

AUTHOR OF *NIGHT VISION* AND *THE CARRION TRAP*

The Backup

by Rye Dano



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by Rye Dano

I looked down at the dirt. The hole. Empty.

It seemed like only yesterday that I was a boy here. On this street, among these houses. Some were different, but the area, surprisingly, still looked pretty much the same as when I was growing up. Not much had changed since then. Not much at all.

I was eleven when it happened. My best friend, Matt and I had walked by this house a million times. We always threw a rock at the big blank wall on the east side of the house, the one where there was only the small attic window and a tall brick column that stretched up high, taller than the house, even. Aside from that and the small window, which we shattered long ago, the rest was all target. It was great fun to see what kind of marks we could make on that wall. The street had lots of little rocks perfect for throwing, but not so good at making a big mark. Matt and I had always planned to bring in rocks from the quarry down past the power lines, but we never did.

One day, when standing in front of the house assessing our hits, we decided to do something more daring. Throwing rocks wasn't even daring, since no one stopped us from doing it. Actually, the folks in the neighborhood encouraged us to throw rocks at that old, empty house. It had a funny feeling, knowing that parents wanted you to throw a rock at something. But we didn't mind. We loved it. But that day, we got gutsy. One of us was going inside - inside that house. That was for sure.

Matt, my best friend and a sturdy kid with nerve, had what it took, I told him, to go in and check out the place. He didn't want to, really. But I convinced him it was going to be easy for him. He let me convince him. He was able to do stuff like that, dangerous stuff, unlike me. I had trouble with a lot of the daring stuff. I thought about it a lot, but I rarely acted on it. My desire was there, but I was never really equipped for the task. I always felt others could do a better job. I don't know if I was always right about that, but I was sometimes, I'm sure. Matt agreed to do it; but only if I backed him up. No sweat. I'd be backup. I think I was suited better as backup anyway.

Climbing the fence was easy. Chain link was made to be climbed. As long as it didn't sway. Then it would bow under like the cargo net in gym class. We picked a section that was tight. Up and over. Easy peasy.

The ground near the spot we jumped was covered with small bushes and a large pile of round, cut sections of dead trees. Tree wedges. We didn't know why someone would pile them up like that, but

we were happy they did - ideal for hiding behind. Matt, as Point, made the first assault. He was at the house in no time flat. Matt was on Track and Field at school. He waved me over. I ran. I felt my heart beating against my chest. It felt good. The physical effort - the fear.

There was a storm cellar door that looked prime for picking and the perfect entry point. We both rushed over. Matt took a look at it while I kept watch.

"It's locked," Matt whispered after a few tries on the latch.

"No way." I couldn't believe it. Thwarted already. "Can you pick it?"

"I don't think so. I don't have any tools."

We didn't plan this out very well and we both realized that fact at once.

"We'll have to come back."

"Yeah. But at least we made it this far." Matt was always positive.

"It was a good reconnoiter." I had just watched an old war movie and was eager to use that word.

On our way back to the fence, I took a spill. My foot hit a rock and I went down hard. Matt ran back to me immediately.

"You okay? What happened?"

"I hit my foot on this stupid rock." I pulled up it to throw it against the house in a kind of punishment against the whole property. When I did, I noticed something strange. The soil where the rock was sunk-in had another rock right below it. Maybe the rock was a bigger one and it broke in two. I dug a little and pulled up the one underneath. Something was stuck to the bottom of it.

We pulled it up and it was a small cloth bag, like a potato sack only smaller.

"What is it?"

"I dunno. But we better not stay here. Let's take it." I grabbed the package and we both ran for the fence. A dog barked nearby and that got us going even faster. Up and over.

We ran a small ways, around the corner, then stopped. "We better not run anymore. Someone might see us and think we did something wrong." People were always watching.

"Yeah, you're right. Where can we go?"

"The power lines." It was a stroke of genius on my part. We both knew the way by heart. Past the gas station and up behind the empty lot. There was a path that ran behind the houses and you could easily see if anyone was following. Then, about 1/4 mile further, the power lines cut through the trees just past the country store parking lot. There was a lot of underbrush and an old shed where the workers kept tools when the lines were going up years ago.

We sat down behind the shed and looked at the package.

"Maybe it's a kind of buried treasure."

Don't be silly, if it was treasure it'd be heavier. This is heavy, but not heavy. It's feels a little like my father's Blackberry only bigger.

