have a ghost who comes and talks to them about history? It should be mandatory really. Ghosts for everyone, ghosts for every topic. You could get Albert Einstein to help you with math, you could get Babe Ruth to help you in gym, Abraham Lincoln could teach you debating skills, the possibilities are endless."

Julia laughed so hard she slid off of the bed and onto the ground with a thump. Her landing disturbed some of the papers. As April straightened them out she came upon one that caught her eye.

“Look Julia, this is the original poem, and there are still two or three things we haven’t investigated yet.”

“Like...?”

“Like the actual location of Tammany Hall and the whole singing ears of corn thing. I think we need to use the internet a bit more. Maybe your mom would let you sleep at my house tonight, and we could spend some more time doing research?”

“I bet she’d let me. What about your parents?”

“It’s Saturday night. They’re staying home and watching old movies together. They say it’s date night or something. If I had someone to keep me out of their hair they’d be happy.”

“Ok, I’ll go ask Mami if I can stay the night. We’d probably have to go over now. It’ll be getting dark soon, and Mami doesn’t like me to go places without her once it gets dark.”

“Good, take care of that, and I’ll give my parents a call and let them know we’re on our way.”

An hour later they were walking up April’s steps. On the walk home April had been quiet and thoughtful, occasionally murmuring something about cobblestones and secrets. If April was 100 years in the past, Julia was firmly in the present. She was looking forward to sprawling out on the thick carpeting in April’s room and using the steam shower in April’s bathroom in the morning. If she was really lucky, April’s dad would whip up a batch of his infamous kitchen sink cookies.

Even though Julia knew it was a bad idea she always compared her home to April’s. April was an only child and both her parent’s had high paying jobs. They had bought an entire building and lived on the first two

floors while renting out the third. When Julia thought about how dark and cramped her apartment was in comparison to April's, her stomach would tighten up. April always said she loved coming to Julia's house, but Julia couldn't see why. April had no noisy brothers leaving their toys everywhere, her parents made tasty recognizable food, and she had her own bathroom and a computer. There was a television for each person who lived at April's house and enough comfortable couches and chairs to seat the entire fifth grade class.

April unlocked her front door, and Julia sighed as she smelled the distinctive Moss household odor. Unlike her house, which usually smelled like nasty boys' socks, the Moss' house smelled like cinnamon.

"Mom, Dad, we're here." shouted April, and she ran up the stairs to her room. Julia stopped to poke her head into the living room to say hello.

"Hi Dr. Moss, hi Mr. Moss, thanks for having me over tonight."

"No problem, Julia dear," said Mr. Moss, not looking up from the television on which a man in a trench-coat threatened a man in a three piece suit with a revolver, "It's always a pleasure to have you. We're ordering pizza in a while. We'll call you down when it gets here."

"Thank you Mr. Moss," Julia replied and padded up the stairs to April's room.

Chpt 25. Love Interest

As soon as Julia got to April's room she pulled off her shoes and let her feet sink into the thick carpet. With a sigh she collapsed onto the ground. Everything in April's room was blue or green and matched. Pale blue curtains, forest green walls, ocean blue carpet, sea-foam green bed sheets, everything. April's parents had made sure they knew what her favorite colors were before they decorated. Julia's room was decorated mostly with whatever they had found that her mother could afford. Still, April said she preferred Julia's house to her own. "At least your family isn't afraid of being loud." she

would say. Julia had told Mami about this, how she loved April's apartment and April liked hers. Mami had said "We always appreciate what we don't have." and shrugged.

April, who had been looking through *The Gangs of New York* when Julia walked in., glanced up, and fixed Julia with a penetrating glance.

"Have you talked to George this weekend?" she asked. Julia could feel the blood rushing to her cheeks.

"N-n-no." she stammered, "To tell you the truth that all seems like a dream now. I know it was only yesterday but did it really happen? It's like, you know, until I'm in school again it won't be real."

April rolled her eyes. "You kill me sometimes Julia, you really do. You've finally got what you've been saying you wanted forever, and you won't even do anything about it."

"Well if I do finally have it, it'll keep for a weekend right?"

"Yeah, but not forever, you better do something about it on Monday."

"What a task master you are!" laughed Julia, "Fine, I'll do something on Monday! Now can we get to work on the problem at hand? What's the deal with these singing ears of corn, and where is Tammany Hall?"

They settled down to do some research. April worked on the computer while Julia searched through *The Gangs of New York*. After about an hour April let out a long sigh of satisfaction.

"Well, I think I've found Tammany Hall. I've found a lot of corroborating reports that it was located on fourteenth street, between Third Avenue and Irving Place."

"Where did you get your information from? Because you know you can't always trust what you find on the internet."

"I know that Julia! Would you give me a break? I know better than to trust just one website, but I checked a bunch, plus the New York Times database and I found an article that seems to confirm the location. Actually

it's a pretty awesome article, it's from 1901 and it's about Mark Twain staging a mock funeral for Tammany Hall."

"Mark Twain, you mean the guy who wrote *Huckleberry Finn*?"

"Exactly! It's kind of crazy you know, it's like, like, the more research we do, the more we find out, more I see how everything is connected. You've got gangs who are working for politicians, who they probably met at the neighborhood bar. You've got artists painting images of gangsters in those bars and maybe putting secret messages into their images. Now here's a writer who was famous in his own day, and in ours, and he's protesting the political machine that supported the gangsters who went to the bars that are in the paintings." April leaned back in her desk chair and laughed. "Do you think years from now people will find the report we're going to write all about this and have any connection to us? Will they say, 'that's April Moss, the famous historian who used to go to school with Julia Ramirez who later became a famous women's soccer player and married George Starkis, international superstar?'"

"Hey! I asked you to lay off me and George. But seriously, I don't know. Maybe you need to like, you know, leave behind something of yourself you know? Maybe that's why Beach left behind these poems and letters, not so much because of this mystery woman, who (by the way), I've found out something about, but because he wanted to be remembered. The ghost seems really into our solving his mystery, but he doesn't seem to care as much about the woman who helped him."

"You know, I'm beginning to wonder if he's exactly who he says he is. Wikipedia, which I know we're not supposed to rely on, but, wikipedia says Boss Tweed, the guy who was the Boss of Tammany Hall you know? Anyway, Tweed didn't oppose Beach's plan at all."

"What?"

"It's stunning I know, but that's what Wikipedia says. It says Tweed

supported the subway, and that he even tried to get a bill passed to fund it, but that when Tweed fell from power in 1871 Beach started saying Tweed had opposed his subway. I guess he was hoping this would make people support him, because it was like everybody hated Tweed right then.”

“So Beach might not be such a good guy?”

“Seems like it. Look, it says there was some kind of financial panic in 1873 and that sort of ruined Beach.”

“Is Wikipedia the only place where you find that information?”

“There’s plenty of other places that talk about how Tweed supported the elevated subway, and I’ve also found some information about how there was a plan for Beach to build some kind of a pneumatic, that means air-powered, message system that would go all over the city, underground.”

“What on earth? This is just getting too complicated for me. Was Beach a good guy or not? Did Tweed really sabotage his idea for the subway and make sure it wouldn’t happen, or did Beach slag Tweed in an attempt to get support for himself? We know Tweed was a bad guy, that he pocketed tons of money and bankrupted the New York treasury, but was Beach being honest when he blamed Tweed for his downfall, or did he just lose it all in the stock market?”

“You know Julia I don’t think this even matters all that much in the short term. I mean, we can complete our investigation whether or not we think Beach is a good guy or a bad guy. But in terms of the report we will have to give in class, Beach’s ethics are going to be important. I mean, according to all this stuff I’m finding Beach was an amazing person. He invented a ton of stuff, owned a newspaper, began the magazine *Scientific American*, and of course built this little bit of subway. But did he lie about Tweed? Because, if he did lie about Tweed, it changes everything”

They were both silent for a while. April sat tapping her fingers absentmindedly on the desk while Julia ran her hand over the carpeting,

smoothing out the whirls and rough spots.

“Does it really change everything?” Julia finally asked. “We know Tweed was bad, we know Beach was good, maybe...what’s that expression Ms. Sachem taught us last week? You know, the um, the, the ends justify the means. Doesn’t building a clean and efficient public transportation system justify slugging a crooked politician?” She sighed, “I don’t know if there is an answer to this. On a more positive note, I did find our girls singing about corn.”

“What did you find?”

“It’s in the very first chapter of *The Gangs of New York*. It says that ‘Dressed in spotted calico and wrapped in a plaid shawl, but barefooted, the Hot Corn Girl appeared on the streets at dusk, and throughout the night she mingled with the crowds on the sidewalks and in the dance houses, hawking her wares and lifting her voice in song.’ Then it gives this little ditty as her song.

‘Hot Corn! Hot Corn!
Here’s your lily white corn.
All you that’s got money-
Poor me that’s got none-
Come buy my lily white corn
And let me go home.

“Well I can agree with the sentiment, after all, she was walking around barefoot in New York, it must have been gross.” said Julia.

