

CHAPTER

A decorative beetle illustration with the number 1 on its back. The beetle is stylized with ornate, symmetrical flourishes on its elytra and legs. The word 'CHAPTER' is written in a decorative, serif font above the beetle, and the number '1' is centered on its back.

GARRISON GRISWOLD whistled his way down Market Street, silver hair bobbing atop his head like a pigeon wing. He tapped his trademark walking stick, striped in Bayside Press colors, to the beat of his tune. A cabdriver slowed and honked his horn, leaning to his passenger-side window.

“Mr. Griswold! You want a ride? It’s on me, my friend.”

“Very kind of you, but I’m fine, thank you,” Mr. Griswold called back, and raised his cane in a salute. He preferred traveling by streetcar or BART. They were the veins of this city he loved, after all.

A woman clutching a cell phone hurried to Mr. Griswold’s side.

“My son is such a fan of Book Scavenger. Can I trouble you for a photograph?”

Mr. Griswold checked his wristwatch. Plenty of

time to spare before he had to be at the main library for his big announcement. He balanced a hand on the woman's shoulder as she held the phone at arm's length to take the picture.

"So is it true?" she asked. "Do you have another game in the works?"

In response, Mr. Griswold pulled an imaginary zipper across his lips and gave her a wink. He continued on his way, through the stream of pedestrians,



whistling and tapping his cane on the brick sidewalk, completely unaware of the two men who'd stepped into his wake.

One was tall and gangly with bushy black eyebrows peeking from the edge of his backward ball cap. His partner was a bulldog of a man who moved as if his chest propelled him down the street instead of his legs. His hands were jammed in his front sweatshirt pocket, and his stare didn't waver from his target.

Mr. Griswold descended into the BART station. When he paused before the fare gate to remove his Fast Pass from his wallet, a voice from behind spoke his name. Mr. Griswold turned and faced the men. His smile faltered. It was early afternoon, off-hours for commuting, and the trickle of people coming in and out of the station was slow. Nonexistent at the moment.

He adjusted his frameless glasses and looked the tall man in the eye. "I'm running late for an appointment, gentlemen." Mr. Griswold wiggled his salt-and-pepper mustache—a nervous habit. The way that short man popped his knuckles and gave him a look that could only be described as *scornful* caused him to put up his guard.

"We have a friend in common," the tall man said.

"Yeah, a friend." The short man laughed hoarsely.

"Ah, I see." Mr. Griswold turned to go through the fare gate, but the tall one stepped in front of him and blocked his way.

“I’m in quite a rush,” Mr. Griswold said. “If you wouldn’t mind calling my office, I’d be happy to speak with you at a later date.”

Mr. Griswold extended his walking stick between the two men, trying to force his way through, but the tall man grasped him firmly by the shoulder.

“We want the book,” he said.

Mr. Griswold resisted the urge to hug his leather satchel firmly to his side. Inside was a special edition of *The Gold-Bug* by Edgar Allan Poe that he had crafted himself using the Gutenberg 2004 EX-PRO Printing Press and Binding Machine he kept at his house. He planned to make forty-nine more, but only the one in his bag existed at that moment. He’d brought *The Gold-Bug* as a prop for the unveiling of his new, elaborate game. It would be just enough to give a hint, a small peek, to the public of what would be involved. But these men couldn’t be talking about *that* book. Nobody knew about it yet—nobody at Bayside Press, and nobody in his personal life.

Mr. Griswold used the cuff of his suit jacket to dab a bead of sweat from his temple. “I run a publishing company, gentlemen. We deal with hundreds of books. Thousands. You’ll have to be more specific than that.”

“You know the one we want,” the short, stocky man said. He leaned in close, stretching on tiptoe like he was looking up Mr. Griswold’s nose. He jerked his

neck back to his partner. “He knows which one, right, Barry?”

The tall man stomped his foot. “We said fake names, remember?”

“Whatever,” the other responded. “This guy’s old. His hearing’s probably shot.”

Taking advantage of their brief moment of strife, Mr. Griswold swung his walking stick and whacked Barry on the cheek, then pushed past him toward the entrance to the lower level.

“Help!”

His cry echoed in the cavernous station. There was a low crack, like a distant boom of thunder. Mr. Griswold felt something like a punch to his back. He stumbled and fell to the ground, hitting his head on the stone floor. Had he been shot? He struggled to breathe. A numb dampness spread across his lower back, and his head throbbed where it had connected to the ground.

Barry cursed and rushed forward. He stooped beside Mr. Griswold and placed a palm on his forehead, as if he were checking for a fever. “What did you do, Clyde?”

“What happened to ‘we gotta use fake names’?” Clyde said.

“I can’t believe this!” Barry cried. “You have a gun? You *shot* him? That wasn’t part of the plan.”

Clyde shrugged. “I improvised.”

“What if he doesn’t have the book on him?”

“Of course he has it on him.” Clyde inspected the hole in his sweatshirt pocket where he’d concealed his gun. “He needs it for that press conference.”

An automated announcement drifted up from the level below where the trains and buses arrived.

“We gotta get out of here.” Barry slid his arms underneath Mr. Griswold’s and dragged him backward to an empty bench.

With a soft grunt, Mr. Griswold collapsed against the slick granite wall behind him. He crumpled from a seated position to a prone one, his back sliding against the wall, leaving a streak of blood to mark his trail. He tried to land on top of his bag in an effort to keep it from the men, but Clyde tugged it free.

Clyde pulled the book from Mr. Griswold’s bag. “*The Gold-Bug* by Edgar Allan Poe.” He tossed it to Barry. “That has to be it.”

Mr. Griswold’s vision blurred the two men together and apart. He wanted to say something, to stop them, but all that came out were moans.

Barry hardly looked at the book before hurling it to the corner, where it rebounded off the wall and slid behind a trash can. “That’s a brand-new book!” he shouted.

“It’s still a book,” Clyde said.

“He’s a publisher! He’s going to have books on him. We were told to look for an *old* book. A really old book.”

A BART train rumbled in one level below. The hum of people leaving the cars carried upstairs. The two men raced to the exit.

A boisterous group wearing black-and-orange jerseys rode up the escalator. One of them noticed Mr. Griswold slumped on the bench and ran over. A man dialed 9-1-1 on his cell phone. A woman crouched next to him and repeated, “Hang on. Everything will be okay.”

As Garrison Griswold hovered on the brink of consciousness, he wasn’t worried about when help would arrive. It was the slim edition of *The Gold-Bug* wedged between the trash can and the wall that consumed his thoughts. All that work, all his plans. Everything was in place, but without *The Gold-Bug*, his game wouldn’t get launched. His nearly priceless treasure would never be discovered. He hoped desperately that the right person would find his book. Someone who would take the time to understand and appreciate the secrets it held.