"Wow. Wouldn't that be cool if we found somebody's Blackberry?"

"Well let's find out." We both pulled on the wrapping, which was very tightly wound around the small brick. Layer after layer - it was wrapped up like a mummy. Finally, the object fell out of its winding sheet.

"What is it?"

"I dunno. Some kind of weird thing with writing."

"Can you read it? Is it a foreign language? Chinese? Egyptian?"

"No. It's English. I can read it."

"It must be important if somebody buried it, don't ya think?"

"Yeah, but it doesn't look too important. It looks kind of like junk, or somebody's garbage."

Matt leaned in. "It smells weird."

"Yeah, like mushrooms or old clothes, but different."

"What should we do?"

"I dunno. I don't want to get in trouble. So let's say we found it here in the power lines, by the shed, okay?"

"Yeah, good idea. Why don't you bring it back to your house, and ask your grandfather. He may know what it is."

"That's a good idea." It was. "He's really old. He knows a lot of stuff - he'll know what this is." We both walked off and headed back to the neighborhood.

"Hey, it might be worth something!" Matt suddenly added as he picked up a stick and swung it like a baseball bat. Three swings and he hit it against a tree. It broke in two.

"Or maybe it's a clue to an unsolved crime. A murder!" My mind always ran along the gamut of mystery for mystery's sake. I left fortune for others to think about.

* * * *

Grandpa pulled his tartan blanket up over his legs so he could rest his arms on his lap. "Hmm. This is interesting. Very interesting." My grandfather mumbled in low tones. He was a gentleman. I never heard him shout or yell or ever see him get mad. Except that one time, when the teacher made fun of me in class and I came home and hid in my room. He went down to the school and confronted that teacher in the bus lot. Boy, was that great. Grandpa had been a teacher himself, a college teacher, a professor. And he said he didn't like his grandson being picked on by young know-it-all. Especially when I was right. At least my grandpa said I was right.

"Where did you find this?" without looking up from the object, as he turned it over and peeled open the layers carefully, because they were very dry and fragile.

"Oh, by the power lines." A top secret oath, even from Grandpa.

"It was in a cloth bag by an old tool shed." A good performance. "What is it?"

"Something very valuable."

My ears pricked up. "Really?"

"Yes. Very.."

"Can we get anything for it? More credit to get a new TV? I'd love to get those new channels."

"I don't mean that kind of valuable." He turned his head to me, peering over his reading glasses.

"I mean really valuable. The kind of value that has no price tag."

Grandpa sometimes spoke like this. I didn't always understand him. I think because he was kind of lonely after Grandma died. They were a fun couple. I don't remember her much, I was only two or three, but I sort of remember her. I would ask Grandpa if he missed her. He'd always get a little quiet and look at me and say, "Yes, I do. I miss a lot of things." I knew his time was very different from nowadays.

"Can we sell it?"

"Oh, I don't think you can find anyone to buy it, anyone who would take that risk."

"Risk? What is it? Is it against the law to have this?" I knew it. It was a clue to a murder or robbery, maybe that big one a couple of years ago.

"Yes, it is. It's against the law to have this. They don't make these anymore. Stopped long before you were born."

"So to have one is bad?"

"Yup. Not only do they not make them anymore, but anyone who has them was supposed to either turn them in, or get rid of them, in a proper manner."

"How?"

"Burying them. It was said that they'd degrade, break down in the soil and earth and go back to being part of nature. Natural, they said." He took off his glasses and slowly wiped the lens with a handkerchief from his pocket. He always carried stuff like that. "Burning was out of the question, of course."

"Did they put a rock over them after they buried them?"

"A rock? Why no. Why would they put a rock over them? No, Theo, we were told to rip them up, and bury the pieces." He started to flick the layers again. "Oh, how I remember this smell."

"It's strange. It's like mushrooms, but different."

"Yes, it is strange. Strangely wonderful." His glasses got a little foggy, but it wasn't hot in the room. "Funny, the scent brings back so many memories of when I was a teacher. I met your Grandma then. She was a librarian. I don't suppose you know what that is."

"No, what's that?"

"She was a kind of guardian, or data master, over many of these..." He gestured with the thing. "Books."

"Books? You mean that's a book?"

"It is."

"How can that be a book? It bends and tears easy, and there's no way to turn it on, is there?"

"No, it's has it's own power. It doesn't need any more power. You just read it, just like it is. You turn the pages - these -" he flicked a couple of layers, "and read."