“So Beach fell in love with a street vendor? You know he had a family and everything, so that would mean he was cheating on his wife, and with a lower class lady too. That would have been such a scandal. I wonder if anyone ever found out about it.” April mused.

“I guess he’s definitely not as good a guy as we thought he was.” Julia sighed. “Not only was he a liar, he was also a cheat.”

“Still, he tried to do right by the girl...” April said.

Julia thought about this and frowned. April patted her arm sympathetically, “Yeah, I know, it still doesn’t feel good.” she said.

Julia sighed, then sat up straight. “So what do we do next?” she asked.

“I think we need to go down to where Tammany Hall was and see if our ghostly friend makes another appearance, and then we need to head down into the Lower East Side. If Beach had a taste for the lower class, maybe we’ll find what we’re looking for there. Right now it’s getting late and I’m hungry. Didn’t my parents tell you they were going to order pizza? Let’s see if they did.”

Chpt 26 While the Innocent Slumber

After eating pizza in the Moss’ kitchen, Julia and April went back up to April’s room and got ready for bed.

“We’re gonna have a lot more field work tomorrow so we should get a good night’s sleep.” April said.

Julia could only agree, she felt sleepy and confused. The question of Beach’s ethics was haunting her as effectively as any ghost. Why did it matter if he was a good man or not? He was dead and they were picking up pieces of his life’s puzzle. Did it matter if he’d been a nice or mean, honest or dishonest? Julia couldn’t shake the feeling that their project was being tainted by their doubts. She knew she should just let it go for now and get some rest, but she couldn’t stop analyzing her doubts.. Was Beach a good man, did he have honest intentions? Why had he left his poem blaming Tammany for his problems, if Tammany was not the cause?

Suddenly Julia snapped awake, she must have only been asleep for a

second or two, at at least it felt that way. Something had woken her up. At first Julia couldn't figure out what had disturbed her, she could hear the quiet regular sound of April's breathing but otherwise the apartment seemed to be silent. Sitting up Julia looked around the room. There was something eerie about the way the dim light showed the outlines of the desk and chair, April's bookshelf filled not with books but with stuffed animals, and the tall gaunt man standing in the corner.



Julia nearly screamed, it was the ghost.

“What are you doing here?” she hissed at him, afraid of waking April.

He stepped forward, out the deep shadows and into the timid light that came from the window. Julia could see that he seemed even thinner than the last time she had seen him. His dark coat and pants had become tattered and torn, and she realized she could actually see through him. With a sigh he sat down on the corner of her mattress, and a chill seemed to emanate from him. Julia pulled the covers up around her shoulders and shot a glance at April, who seemed to be sleeping solidly in her bed.

“I came because you doubt me, as I suppose you are right to do.” Seeing that she was looking at her friend, the ghost laughed, a hollow sound that Julia knew had no humor in it. “Do not worry about your friend, she will not awaken. No one will interrupt us until we have finished this conversation. Now about your doubts,”

“You lied to me.” Julia interrupted him. “You said that you were under Tammany Hall’s control. I don’t believe you about that.”

“Well you are right not to believe me about that, but there are many things you do not understand.”

“Then explain them to me!”

“Firstly, you must see that I was right about the subway, that it did need to be built and that it could have been done, and done well, by myself.” The ghost looked hard at Julia and his eyes, those twin pools of midnight, begged her to believe him. Seeing that she was unmoved by his pleas he went on, “You see, I felt that you, just like the public, would be against me if you felt that I was after simple personal gain. In order to understand what I did, you need to see the beauty of invention, not for the sake of monetary gain, but for the sake of progress.”

“This is an ends justify the means thing, right?”

“Exactly, my dear child, exactly. You must look at what I did, or tried to do, in terms of the greater picture of New York. This city is great because of the people who live in it, and those people are both ingenious and terrible. I

know you will find the key to my puzzle, and in so doing, set me at my ease. Whether you like it or not, you will be an instrument of justice. Just remember this: the streets are a place where many answers can be found.”

“If you want justice done so strongly why do you speak to me in riddles, why not tell me things plain and simple. What are we going to find, not another literal key?”

“What would be the fun of telling you straight out? Listen girl, you will find what you find, interpret it as you wish, and present your work to your peers. I will be freed by your actions no matter what you do. We shall not meet again, just remember what I said about the streets.”

The ghost then stood up and walked back to the corner of the room he had come from. He reached the corner and turned around. “Remember what I said, the streets hold the rest.” he said, and disappeared as simply as he had come. The coldness that had filled the room disappeared along with him, leaving Julia sitting stiffly in the silence, certain she would be unable to get back to sleep.

Julia did fall back asleep, a sleep so deep that April actually had to shake her awake. “Come on Julia, we’ve got to get going. My parents have already left to go jogging or something, let’s have breakfast and get out of here!”

“Wha? Oh...right...ok.” Julia staggered out of bed. “Man, I feel like I got hit in the head with a safe. What a night.”

Over rice-krispies in the Moss’ clean and bright kitchen Julia told April about the ghost’s latest visit.

“And then he told me it was the last time he’d come, and that today we were going to find the last piece in the puzzle.”

“Well, that’s good news! After all, we’re both getting tired of this wild-goose chase. Plus which we’ve got just a couple weeks before the whole project is due.” April pointed out.

After breakfast the girls got dressed and prepared themselves for another tough day of goose-hunting. They walked to the 34th Street #6 stop and took the local downtown to fourteenth street. Then they walked east towards Irving and Third Avenue.

“This must look so different from Beach’s day, the buildings must be taller, and look at all these stores, nothing like Trader Joes Existed in 1871.” Julia mused.

Soon they were between Third and Irving. There was no plaque memorializing Tammany Hall, just a Commerce Bank and a stationery store.

“Well this was a total bust.” said April, “There’s nothing here from 1870, not a cobblestone. How are we supposed to find anything?”

“More importantly is what are we trying to find, and how long do we have to find it?”

“What do you mean how long do we have to find it?”

“I mean when are your parents going to wonder where we are? Did you even leave them a note?”

“Oh don’t worry so much Julia, my parents probably think we went back to your house. It’s Sunday, it’s their day off. They want nothing more than to be left alone, and that’s what I’m doing.”

Julia had known April would answer her like this, but she still found it hard to understand. Mami always wanted to know where Julia was and what she was doing, but April’s parents didn’t even seem to care.

“I guess that makes it easier for us. Hey, I’ve got an idea, since there’s nothing here, why don’t we go back to the Transit Museum? We could find Charles and talk to him again, try and bounce around a couple of our ideas with him. What do you think?”

“Great idea Julia, do you remember how to get there?”

“Sure, we just take the 4 or 5 downtown to Borough Hall and walk from there.” The two were heading for the subway when they nearly ran right into

Maggie and Katherine.

“Hey guys, where’re you going?” Maggie asked, brightly.

“Oh um, well, we’re just...” Julia couldn’t think of anything to say.

“We’re just heading to the library to do some research for our Independent History Project, what’re you guys doing?”

“Well, we’re going to the library too, except you know, we must be going to different libraries.” said Maggie slyly.

“Yeah, we must be going to different libraries, because we’re walking in different directions.” Katherine said nastily. Julia could tell from her voice that Katherine didn’t believe them. April, course, had an explanation at the ready.

“Well, we were going to take the subway to one of the uptown branches. They didn’t have the books we needed locally.”

“Yeah.” murmured Julia, hoping Maggie and Katherine would believe her.

“Oh, well, that’s great, I didn’t know your mom let you take the subway on your own Julia. It’s nice of her to finally trust you.” Katherine just wouldn’t give up! Julia could feel her resolve to stand by April’s lie melting away. What could be the harm of telling them where they were going? Why did it have to be such a big secret anyway? There was no reason! So she said, “Ok, you guys, ummm, wanna know the truth?” Maggie and Katherine leaned in, they loved the truth because the truth was close to gossip, and gossip was their life blood.

April looked on, clearly shocked and upset. She didn’t like Maggie or Katherine and she certainly didn’t want them knowing something she had decided to keep a secret. Despite the obvious horror on April’s face Julia told Maggie and Katherine about their project. “So guys, part of our Independent History Project is on the subway, so we’re going to the Transit Museum to do some research.”

“Wow, you’re going all the way to Brooklyn without a grown-up?”

Maggie whistled, “you better hope you don’t get caught Julia, if you’re mom finds out she’ll never let you out of the house again.”

Julia sighed. She knew it was true. “Maybe we better go with you.” Katherine said brightly. April shook her head, no no no, she did not want them coming at all. But then Maggie chimed in “You know there’s safety in numbers, if something happens at least there’s more people to spread the blame around to.” Julia shot a look at April, she was looking sullen, but accepting. “Well, if you guys really want to come...let’s get going!” So the four girls headed downtown.

Chpt 27 Some Answers, Finally

The ride to the museum was uneventful, but filled with information. Maggie and Katherine spent the whole time chattering about who was dating who, who was in love with who, what different people had worn to school on Friday, and what they might wear to school on Monday.

When they were a few stops away from the museum they finally got around to George. Katherine gave them the first piece of information “Listen, I heard that George and Deirdre broke up, and now she’s dating a sixth grader from across town!”

Maggie chimed right in when Katherine was done. “It’s crazy right? She finally lands the best looking boy in the fifth grade and then she dumps him for some pimply creep who lives on the west side. I heard she told George he was too immature for her because all he wanted to do was sit around and watch zombie movies or something, isn’t it exciting?”

“Oh come on Maggie, how do you know this?” April asked.

“Well because I heard it from Rishelle and she and Deirdre are next door neighbors. Rishelle says she could hear Deirdre breaking up with George through the walls of her apartment.”

“Through the walls of her apartment huh?” April was not convinced,

“Sounds like hearsay to me.”

It didn't to Julia, it sounded like the sweetest music she had ever heard. George had been right! Deirdre wasn't really all that into him, and she had ended things as he had known she would. If her heart could have flown it would have jumped out of Julia's chest and done some loops around the train. April shot her a look. That was when she remembered that nobody but her and April, and of course George, even knew that he liked her. She had to remain calm, cool, collected.

“Well that's very interesting, we'll see how true it is when we get to school tomorrow, right?” Maggie and Katherine nodded.

“It is true! You'll see.” Katherine assured her, and Julia hoped that she would indeed see.

Once they got to the museum they had to figure out how to find Charles and they weren't even sure how to do that. They stood in the lobby of the museum, feeling a little uncomfortable and out of place. Julia wondered, should they ask the guy taking money for admission? Should they just pay admission and go into the museum and wander around? Luckily the answer to their question was provided without their actually having to ask anyone.

Just as they were about to go up to the booth and ask if Charles was at the museum, and if so, could they talk to him? A streak of grey whizzed by them, accompanied by the noise of a tinkling bell. Running after the streak was Charles, calling out “Sadi! Sadi! Stop her! She grabbed that boy's pacifier!”



The grey streak had stopped at the bottom of the stairs, and turned out to be a small grey cat with a purple collar and a light blue pacifier in her mouth. Maggie, who had a few cat's of her own, ran over to the cat and scooped her up, quickly removing the pacifier from her mouth and handing it Charles. He thanked her and walked back to where a mother was trying to comfort a crying toddler.

“Here you go Ma’am, sorry about that, Sadi can be a bit mischievous some times.”

Then he looked back at the girls and his eyes fixed on Julia and April. Smiling he walked over to them and thanked them for their help.

“Thank you ladies, I thought I’d see you again. How’s it going with that poem?”

Maggie and Katherine shared a glance and were about to say something, but April swiftly interrupted them.

“We’ve been trying to solve the riddle you gave us, but we’re stuck, and we want your help or advice.”

“Well that sounds lovely ladies, I’ve got about half an hour before the next tour, will you come with me to the cafeteria and we can talk about what you’ve found?”

The girls nodded and followed Charles to the cafeteria. Julia felt more than a little bit nervous. What would Charles think of what they had found? Impulsively she grabbed April's hand and gave it a little squeeze, April looked at her, smiled, and squeezed back. Charles found them an orange and blue table in a corner of the cafeteria and sat down, gesturing for the girls to do the same.

"Now I already know you two, April and Julia right? But who are your new friends?"

"I'm Katherine and this is Maggie, we're kind of tagging along. We don't really know what this is all about, so we'll just sit and listen ok?"

"Alright ladies, whatever you want," Charles shifted so he was looking right at Julia and April. "What's up?" he asked.

Julia pulled the blue notebook out of her bag, along with the rolled up grave rubbings.

"To start with, we've got some disconcerting information." April said. "You see we've found out that our previous assumptions about Alfred Ely Beach were not necessarily accurate. What I mean is, he might not be as good a person as we had thought. You see we've found out that he greatly over-represented Tweed's level of interference with his subway. In fact, some sources indicate that Tweed actually would have supported Beach's work, except that Tweed was being run out of office even as Beach was building his subway."

"I'm shocked." said Charles, but to Julia he didn't sound shocked.

"There's more." April went on grimly. "We've figured out a bunch more from the poem, why don't you tell the rest Julia."

"Well...ok." With everyone staring at her, Julia's mouth dried up. She had to swallow hard a few times before she could go on. "First off, the Native American and the Dead Rabbits, those were gangs. The, um, the Dead Rabbits were mostly Irish, and they fought for Tammany Hall, the Native

Americans fought against the Dead Rabbits, Specifically, they represented an oppositional party. Anyway, the two gangs were involved in a bunch of brawls that had something to do with who would control the police force in New York.” She paused, looking at April. Had she gotten it all right? April nodded at her to continue, so Julia took a deep breath.

“The thing is, this was in the 1830s, and Beach didn’t write this poem until much later, and he certainly wasn’t going against Tammany Hall and Boss Tweed in 1834. We’re not really sure why he was so involved with them that he wrote about them in the poem. I mean even after we figured out who the Dead Rabbits and Native Americans were, we still had to find out where they would come to rest. We thought a graveyard would be a place where a gang member could finally find rest, so we looked into old graveyards. We found two that were easy to get to from where we lived. They’re called the Marble Cemeteries and they’re both in the East Village. Look, we did grave rubbings from some of the head stones and plaques, and we found these.”

April put the grave rubbings on the table. Charles traced his finger lightly over the rabbits and flags and said “Interesting.” Julia realizing she was finally on a roll, didn’t give Charles a chance to say anything else. She just plowed ahead, throwing out everything they’d found.

“Here’s some other stuff we found out, that the old Tammany hall was on 14th street between Irving and Third Avenue, but it’s long gone. The ash-cans were a school of painters and one of their favorite topics to paint were scenes of daily life, which apparently included a lot drinking, at places like McSorley’s Ale House.” Here Julia had to consult the notes in the blue notebook. “McSorley’s had been open since 1854, which sort of lines up with our gangs but not quite. There are a lot of images of McSorley’s and place looks pretty close to what it used to look like, but not quite the same, you know.”

“Hmmm...” Charles scratched his head, rubbing the lines of his braids.

“This is a lot of information, but what does it all lead to?”

“That’s exactly what we’re wondering!” April huffed.

“Well there is one other thing.” Julia paused, it was the last piece of information they had after all, and she didn’t see how it was going to help them. “The thing is we have reason to believe that the person singing about ears of corn was a former love of Beach’s. A woman who worked the streets at night, selling roasted ears of corn out of large wooden buckets. I think, I mean it isn’t like April and I have talked about it yet, but I think he might have met her while going to McSorley’s.”

“How romantic.” whispered Maggie, and she would have gone on but April shot her a scary look, and she shut her mouth.

“Sounds like you girls need to ask yourselves some questions, instead of running around looking for answers.”

“What do you mean?” April asked, her voice holding a lot of hostility. “We’ve been working on this poem for a week, trying to figure out what everything means. We came here for answers, not more questions.”

“Well you know it’s all well and good to go and find a bunch of stuff out, but you’ve got to wonder what it means, not just run around looking for more. For example, what did Beach want with gangs? Maybe he had them doing some work for him? Did you girls ever look into that? Also, what did Beach have to gain by associating himself, even negatively with Tammany Hall?”

“We’re never going to figure this out in time for the Independent History Projects!” said April sadly. Julia moaned softly. Her friend was right, they were never going to figure this one out in time. Charles must have seen how upset he’d made them, and he tried to make it better. “Now you can’t give up! Listen girls, you’ve got to keep your spirits up and keep on working. Why don’t you put away this problem for a day, have a good night’s rest, and get back to it tomorrow. That usually helps me when I have a problem that seems

to big to handle.”

Charles’ kind words did nothing to ease the worry that Julia and April felt. Despondently, the girls left the Transit Museum, with Maggie and Katherine in tow, and headed for the uptown train. They sat on a bench in the station, waiting for the 4 train, united by their spirit of defeat.

“You know I would never have gotten us started on this if I thought it would make me feel like this.” April said with a sigh.

“Like what?”

“Like a total failure, like I don’t know my top from my bottom. I figured we’d get started on it and then we’d be at the end. Instead, it seems to be stretching out in front of me forever. Even with the help of A-,” here she stopped, realizing that Julia probably wouldn’t want anyone else to know about the ghost, “I mean to say even with all the help we’ve had we haven’t really gotten anywhere.”

“Yeah, we’re really out of luck right now” Julia said, with a weak laugh, and a quick sidelong glance at her friend.

She’d never heard April talk like this before, so defeated. It wasn’t in April’s nature to give up, just like she never backed down. Katherine and Maggie must have felt the strain because they didn’t keep up their normal chatter. It wasn’t until they’d gotten onto the train and were almost at 14th street that April spoke again.

“The thing is, the thing that’s bothering me the most, is that I feel like we’re pretty close to figuring this out. Maybe Charles is right, and we just haven’t been looking at it the right way, I’m just not sure if I know another way of looking at things. Is there a way of changing your eyes? Because mine have never been all that good, and now I think they might be faulty.”

Julia couldn’t figure out if April was talking about her glasses or something a little more abstract.