"But how do you scroll or jump?"

He laughed. "You just go to it."

"But how do you know where it is?"

"You don't. That's the fun part. You read it in order, that's the way it was meant to be read. But you can jump ahead, anywhere, if you like. But no, there's no, what do you call them, links." Grandpa's face became more alive, brighter. He seemed younger before my eyes.

"So Grandma was in charge of these ...books?"

"Yes, that was what a librarian was. It was her job to know the books. She loved them, as I did, too."

"I'll bet she knew all the books."

"Yes, well, not all of them, of course. But hers was a vast mind of the written word. She could recite like nobody's business."

"What's that?" Daphne barked. My little sister had snuck in and neither of us had noticed.

"What are you holding, Grandpa?"

"Why Daphne, where did you come from?" He put the book on the table next to him as if it was nothing. "Did you want me to look at your school award again. I'd love to." I noticed he seemed a little uneasy.

"What was that in your hand, Grandpa. I wanna see."

Daphne was eight and a know-it-all. She was in elementary school but acted like she was in high school, often telling me what to do. I never listened to her, but my parents were always babying her. She was the baby. But I never saw my Grandpa so nice to her as he was acting now. He always had a distance from her, that I couldn't quite understand.

"This is an old musty piece of trash. You don't want to dirty your nice clean hands with it."

"I wanna see it." She had come over to the side table next to Grandpa and was craning her neck to get a better look at it. Grandpa had already covered it mostly, with the corner of his blanket. "Why can Theo see it and not me?"

"That's because I found it."

"No, he's just joking. I found it, outside there, in the street- during my walk."

I never heard Grandpa lie before. He was clearly lying and right in front of me. What was going on?

"I wanna see it." She persisted.

"Maybe later. Let's get ready for dinner." He wrapped up his blanket off his lap and expertly included the book in the folds. Daphne was still craning trying to see where it ended up, like a kid watching a magician trying to catch the trick.

“It’s not fair.”

What’s not fair, dear.” Mom asked my sister as she spooned out the perfectly symmetrical eggplant onto her dish.

“I wanna see it. And they won’t let me.” I wanted to slap that baby face.

“See what?” Dad asked as he fingered his pad.

“Honey, I told you, please don’t do that at the table.”

“I’m sorry, dear. It’s work and -,” he laughed suddenly, interrupting himself. “Marshall is in the middle of upgrading and his dog just got loose. It’s like a madhouse over there.” He never looked up.

“Well, it’s gonna be a madhouse here if you don’t put that thing away while we’re eating. It’s not a very good example to set.” My sister and I looked at each other.

He looked up, almost as if surprised to see me and Daphne at the table. “Oh, you’re right, dear. Let me just finish this up.” His head went back down as he stabbed at the device a few more jabs. Done. Sleep mode. He looked up and smiled at all of us. A smile too big to be real.

My mom smiled back, though it also looked a little fake, it was much more believable. “Now anyone for more mashed potatoes? There’s still half a container in the kitchen.” She started to get up.

“I don’t want any potatoes. I wanna see it.”

“I’ll have some.” I added, ignoring Daphne.

“I would absolutely adore another helping, sweetheart.” Grandpa always talked funny like that.

“Okay, that’s two.” She looked down the table at my dad. “Dear?”

“Nah, I’m fine,” as he looked down at his plate briefly while reaching for the rolls.

“Daphne?”

“No! I wanna see it!” She slammed her fork down.

“Hey, Missy. What’s with the temper?” Still getting rolls.

“She says she wants to see it.” To Daphne. “See what, dear?”

“The thing.”

“The thing?” Mom and Dad together.

“Oh, sweetheart, I’m to blame. It’s my fault,” Grandpa offered. “I found this dirty old relic out by the curb. Must have fallen from the garbage pick-up or the shuttle. Daphne came in while we were examining it. That’s all.”

“Honey, maybe I will have - ” Dad gulped “more potatoes.” He was shoveling his food down almost as fast as he got it on his plate. “Why don’t you just show her?” He added to Grandpa, between shovels.

“It’s dirty. I’ll get rid of it. I’ll bury it.” Grandpa explained.

“It looks bad. In school they showed us pictures of those. Teacher said they’re bad. We have to tell if we see them. I’m gonna tell.”

I really wanted to slap her.

“Bad? What are you talking about, Daphne?” Turning to Grandpa, mom asked, “What is it, Dad?”