April sighed again, “Well, I guess we can talk about it more in school

tomorrow. Ms. Sachem is going to want to know how far along we are with our project, and we're going to have to have something to show her."

"You guys shouldn't be so down," said Maggie. "You've done some good work and you're probably sitting right on top of the breakthrough you need. Is there something you've been overlooking? I mean Charles said you should stop looking for answers and start trying to focus on what the right question is."

April looked at Maggie glumly. "Easy for you to say, I mean what're you doing your project on, probably some big invention or something right?"

Katherine looked startled, "Well, we actually are doing our project on the printing press, but that doesn't mean we can't help you guys out a little bit. Just let us know what you need us for and we'll help out. Your project is really interesting, and I think you've got something good. Do what Charles said, don't worry about it anymore today, and just get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow we'll all be at school, and you can worry about it some more. Plus we'll have a newly single George to distract from any worries, right?"

Julia blushed. She'd almost forgotten about George too. Had it only been a few days earlier that she'd been with him in the second Marble Cemetery? It seemed like years had passed since that day. Would they be able to eat lunch together now? What would Maggie and Katherine think of the whole thing when they found out? As they waited to transfer to an uptown 6 train she pushed all her worries aside. Charles was right, there was nothing to do but go home, have dinner and get some rest.

Chpt 28 Back to School

When Julia got home there was a note from Mami saying that she and the boys had gone to a soccer match, and would be back a little after dinner. She the slumber party at April's had been fun, and there was dinner in the refrigerator. Julia took one look at the strange lump of pink and blue her

mother had prepared for her dinner and decided she could have a banana and some cereal instead. Then she took a shower and went to bed, not a little hopeful that the ghost would decide to go against his word and make another appearance in her dreams. In her dreams she saw endless tunnels, each one darker and longer than the next, but nowhere did she find the ghost.

She woke up the next morning and felt disappointed. As she headed for the bathroom, dodging past Jesus and Ramon who were wrestling in the hall Beach's words from the night he had appeared at April's house surfaced in her memory. He had told her to not forget the streets, had she, had they? As she brushed her teeth she thought about all that they had found, and all the places they had gone hunting for clues. Together she and April had walked down just about every street in the East Village, they'd been to Brooklyn Heights. They'd even visited the Upper West Side, what could be left?

Suddenly she realized there was one place they hadn't gone near, the actual location of the original subway tunnel that Beach had dug. How could they not have thought of this earlier? Spitting toothpaste foam into the sink Julia felt like kicking herself. She couldn't wait to get on the bus and see April, tell her what she'd realized.

Julia raced through the morning, pulling on her uniform hastily and hardly stopping to chew the toast she made herself and the twins for breakfast.

"What's wrong with you today Julia? You look like you're only half here." Ramon complained.

"Yeah, you're supposed to be making sure we're getting a balanced breakfast and that our shirts are tucked in, how come you're not doing that?" chimed in Jesus.

"You two are old enough to get a balanced breakfast for yourselves. Besides, you just pull out your shirts as soon as I'm not looking. Anyway, I've got stuff on my mind. Now be quick and get your backpacks, I don't want to miss the bus."

“Julia we’re going to be early for the bus, we’re going to have to wait there for at least ten minutes if we leave now. Can’t we just wait a little longer? I haven’t even finished my milk.” Ramon held up the half full glass of milk accusingly.

“Finish it now Ramon. Jesus you finish your toast, we’re not going to be late today!”

Grumbling the boys gulped down the last of their breakfast and gathered their school things together.

“It’s like she saw a ghost or something.” Ramon mumbled to Jesus.

“What’s that?” Julia asked sharply.

“Nothing, nothing. Sorry, Julia, nothing.”

“Well good, keep it that way, now let’s go.”

“Julia I think we should start calling you El General for real! You’re acting you’re ya dictator.”

“Whatever you want to do, let’s just go.”

At the bus stop Julia could hardly stand still. The bus was late and this only added to her nervousness.

“We told you we’d have to wait. Why did you rush us?” whined the twins, but she didn’t pay attention to their complaints.

Finally the bus showed up, and they got on. But then Julia had to wait until they got to April’s stop. When April got onto the bus she looked as excited as Julia was. Her hair was in its normal tight braids, her glasses in their normal position on her nose, but there was a feeling of electricity coming off of her. She almost seemed to crackle as she walked to where Julia was sitting.

She sat down and the girls turned to one another and said, in almost perfect unison “The original subway! We have to visit it!” They were both shocked.

“How did you, I mean...” Julia frowned, this was strange.

“Julia! You took the words right out of my mouth, that was, that was, well it was just weird.” April looked worried too. But then they shook it off and laughed.

“Well as long as we’re in agreement, then let’s try and get down to the old tunnel as soon as we can, and maybe there’ll be something there.” April said.

“What are we going to say to Ms. Smythe today?” Julia asked, “I mean, I know we’ve got a plan now, and I know there’s something we’re overlooking downtown, something that will make the connection between the Dead Rabbits, Tammany Hall, Alfred Beach, and the Corn Girl make more sense, but are we going to tell her that?”

“Of course not! Don’t worry Julia, I’ll think of something to say to Smythe, you just make sure you’re standing behind me looking innocent and nodding a lot OK? And by the way, did you look in the mirror this morning? Your shirt is buttoned wrong.”

Julia blushed, she’d been in such a hurry that morning that she had hardly even chewed her food, let alone looked in the mirror. She looked down and saw that, just like April had said, her shirt was buttoned wrong. Not only was it buttoned wrong, but it looked like she’d pulled it out from under her bed, which in fact she had.

“I look a mess!” she laughed and re-buttoned her shirt, trying to straighten it out as she did.

“Aren’t you nervous about seeing George today?” April asked.

“Well yeah! Obviously, but you know what? It doesn’t matter to me as much now as it used to, because we’ve got this mystery to solve, and that’s sort of consuming me.”

April laughed, “George not mean that much to you? I’ll believe it when I see it!”

The bus pulled up in front of their school, and the kids piled out. As

soon as they got off the bus Maggie and Katherine came running up to them.

“Told you! It’s totally over, I mean look at Deirdre over there by the water fountain, does it look like she’s waiting for George?”

The girls all swung around to look at Deirdre. Julia had to admit, she didn’t look like she was waiting for George; she wasn’t looking for him and she didn’t seem interested in whether or not he was looking at her. She was happily looking through the latest copy of what could only be *Tiger Beat*, a gossip magazine targeting kids their age, with a group of her friends.

“I’ve got to agree with you Maggie, she doesn’t look upset.” Julia said. The girls started walking across the courtyard towards the door of the school, all the while looking around trying to find George. Suddenly, almost as silently as the ghost, he was standing right there in front of them.

“Oh, hey George, we were just talking about you.” April said, cool as a cucumber. Meanwhile Maggie and Katherine were falling over themselves trying to act like they hadn’t been talking about George just seconds before he showed up. And Julia found herself, once more, speechless.

“Hey April, good morning Katherine, how are you Maggie. I was wondering if I could talk to you for a minute, Julia?”

Pulling herself together as best she could Julia nodded her head, George then took her by the elbow and led her away from her friends.

“Ok, so since you were just talking to Maggie and Katherine you must already know that Deirdre and I broke up.”

“Um, yeah I’d heard.”

“I was hoping maybe we could start hanging out? Or at least, you know, talking on the phone a little bit. I think you’re really cool, Julia, and I’d like to get to know you better.”

“That, that would be great, George, I’d really like that.” Julia smiled, and George smiled back.

“I’d really like that too.” he said. “Okay, well, here’s my phone number,

why don't you give me a call sometime, like tonight?"

"Ok, I will."

He squeezed her elbow and then he was off, back across the courtyard to the group of boys who were his friends. When Julia rejoined her friends, the bell was ringing summoning them to class.

"What was that all about?" Katherine asked. Julia looked at April, and her friend's eyes cautioned her to not give everything away, not just yet.

"Oh well, George is helping us with our Independent History Project, and he just had a couple questions he needed to ask me."

Maggie was full of questions. Why couldn't he ask in front of us all? Why didn't he ask April any questions? Since when is he helping you guys? He wasn't helping you guys yesterday, I mean, we were there, and you didn't mention him at all." She smiled, and her eyes twinkled with curiosity.

Julia tried to think of a good reason why George had to talk to just her, and couldn't. She tried to think about why they hadn't mentioned George the day before, and couldn't.

Luckily April, as always, jumped in with a glib answer. "Oh well, you know, Julia's been doing a bunch of research, and she already shared her findings with me, but George wanted to know what she'd been up to. He's been tutoring me, and I told him about the project and he got really interested. He probably didn't want to bore you guys with some silly historical mumbo-jumbo, you know, and he didn't know you guys are helping us too."

Katherine and Maggie didn't seem convinced. "What new information have you dug up since yesterday?" asked Katherine.

"Well we realized we never went and checked out the location of the tunnel that Beach made, and we think that's important. I mean, it must have been really hard to keep people from noticing it. How did they do that?" April said.

While April's answer didn't seem to have completely satisfied them,

Maggie and Katherine let it slide, and the girls headed into school together.

Chpt 29 Calming Smythe, Heading Out

All through home-room Julia felt tingly. A phone conversation with George! He had said they couldn't date yet. That meant they could be, or would be, dating soon! With this thought at the front of her mind Julia floated on a cloud until first period history, when Ms Smythe called her and April up to her desk in an imperious voice.

"Alright ladies, I'd like to see what kind of work you've been doing on your Independent History Project. I know the presentations aren't for another two weeks, but I'm hoping you've gotten a good start on the work and have something to show me. As I said before, the project you are doing...this kind of group work and independent research...my allowing you to choose your own theme...all of this is highly unorthodox."

"Well Ms. Smythe, I'm happy to report that we've found quite a bit of information, although our inquiry hasn't quite finished." April purred. "You see, based on the information we were able to gather at the library we have come across some rather, interesting, facts. The grave rubbings, please, Julia." Julia rummaged through her bag and pulled out the grave rubbings. "You see," April continued, "We began our research with a poem left behind by Alfred Ely Beach. This poem was filled with hidden meaning, and used a sort of rhyming meter in order to convey its message." Julia almost choked. What on earth was a rhyming meter? How did April know stuff like this?

"At any rate, by tracing the different elements in the poem we ascertained that many of the references were to old cemeteries here in New York. We visited several and made rubbings of the graves and found that many of the er...patrons...of these cemeteries had shared a similar occupations, that of gang member."

April paused for air and Ms. Smythe, had been looking more and more

upset, interrupted, "Excuse me?" said Ms. Smythe, who looked horrified, "You've gotten involved in gangs?"

"Oh no! No worries Ms. Smythe, these gangs are long gone. The gangs I'm talking about are from the 1800s. At any rate Ms. Smythe, our research has taken us to much more savory locations as well. We have been studying the Ash Can school of painting at the New York Historical Society and have undertaken a street survey of the East Side. Our issue, Ms. Smythe, is not a lack of information or interest, but rather an overwhelming amount of data. We are hoping to tie up all of the loose ends we have encountered with another visit to the library, which were hoping you could authorize today."

"Well April, Julia, I must say this is an almost overwhelming amount of information." Smythe looked annoyed, "Given how hard you have both been working I can authorize you for one more visit to the library. After this visit you're on your own, understand?"

"Yes Ms. Smythe, of course."

"And another thing, what exactly is your plan for your final presentation? After you've done all this research you know you'll have to have something to show for it. Some of the other groups are going to be presenting slide shows or short lectures from their longer papers. What will you girls be doing?"

Before she knew what she was saying Julia heard her voice say "We're going to be presenting a short play set in the 1870's, illustrating our findings." April, who had been about to say something, was caught short. She turned and stared at Julia. All Julia could do was shrug, she hadn't known she was going to say that, but now that she had, it sounded like a good idea. Plus, Smythe was visibly excited by what she'd said.

"Oh! That sounds wonderful girls, but who are you going to get to be in your play?"

Of course Julia didn't know who, she hadn't even known they were

doing a play. Once more her mouth was working on its own. "We're going to have Katherine and Maggie, George Starkis, and maybe Deirdre French."

"That sounds lovely girls, what a good idea to get other students involved in your project. You let them know I'll give them extra points on the next history exam if they participate in your play."

"Y-yes Ms Smythe, could we go to the library now?" April said.

"Of course girls, good luck with the rest of the research."

As soon as they were in the hall, April turned to Julia with fire in her eyes. "What did you mean, telling her we were going to do a play? We never talked about a play. I told you to just stand there and be quiet. Now we've gotta do a play with half the school watching. When are we going to have time to write a play, how are we going to convince anybody to be in it? Especially Deirdre French, why did you choose her, of all people?"

Julia shrugged, she didn't know why she'd said that, but now that she had she didn't really want to take it back. She thought a play would probably be a good idea, people liked plays. Plus it meant she'd get to work with George and maybe find out if Deirdre still had feelings for him, and if she did, if she was planning on clobbering anyone who got too close to him.

"I don't know what came over me April, but do you think it was awful what I said? It could be a good idea, you know?"

"Well..." April thought for a moment, "Well you've gotten us into this, and I suppose we'll get out of it ok in the end. Couldn't you have asked me about the play idea?"

"Honestly, April, I had no idea I was going to say that. It was like, like wasn't in control of what I said, like I was possessed or something." April rolled her eyes. "I'm not saying I was possessed but I'm telling you, I was not in control. But now that it's said and done, let's just try and get on with it ok? It's not the worst idea in the world, and it could actually work. Let's just go to

the library, figure out where we've got to go to find the old tunnel, decide when we're going to do it, and then we can talk about how we're going to get everyone to help us with this play."

April sighed, "You know I'm supposed to be the impetuous one." Julia smiled and gave her friend a punch in the shoulder.

"Yeah, I know, but sometimes roll reversal can be fun, right?" In reply April just shook her head and sighed, an action Julia was all too familiar with herself.

At the library the girls found computers next to each other and went online, pulling up more information on the infamous first subway. Apparently, it ran on Broadway between Warren and Murray.

"Wow, look at this. It's right by the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge, just the other side of City Hall Park."

"I wonder, I mean, do you think that park was there when the subway was built?" asked April.

"Dunno, but we can check it out." April opened up a new window on the computer and searched for City Hall Park.

"You know it looks to me like that whole tunnel could be part of Brooklyn Bridge Station now. So, you know, we could take the subway right into where the tunnel used to be, and the go above and check it out." April said.

"Wait, it says here it's part of City Hall Station, is there a City Hall Station?" asked Julia, "Because I feel like we might have heard about it at the Transit Museum, and I think that station is closed."

"Oh yeah, you're right, it is. The Transit Museum website says the station closed in 1943, so what're we going to do, I mean, how do we visit a closed subway station?"

April shrugged, "I'm trying to remember what Charles said about that station...hrm...just keep on researching the park, I'll remember."

“Whatever you say, crazy, ok...so City Hall Park is really quite old. Look, it says right here the Declaration of Independence was read there in 1776, and, well, there’s various other information here about the park. I guess for our purposes we can say the park was already there when Beach built his tunnels. You know what else was there? City Hall!” Julia shook her head in disbelief. “Can you believe he built those tunnels right in the shadow of City Hall? That guy Beach, he had some nerve!”

“Hey! I remember the deal with that City Hall station. You’re right, it’s totally closed. You know what though? The six train turns around in it. So if we want to see it, we can take the 6 train there. It’s not Beach’s tunnel but it is an abandoned subway station. Could be interesting, and what’ll it hurt to check it out?”

“I guess it wouldn’t hurt anything, so, where do we stand now?” Julia asked.

“We’re going to go down there and visit the scene. We’ll check out the old City Hall station and walk on Broadway between Murray and Warren, try to find the connection between a responsible business man, corrupt politicians, street thugs, and a poor woman, down on her luck.”

April laughed, “My father would say that all four of those things go together naturally anyway, except for honest business men, since they don’t exist. I sure hope we figure this out soon, I’m getting tired of having to go over this stuff again and again.”

“Do you think maybe we should ask Maggie and Katherine to come with us, and maybe George too?” Julia asked hopefully.

“Oh yeah sure, let’s invite Deirdre too.”

“What?” Julia was shocked.

“Well they’re all going to be in the play right? Let’s see if they can come with us on Wednesday after school.” April said matter-of-factly.

“Why Wednesday?”

“Eh, I just like the day.”

“Alright April. Wednesday, after school, we find out the truth about all this stuff once and for all.”

“So who’s gonna ask Deirdre to come?”

“George?”

“Good plan. Let’s get back to class. Smythe is probably about to wet herself worrying about what we’re up to here, all alone, in the library.”

Laughing, they walked back to class.

Chpt 30 We all Go down Together

The rest of the day passed as a blur for Julia, and Tuesday was kind of fuzzy too. On Tuesday morning April had talked to Maggie and Katherine and convinced them to come down town on Wednesday after school. Julia had spent two hours on the phone the night before with George talking about, well, she didn’t really know what they had talked about. Her family, his summer vacation, the foods they both liked, the bands neither one of them were interested in, they covered it all. Of course she had totally forgotten to ask him to come with them on Wednesday, so that was an excellent reason to call him on Tuesday. He said yes and promised to talk to Deirdre.

In the end George, Maggie, Katherine, Deirdre, two of Deirdre’s goons, April, and Julia all headed downtown on the six train after school on Wednesday. It was awkward for Julia at first. Deirdre and George seemed to be such good friends, and of course Deirdre’s presence made her nervous. After they’d all been together for a while Julia began to relax, nothing bad had happened yet, and she felt like maybe nothing bad would happen.

April didn’t seem to loosening up though. She snapped at Maggie when Maggie asked how long this was going to take, blatantly ignored Katherine’s attempts at conversation and focused all her attention of the two goons, who it turned out were named Cherise and Ochre. Apparently all three of them had

taken Judo together and they were discussing the basic principles behind the moves.