“Yeah, pops, what did you bring into our house?” More shoveling.

“Oh, all right. I don’t know what all the fuss is about. It’s just a small, insignificant, harmless little paperback.” No reaction. Grandpa waited. Then, “A book.”

At that point, he might just as well have said he brought a twenty foot Malaysian python into the house.

“A BOOK?” Mom and Dad, again, at the exact same time.

“A PAPER book?” mom asked, eyes still wide.

“Yes, a harmless little paperback book. The whole world won’t come to an end, you know.”

“Oh, father, how could you? You know the rules. After all these years, you’d do something like this? After what happened to Ellen and Richard.”

“Pops, what were you thinking? Endangering my family this way? Get rid of it, now. Right now.”

“Oh, dear, let father finish his dinner, at least.”

“No, honey, he started this mess, he’ll finish it.” Toward Grandpa. “And now, please.”

“He’s right, sweetheart. I’m sorry for causing all this anxiety in your house.”

It was strange to hear him say ‘your house’. It was always ‘our house’. This was all my fault and I couldn’t let my Grandfather take the blame. I began, “Dad, I was the one who - ”

Grandpa quickly cut me off. “Yes, Theo, you’ll help me get rid of it. To make sure I don’t make a mess of that, too.”

“Good idea, son. Go and see he does it right.”

“Oh, Gerald. Please don’t talk to my father that way. You know I don’t like it.”

“Dear, he has to realize his place. Coddling him won’t do anyone any good. I’m not going to jeopardize our household and our credit because that old fool broke the law.”

“He’s not an old fool!” I yelled, surprised at my outburst. “And it’s OUR house!”

My dad stared at me. Then slowly, “Son, get going. Go with your grandfather and the both of you, take care of this.” A pause. “Now!” That last word was firm. He meant it.

“Grandpa kissed my mom, still seated, on the head as he passed her. I followed close behind and secretly kicked my sister’s chair hard as I went by.

“Ow! Mom, he hit my chair.”

“Would you two stop?” Dad was already back into his pad. “Quiet. You’re both giving me a headache.”

Out in the yard, Grandpa dug the sharp edge of the shovel into the ground. Then, he folded his arms and rested them over the top end of the handle and waved me over, closer, like he was going to tell me a secret. “Theo. Let me explain..,” he whispered even lower, “why I lied.”

“Sure, Grandpa.” I acted like it was no big deal, but it was. He was sort of the real father figure to me. He was an example of how a father should act. Like an oak tree, solid and strong. My own dad seemed to always be changing his mind or always busy with his pad or work or games.

“You see, Theodore.” Grandpa never called me Theodore unless it was serious. “This is a strange time we live in. I don’t mean things are strange, because things are always changing. That’s life. But what I mean is that people are acting strange. Things make them act that way.”

“I don’t understand what you mean, Grandpa.”

“I know it’s hard to understand this old madman grandfather of yours.” He laughed. I loved his laugh. “Why, when I was a boy your age, we had a lot less than you have now. We didn’t have shuttles then. We had to move ourselves around, in cars. Automobiles.”

“Auto-what?”

“Auto-mobiles. It means to move by yourself, independently. We used to drive and own our own automobiles. They were about half the size of the neighborhood shuttle. Most families usually had one or sometimes two.”

“Oh!” I suddenly remembered. “Did they keep them in small barns on the side of the house - like that empty house down the street?”

“Yes, garages. Houses often had a garage where you kept the family car. The garage was a place for men. And boys of course. That house you mention, the one down the street, the empty one, that certainly does have a garage, too. The James lived there. Ellen and Richard. Nice couple. They didn’t like how things - how people had changed either. They’re gone now.”

“Wow. Is there an auto- whatchamacallit in their garage?”

“No, it’s gone. All the cars were either recycled to make the shuttles or rusted away into the earth.”

“Wow, it would be fun to move one of those around the street, I’ll bet.”

“It sure was.”

“What happened? Why don’t we use them anymore?”

“They weren’t electric like the shuttles and delivery vans, they used fuel, fuel from the earth. And that substance was considered bad for us. So most things like that were replaced, at first, but eventually they all became, like this paper book, illegal for people to have.”

“What else was different? I remember you once told me about where you had to go to buy things.”

“That’s right. There were no stores like you see today, on the screen. Food wasn’t delivered. We had to go to them, and shop, in person, big places, small places, to find what we wanted. It took a long time and we often didn’t find what we wanted. But it was fun. We met other people, we talked to strangers and to friends and often made new friends.”