Finally they got to Canal Street, the second to last stop on the six train. April roused herself out of an analysis of 'finishing moves' and tried to get everyone's attention.

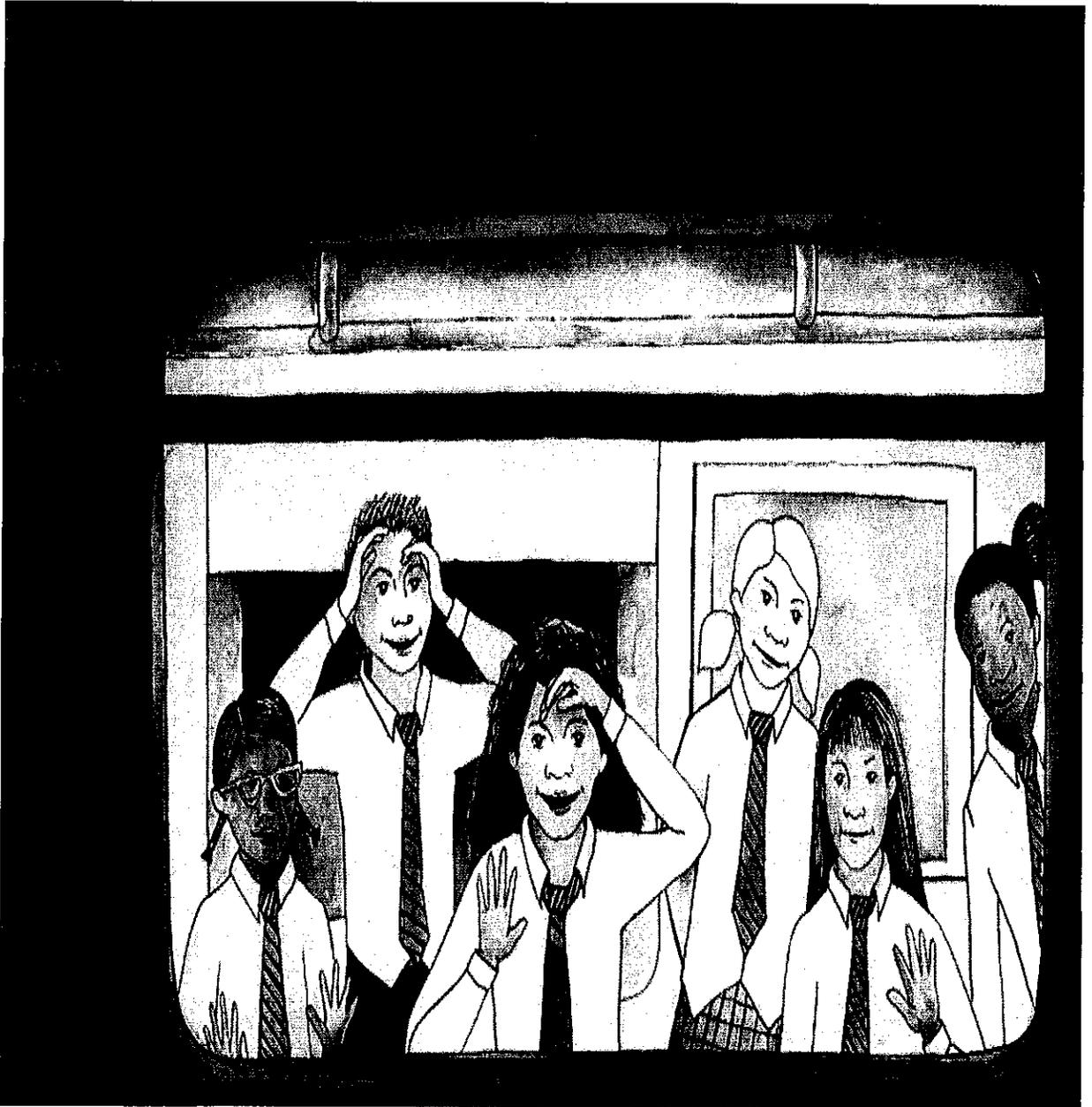
"Ok guys so this is the drill. We're going to stay on the train after Brooklyn Bridge, and that'll take us through the old City Hall station. After that anyone who wants to head back home is free to, but Julia and I are staying downtown to follow up on a few more leads. We really appreciate your all coming with us today. We thought it would be a good way to give you an idea of the time period we're going to be working with, and some context for when we hand out parts. You should all have your scripts in a week or so, and then we'll have time for a few rehearsals before the Independent History Projects are due. Anybody got any questions?"

Julia couldn't believe it, everybody just nodded and agreed with April. She would have thought that Deirdre would have tried to take more control of the situation, or that Maggie or Katherine would want to know more about their parts. But no, nobody made even the slightest peep. They all just nodded and went along with April. It was amazing what April could do sometimes, Julia knew that, but she hadn't expected her friend's powers to extend this far.

After her announcement April seemed to loosen up, but Julia began to feel tense again. Even though she didn't think what they were doing was illegal, it was still worrisome. As the train entered Brooklyn Bridge Station, the announcement of 'last stop' made her heart race. She looked over at Maggie and Katherine, and it reassured her to see they both looked a bit nervous. George seemed to be having a great time, and when she looked at him he looked up and smiled and winked. Soon they were pulling out of the station.

At first everything seemed normal, all Julia could see out of the windows of

the car was darkness. Then suddenly they were passing by a platform that was lit from skylights. There were green tiles on the walls, and Julia could make out brass candelabras on the walls.



“Wow, you guys weren’t kidding!” said Deirdre, “There really is an abandoned subway station. Check out the dirt on everything.”

She was right, the whole platform was buried underneath a thick layer of dust. Even though it wasn't Beach's tunnel Julia felt a shiver go down her spine. His tunnel had been made part of this one, and it had been under people's feet for so long. As the train turned into the loop that led back to the Brooklyn Bridge station she had to wonder, how many people were walking over them right then, unaware of what lay beneath their feet? Then, all too soon, they were back in the Brooklyn Bridge station, piling out of the train and onto the platform.

"That was amazing!" said George, "I never even knew that existed." Everyone agreed, even Deirdre and her goons seemed to be blown away by the station. The question was what to do next.

"I'd like to go walk on Broadway over the area where Beach's tunnel used to be, you don't all have to come, but of course anyone who wants to is more than welcome." Announced April.

Julia knew she was going, she'd told her mother she had to stay after school to help set up the cafeteria for the third grade science fair. Deirdre and the goons said they had to get home, as did Katherine and Maggie. That left George.

"Oh I'm definitely staying." George said, and he smiled at Julia, "Wouldn't miss this for the world."

Deirdre caught the smile and gave Julia a hard look. As they were all saying goodbye she leaned in and whispered "I know he likes you." Julia's blood ran cold, her body tensed as she got ready for whatever was coming. "He's a great guy, probably better than you deserve." Deirdre said, and walked away.

Julia was shocked! Deirdre was being protective of George. She hadn't known Deirdre was capable of that kind of interest in other people, or the kind of restraint that kept you from punching people who liked your ex. She couldn't think of what to say, and Deirdre was already far away to say

anything to. So, she smiled, shrugged and headed out of the station, trailing behind April and George.

Chpt 31 Almost there

When they stepped out of the station they found themselves in a tall vaulted arcade, right next to the Brooklyn Bridge and across the street from City Hall Park.

“My parents said this park was a real dump until about 1998, when Mayor Giuliani had it refurbished.” April told them.

Julia looked around, if the park had once been a dump there was no sign of it now. The park was beautiful. There were carefully manicured flower beds, a huge fountain filled with splashing water and surrounded by gas lanterns and plenty of benches to sit on.

“You know what else my parents told me? They said that when they were rebuilding the park they found a bunch of skeletons buried here, skeletons from the 1700s! And you know what else, they didn’t even get rid of them. They just buried them again. We could be walking on top of them right now.”

“Yuck!” said Julia, and George and April laughed.

“Well it is gross you know, to think about there being skeletons right underneath us, right now?” Then Julia started thinking about what she had thought of in the tunnel, how you never know what’s going on right on top of you or right underneath. Then she started thinking about all the people who lived in her building, who she didn’t even know, which led her to thinking about the buildings around her building, and the buildings next to those buildings, and so on and so forth.

“Geez, this city...” she murmured.

“I know, right?” said George with a grin, “You start thinking about it too much and the next thing you know you’re totally overwhelmed. You’ve just

got to keep it in perspective.”

“What perspective is that?” asked April.

George had to think about that for a while, they had almost reached Broadway before he spoke again “I guess you’ve got to think about it like this, I mean here we are, a few people in a city made up of many, but what we do is important, even if it’s only important to us. You know it’s like we might not know it, but our actions affect people all around us.”

“Getting deep huh?” said April, and then she stopped. They’d made it to Broadway and Warren.

“Wow, we’re like, just behind City Hall aren’t we? How could you make a secret tunnel here?” asked George, “I think people would have noticed.”

April nodded, “Yeah, that’s really true. It’s part of what we’re trying to figure out, I mean, how secret could this secret tunnel really have been? Beach had already lobbied twice to try and get his subway built, he’d even gotten permission from some branches of NY government, only to get vetoed by others. How could he have kept this a secret?”

Slowly the three of them walked down Broadway, towards Murray street.

“It just doesn’t make sense.” mused Julia, “After all, it wasn’t like people didn’t know he wanted to do it, and there were people who knew, I mean he was dumping the dirt somewhere wasn’t he, and he had to hire people to do the work?”

April, of course, knew the answer to this “He was dumping it in the basement of the store they started the digging in, I think it was called Devlin’s. He must have paid his workers well, to get them to keep his secret.” They all thought about that for awhile. Then April said, “Let’s go over to City Hall and sit on the steps and think.”

The City Hall building was beautiful, and as April and Julia had

discovered, quite old. As they sat on the steps thinking about their questions Julia felt as if they were surrounded by the weight of all the lives that come in and out of the building over the years. How could they ever even hope to understand what had happened in Beach's tunnel? How could they, fifth graders at a public elementary school, try and solve a riddle that had been around for over a hundred years? And then, suddenly, she had it, or at least part of it.

"You guys, I know why Beach had the gangs involved." George and April turned their attention to her, all ears and eyes. "It's so simple! Why didn't we think of it before? Just like how Tammany hired the gangs to fight for them, Beach hired the gangs to guard his tunnel. The construction of the tunnel couldn't really be kept a secret, after all, people would have noticed it no matter what. But, you know what I think? I think that if there were scary enough people outside the tunnel people would, you know, forget they saw it. Of course this probably turned out to be a bad idea for Beach. Those gang members probably started to hit him up for extra cash, and when the subway didn't pan out for him, he ended up broke anyway. Nobody at Tammany would help him, since he'd already tried to distance himself from them, and he'd probably alienated a lot of other people by going ahead with his plan without permission."

Julia paused, both April and George were following her train of thought closely. "Yeah," said April, "Just look at how close his tunnel was to City Hall, there's no way they didn't know what he was doing."

"Exactly!" cried Julia, taking the narrative again "Of course they had to know what he was doing, but they probably chose to ignore it, just like they did when he failed. They turned a blind eye to him and his problems. Then he started drowning his sorrows, he met the corn girl, but even her singing couldn't help distract him from all he had lost. He knew he had been foolish and lived his last years in mourning for what he had lost. What do you guys

think?”

“But what about the poem?” April asked.

“Well...that’s sort of weird. But would anyone ever have known what he did, I mean exactly what he did, and what he had to go through without it?” asked Julia.

“No way!” said George. “Not even the people who run the magazine he started, or go to the college named after him know the true story, just us.”

“Wow.” said Julia. She’d never thought about all the people who revered Beach and thought they knew his history; they were totally in the dark. It was like they had found a secret flashlight, a flashlight that illuminated the past.

“You know what? I like knowing all this stuff.” said George.

“Me too.” said April, “It’s like being part of a club or something isn’t it? I never understood why people wanted to join clubs, like girl scouts or whatever, but knowing all this information makes me feel special.”

“Well we could start a club.” Julia said.

“Like what kind of a club?” April asked.

“A New York explorers club. There’s bound to be more secrets buried under the city than this one. After we’re done with this maybe we could try and discover more.”

“Wow guys, are you serious?” asked George.

“YEAH!” said the girls in unison.

“Well then count me in! This has been the most exciting independent history project I’ve ever worked on.”

“Yeah, this has been difficult and strange but definitely worth it, plus it’ll make a good play. Now all we have to do is write the play, get everyone into rehearsals, make some scenery, write a short report to go along with it. This should be easy right?” April looked at Julia with what had to be an evil grin.

“Right...”said Julia, “Easy as could be.”

The three of them got up and headed for the subway.

“You wanna come and get a slice of pizza with me when we get back up town?” George asked Julia.

She looked at April, who gave her the slightest nod.

“Sure.” she said.

Chpt 32 THE END

That slice of pizza was just one of many. Over the weeks that followed Julia and George got to hang out a lot. Together with Maggie, Katherine, Deirdre, the Goons, and even Ramon and Jesus, they built a small set, wrote a script, held rehearsals in whomever’s apartment they could, and nervously went over their data time and time again. Together April and Julia pieced together a report that detailed their investigation and their findings. In the end they had a three page paper and a short play they felt proud of. The paper was called ‘The Truth about History’ and the play was called ‘The Difficult Work of Alfred Beach’. On the day of the Independent History Project presentations the group gathered outside of the classroom, excited and nervous.

Ramon and Jesus had been given special permission to come up and help, and they were looking very anxious about being in front of the fifth graders. Julia was worried about Jesus’ asthma; when he was excited, he forgot to monitor his breathing. She was keeping an inhaler in her pocket, just in case.

As they nervously stood in the hallway, April gave a short speech to pump up the group. “Ok guys, we’ve all been practicing really hard for this. I know we’re ready. So when we walk into that room, let’s make sure they know we’re ready. Let’s get in there and knock them dead!” She cried, and they headed into the classroom

They walked in and Julia could see that everything was set up. Their

play was in three acts, the first took place in a Tweed's office in Tammany Hall. Deirdre took her place behind a desk with her goons flanking her. Her role was that of Boss Tweed, with her goons playing two members of his infamous 'ring'. As soon as she was in place George stepped in, playing Alfred Ely Beach. The first act went like this:

Narrator: The year was 1870. New York City was a bustling metropolis of over 2 million people. Everyday immigrants arrived on her shores, ready for a new life, a new start. One man looked at the busy streets and he saw something that was not there, an underground railway, a subway. This man's name was Alfred Ely Beach, and he would not see his dream realized in his lifetime, but in 1870 he did not know this.

Tweed: Well Beach, it's a pleasure to see you again.

Beach: Can't say the same to you Tweed. You're a corrupt politician, and that's a sure thing. But I won't be paying any graft or bribes to you this time.

Tweed: And why is that?

Beach: You know already, you scoundrel! The powers that be do not support my subway, and they have vetoed the last two bills that you introduced. But I tell you, Tweed, your days of greed and corruption here in New York are numbered. The people of this city will not stand for your wicked ways, and from the great height to which you have pulled yourself up through bribery, extortion, and political favors you shall fall. Mark my words Tweed, you shall fall, and you shall fall hard.

The members of the tweed ring take a menacing step forward, and Tweed

motions for them to be still. He seems completely unbothered, and smiles happily at Beach, his hands folded across his stomach.

Tweed: Well, you may be right, after all, there is nothing in this world that is permanent. That still leaves you without your precious tunnel, what're you going to do about that Alfred?

Beach looks insulted at Tweed's use of his first name

Beach: I'll not tell you what I'm doing, but I will tell you this, I shall distance myself from you as much as possible in order to achieve my goals. Any connection between us would only drag my dreams through the mud.

Tweed: *(chuckling)* Can't say I blame you, can't say I blame you one bit. Now, you go and you get that tunnel built, and let me deal with what I need to deal with. If you think I'm going to let some reformers drive me out this city, this city I made, you've got another thing coming. We'll see who's standing at the end, your tunnel or my government.

Tweed, the two members of the ring, and Beach exit the stage and Katherine walks through carrying a sign that says Act II

April and Julia pull a large screen out onto which they have painted the mouth of a tunnel. Ramon and Jesus come out carrying buckets and shovels. George is standing in a corner. The two goons come out as well, carrying baseball bats that have been taped up.

Worker 1: Well Mr. Beach, we've gotten a lot done, but it sure is hot in that tunnel.

Worker 2: And you can hear the horse's walking above us, it's hard to concentrate.

Beach: Well, you've got to keep working. This project is costing me hundreds of thousands of dollars, and the economy isn't doing to well, we've got finish on schedule. I know the public will receive us well, if we can just finish the work. *(He runs his hands through his hair)* Yes, I just know they will, if we can but finish...

Worker 1: Of course boss! We'll work hard.

Worker 2: But did you have to hire those guards? They give me the creeps, they look like a couple of gangsters.

Beach casts a look at the two guards, who do indeed look like gangsters. They are wearing dark lumpy coats and have their hats pulled over their eyes. One of the guards is taps his baseball bat on the floor, while the other menacingly twirls his. Beach shudders, and turns back to the workers.

Beach: Had to do it boys, had no choice.

Gangster 1: Hey boss, c'mere a minute will ya boss?

Gangster 2: Yeah we've got something to talk about with ya.

Beach walks over to the gangsters. The look on his face is one of resignation

Beach: What can I do for you boys?

Gangster 1: You can pay us is what you can do boss.

Beach: *(shocked)* B-b-but I paid you yesterday!

Gangster 2: No you didn't boss, you paid the guy who was working yesterday. We're different guys, so we need different pay, you got me?

Beach: You're going to ruin me!

Gangster 1: Let me ask you a question, what do you like more, your pocket book or your legs?

Beach: Well, my legs of course.

Gangster 2: Then you better pay us, understand.