“But how did you make friends with people without knowing what they like or don’t like? How did you know who to be friends with?”

“You found out as you went along. Like the book, you turned the pages as you went and the story unfolded. And we had public places where we could read, like I told you about, libraries. But there were also bookstores, no, not like now, but different. These were places too. Real places. No screen. Places where you could go, and browse the books, new books, old books, magazines, newspapers. That’s what news used to come on, papers, large sheets of paper that were folded and you could unfold them and read and see what was happening in the world. They were made overnight and you got them in the morning, or sometimes later in the day if something really big happened - something important.”

“Like a flood or earthquake?”

“Yes, like that. And also when a final ball game was won by the home team.” He elbowed me gently. “The news didn’t have to be tragic to be important.”

“Why did they get rid of newspapers and books - like this book? ‘Cause they’re too heavy?” It looked heavy in Grandpa’s strong, weathered hands.

“Yes, they are heavy, aren’t they? Substantial.” He looked past me, toward the house. “Well, some people thought that it was wrong to keep making these things out of paper, since paper came from trees and trees were part of nature. And we have to protect nature.”

“It’s wrong to harm nature.” School. In kindergarten we all had to memorize that sentence. Over and over.

“Yes, it is wrong. And that’s why it’s against the law to own paper things, like this book. But that wasn’t the only reason, Theo.”

“What do you mean?”

“Some people thought that if you made a book like this, with paper, and millions of people had one that they bought, or got from somebody - we often lent them to each other - it couldn’t be changed, the words, I mean. The words couldn’t be changed, since it was a real thing, out there in people’s hands.” He handed the book to me. “Hold it.”

It was so heavy. Even heavier than I remembered it from the morning. He had it wrapped so tight that I couldn’t smell the musty odor anymore. “Grandpa, you wrapped it up again?”

“Yes, I did the wrapping,” he said, proud of his accomplishment. “That’s right. Nowadays, you read books easily on your thingamajig there, what do you call it?” He pointed to my pocket.

“My Reader?”

Laughing, “Yes, your reader. You can read the news or stories or anything on that little thing, right? It can hold a library in there, I’d wager.”

“Not mine, but the newest one is the biggest data size yet. Dad’s got one.”

“I’m sure he does.” He smiled. “Yet, with all that storage - room to equal Alexandria itself - it still has one major drawback.”

“Yeah, the screen hurts my eyes.”

“Well, maybe that’s true, too.” He laughed. “But one, bigger, more important drawback.” He

stared at me a long time as if he was waiting for me. I felt a strangeness on the back of my neck. "You see, Theo, everything on there, every written word, can be changed."

"It can?"

"Yes, it can. And it is." He straightened up, plucked the shovel out of the ground and started to dig.

I watched him start to dig the hole. Like I imagined a farmer would, he pierced the ground with the spade in strong, solid plunges. I liked the sound it made as the steel penetrated the soil. "You mean, a story or something can be changed easily?"

"That's what I mean." He dug. "Changed." Another dig. "Instantly." And another.

"Is that bad?"

"Well, I think so." He put the shovel down. The hole was dug. "Come on. Let's get that in there before we both get in more trouble." He motioned with his eyes toward the window to our dining room and grinned.

We both placed it in the hole carefully, as if we were burying a dead bird. "There now. That's good. How does it look to you?" he asked as he smiled that wonderful, magical smile he had.

"Like buried treasure!" I offered.

"Yes, like buried treasure!" He laughed that great big laugh again. "Now you cover it up, Captain Cook." He handed me the shovel like it was a ceremonial cutlass.

I took the soil from the miniature mountain he had made and covered up the book. Two, three, maybe half a dozen more helpings of dirt and it was completely underground. "Now pat it down. Like this." He stepped his foot on the dark soil and pushed the earth flat. I did the same. We were like two warriors in some weird and ancient ritual, burying a secret and holy relic.

"Now go inside and trouble your mom for some desert. You've got it coming to you."

"What about you, Grandpa?"

"Oh, I'll stay out here and look at the stars for a bit, maybe take a little walk around the block-my daily constitution and all." He looked up at the sky. "I'll be back in shortly."

"Okay. Thanks Grandpa."

"Thanks for what?"

"For explaining those things and..." I paused "why you...well, you didn't really lie, 'cause it was to get me out of trouble." Awkward. I started to run to the house. "So, thanks!"