Beach Falteringly pays up, he looks miserable

Beach: *(turning to the audience)* All I wanted to do was bring economical and clean transportation to this city. I now see what Tweed meant, when said we'd see who was left standing. If we do not finish construction soon I may not have a leg to stand on, literally.

Julia and April clear the set and move the desk. Then they set up a few stools and set some glasses on the desk.

Maggie walks across the room carrying a sign that says Act III

Julia and April prop up a sign that say McSorley's Ale House on it.

Maggie comes in wearing an apron and takes a place behind the bar. Ramon and Jesus take seats at the bar, hunch over their glasses.

Bartender: Well boys, another day another drink, it's what I always say.

Workmen: muffled laughter

Beach walks in, looking worse for wear and takes a seat.

Bartender: What'll it be for you sir?

Beach: A pint of beer for me. *Sighs, puts head in hands* It's come to this!
Here I sit, in a common bar, drinking common beer, just wanting to forget my
worries.

Workman 1: Say, don't I know you?

Beach: NO.

Workman 2: Yeah, yeah I do know you, ain't you Alfred Beach, what made
that subway a few years back?

Beach: *stiffly* You must have me mistaken for someone else.

Bartender: Here's your beer now sir.

From outside the bar comes the sound of beautiful singing

Corngirl: Corn Fresh Corn Sweet and white!

Bartender: Ach, it's that daft girl who sells the corn, anyone got a penny to
spare on the poor lass?

Beach: *loudly* Here Lass, I'll buy an ear. *to himself* What's a penny to a man
who's lost his fortune after all?

He walks out of the bar and meets Katherine who is carrying to buckets on a yoke.

Beach: I'll take an ear of corn lass

Corngirl: Here you go governor, say, don't I know you?

Beach: No, no, well, yes. *Sigh* I used to be Alfred Beach, happy businessman, proud father and inventor. Now, now I'm no one, I'm broke and I'm down.

Corngirl: Now sir, is that anyway to talk about oneself? You come walk a ways with me sir, you'll see what it is to be broke and beaten down. Why there's things in these streets that someone born into, whaddaya call it sir? Wealth and power, that's what it is, keeps you from seeing the real filth on these streets.

Beach: *thrown by the girls demands and brusque manner, he stutters.* P-p-please lass, you know it'd be improper for me to be escorting a lady as young as you out at night.

Corngirl: *with a gleeful cackle* What's improper about being escorted by such a fine gentleman as you sir?

Beach: Well, I suppose things couldn't get any worse. Alright lass, take my arm, and show me what lurks in the night.

The two go off into the night together.



Everyone clapped when the play was over, even Ms. Smythe. They had to take three bows!

“Girls you’ve really done an excellent job, your report was outstanding.” Ms. Smythe told them.

“Thank you Ms. Smythe.” said April, “We couldn’t have done it without your support, and without the help of Maggie, Katherine, Deirdre, and George. Special thanks also to all of our other actors. Can they come in and take a bow?”

“Absolutely!” said Ms. Smythe.

Everyone trooped back into the classroom and took a bow. Julia looked at their smiling faces and felt proud. Not only had they done a good job on their project but she’d made new friends. A month ago she never would have believed Deirdre French was capable of friendship, but now Julia felt happy to count her as a friend.

Then her gaze fell on George. What could be better than George? She knew the answer to that, nothing! And this afternoon they were going to convene the first meeting of the history detectives. Who knew what they would find next? For just a second she felt a cool shadow pass over her, and she could have sworn it was the ghost of Alfred Beach, making one more visit, perhaps to say thanks. It could have just been a trick of the light, but she

thought she saw his ghostly hand waving at her. She would never know for sure.

April and Julia's Reference Section/Maps of their Trips

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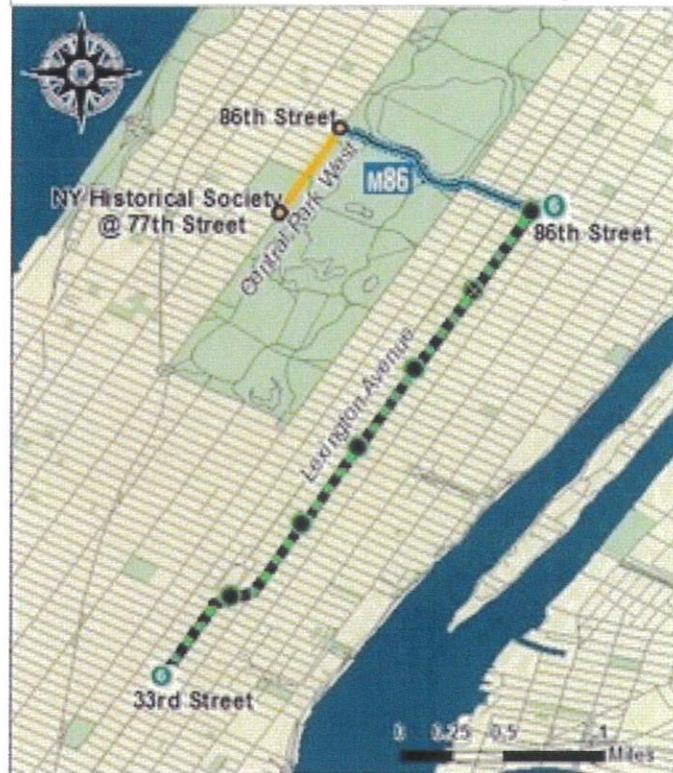
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mta.info

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Ely_Beach

33rd Street & Lexington Avenue to the New York Historical Society

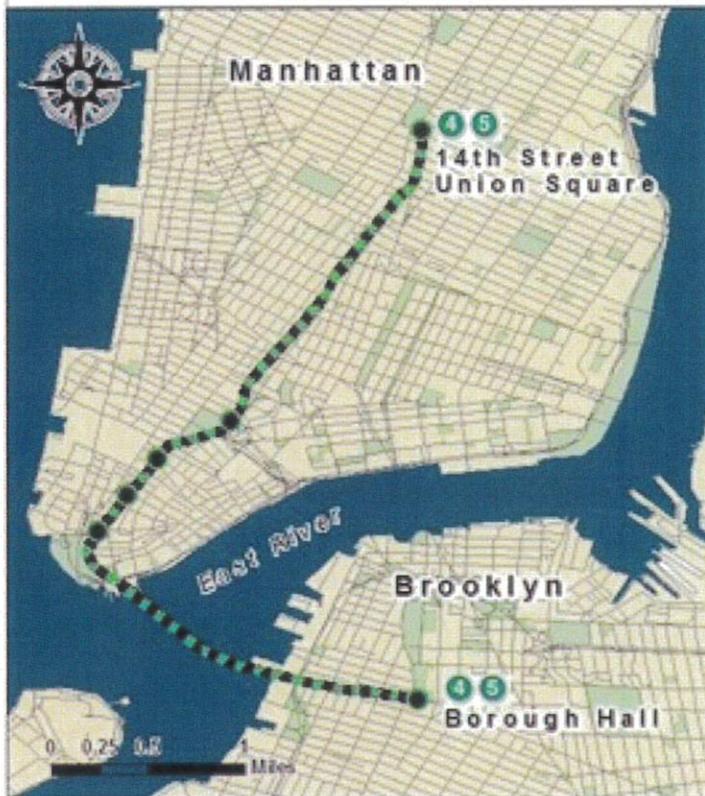


- Get on the Uptown/Bronx-bound 6 train at 33rd Street
- Take the train seven stops to 86th Street
- Exit 86th Street station via the northeast exit
- You will be on 86th Street and Lexington Avenue
- Walk one block west to the M86 bus stop
- Take the westbound M86 across Central Park
- Get off the bus on Central Park West, 86th street
- Walk nine blocks south to the New York Historical Society located on the southwest corner of 77th street and Central Park West

33rd Street to Astor Place Marble Cemetery and McSorley's Ale House

- Get on the Downtown/Brooklyn-bound 6 train at 33rd Street
- Take the train four stops to Astor Place
- Exit the station and walk east on Astor Place until you reach 2nd Avenue
- Turn right on 2nd Avenue and walk south until you reach 2nd Street
- At 2nd Street, Marble Cemetery will be on your left
- When you are done at the cemetery head west on 2nd Street
- When you reach Bowery/3rd Avenue turn right
- Walk north until you reach McSorley's on the corner of 7th Street and 3rd Avenue

**Union Square to Borough Hall
New York Transit Museum**



- Get on the Downtown/Brooklyn-bound 4 or 5 train at 14th Street/Union Square
- Take the train five stops to Jay St/Borough Hall
- Exit at Jay Street and walk towards the Fulton Mall sign
- At Boerum Place turn right
- Walk two blocks to Hoyt-Schermerhorn and turn right
- The Transit Museum is directly in front of you

Jay Street Borough Hall to Brooklyn Bridge/City Hall



- Exit the transit museum at the corner of Boreum Place and Hoyt-Schermerhorn
- Turn left and walk two blocks
- At Jay Street turn right, the subway station will be on your left
- Get on the Uptown/Manhattan-bound 4 or 5 train
- Take the train four stops and get off at Brooklyn Bridge/City Hall

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