"No trouble at all, Theo. It was nothing."

"Thanks!" I yelled back, knowing it wasn't nothing, but more than something. It was something great. As I left him there, I had another strange feeling. This one wasn't so good. I tried to ignore it.

Later that night, as I lay in bed, I heard something moving in the hallway. I got up and saw Grandpa standing outside my door. He ushered me into my room quickly.

"Oh, Theo. I was hoping you were still awake," he whispered. "I was going to leave this for you." It was plastic envelope, the kind they use to deliver meals.

"What is it?" I held it up closer to the night light.

"It's for you. Top secret." He knew our phrase. "Open it later."

"When?"

"You'll know when. But remember, no one's to know. Not even your mother." He knew if there was anyone I'd tell, it would be her.

"Top secret." I confirmed.

"Good." He smiled broadly. "Goodnight, Theodore."

"I don't get it, what is it?"

"Goodnight. I love you."

"Goodnight, Grandpa." I wanted to say 'I love you, too', but I could never get myself to utter the words to anyone but my mom. I had wished I had, though.

The sound was awful. Horrible. My mom's wailing intruded into my dream like a cold sickle swung down onto melting ice. I froze in bed at the sound of it, not knowing what to do. I couldn't move. Then suddenly the door swung open. My dad stood there, in silhouette, peering into the darkness of a pre-dawn morning.

"Son, get up. Something's happened."

"What's going on?" Were the Police at our door? Did that book cause all this? I couldn't believe it. What had I done? My mind raced as I sat up at the end of my bed.

"Your Grandfather passed away last night."

I couldn't believe my ears.

"He didn't have any pain. He was very comfortable." My brain went into a hyper frenzy of thoughts, racing about like a frantic bird in a thunderstorm looking to land somewhere familiar, then, anywhere.

"He died?" My mouth said the words but my mind wasn't accepting them.

"Yes, son. It was all very quick. He didn't suffer. He died peacefully in his sleep."

"What? How?" I couldn't get the questions out.

"Your mother had a dream. She woke up with a start. She went to check on him - you know how she had those things, those premonitions about stuff. It was her father, so of course...." He didn't finish.

"But how?" I repeated.

"It was that thing!" Daphne's shrieking voice penetrated my room. "It was that thing he had. The dirty book! See, it was bad to have that in the house. He brought it in the house!"

"Shut up!" I barked at her. "You just shut up."

"Hey, kids, c'mon. Your mother is having a tough time. Don't fight." He left to go to his wife who was still wailing out in the hall.

Daphne stuck out her tongue at me and quickly spun, flinging her pony tail in defiance as she left. I quickly grabbed something, my baseball off the table next to my bed and threw it at her with all my might. I missed and knocked a picture frame off the wall. It fell and broke. I heard her laugh.

Later that morning as I cleaned up the broken glass and put it in the waste bin, I noticed the envelope that Grandpa had given me. I immediately lunged for the door, slammed it shut and opened the plastic.

Inside was a note written in beautiful handwriting. It read: "Theo. I'm so proud of you. Remember what I've taught you. Remember that you are not alone. I'm always with you, now and forever. Grandma and I are both here for you. It pains me to say that you need to be careful what you say, and who you say it to. But it is necessary that you be this way, these days and after for some time. We didn't bury the book. That was something else that will be very amusing to those who dig it up, most likely very soon, to experience. When you went in this evening, I took a walk. I hid the book in the special place we talked about. Remember? Now, I want you to do something. I want you to read that book. In secret. Top secret. Let no one know. I want you to read it thoroughly and slowly. I want you to take in the smell, to hold it in your hands, to feel the nature of it. To let the book become a part of you. Nature is good and of all things that man has made from nature, none is as good, as strong, as pure, as a book. I want you to read it. I want you to learn it and to learn from it. Then I want you to do something. I want you to bury it. No, not like they told us to - but differently. I want you to wrap it in plastic to protect it. To save it. Wrap it tight so no water can get to it. I want you to bury it for the next person who stumbles across it. Think of it as a kind of back-up for our culture - a back-up for the future. I want you to include this note. I know you want to keep this note, because I wrote it to you, but you cannot. It's too dangerous. And also, it will be better to give the next person knowledge about the history of how that book came to be in the hands prior to their own. I am enclosing another thing. This one is for you. It's something you can carry with you to remember me by and to give you hope and strength, and someday, maybe, if all goes well, independence."

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