

Chapter One

“It’s spam, Sam,” Annabel says without looking up from her crossword puzzle. “Real people don’t send email like that. Delete it. Now here’s an easy clue for you. ‘Two girls, one on each knee.’ Seven letters.”

“I have no idea,” I say. Annabel is teaching me to do cryptic crosswords. I can do regular

crosswords, but the clues in cryptic crosswords don't make sense.

Annabel gives me a *how can you be so dumb* look. "Patella," she says. I stare back blankly. "Pat and Ella are girl's names, and a kneecap is called a patella. Simple."

"For you, maybe, but you're weird," I say. Annabel smiles as if I've paid her a compliment. "Sometimes I wish you'd go back to learning PI to some crazy number. At least I could understand that. But come see this email. It's not the usual spam. There's no link to click. They're not asking for anything. It says I've been selected for a free cruise."

"Yippee," Annabel says. "A cruise in the Bahamas. That's useful when you live in Australia."

"It says flights are included. And it's not a cruise to the Bahamas. It goes through the

Northwest Passage. It's called 'In the Footsteps of Sir John Franklin'."

A moment later, Annabel is reading the email aloud over my shoulder.

Dear Sam:

ENIGMA TOURS, a division of the Crype Foundation, has a long history of guiding small groups of adventurous souls to locations of extraordinary interest.

ENIGMA TOURS is creating several new adventures based on the world's great mysteries. For our first tour, we are planning something really special, and we hope that you will be interested in a chance to participate.

In 1845, Sir John Franklin led the greatest Arctic expedition ever into the fabled Northwest Passage. Not one of the 129 men on Franklin's two ships lived to see home again. And today

their bones lie scattered on the icy shores of Canada's Arctic islands. What went wrong? No one knows. Would you like to be the one to solve the mystery?

ENIGMA TOURS will be offering a small group of people free passage on a trial run of the tour. This will include return airfare and two weeks on our luxury motor yacht Arctic Spray. All you have to do is spread the word about our great product and allow us to use your name and image in our promotion. Your passage will include a companion.

A brochure has been mailed, and within a few days I will call you with more information and answer any questions you may have. If you are still interested, your name will be entered in a draw.

I do hope you will consider our unique travel adventures. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Moira Rawdon

Vice-President, ENIGMA TOURS

ENIGMA TOURS

Travel on a ship of the desert.

See the first light of dawn.

Visit the sites of ancient conflicts.

Cross unimagined rivers.

"You're right," Annabel says. "That's not normal spam."

"Do you think it's real?" I ask.

"Could be, I suppose. I can't see any way they could scam you, unless..."

"Unless what?"

"Unless," Annabel goes on, "they're aliens. They might have a plan to abduct teens for a colony on one of Jupiter's moons."

It takes me a second to absorb what she's said.

"That's crazy," I tell her.

"Hmmm. I guess you're right," Annabel agrees. "It's much more likely they want you for medical experiments."

“Well, I think it’s real,” I say, annoyed that Annabel isn’t taking the email seriously. I turn back to my computer and search for Enigma Tours. I click on *News* and see an announcement of upcoming tours.

ON THE TRAIL OF COLONEL FAWCETT: Through the Amazon jungle in search of the lost city of Z

THE MUMMIES OF TURIM: Who are these perfectly preserved bodies in remote Asia?

“Lost cities in the jungle and mummies in the desert sound pretty cool.”

“That’s how scams work,” Annabel explains. “They sound cool and offer something you want to believe in. *Then* they bleed you for money.”

“Their website looks pretty good,” I say, pointing at the screen. We look at beautiful photographs of luxury ships, trains and camper vans, complete with obviously rich people enjoying themselves. We watch a video of smiling holidaymakers

sipping champagne on beaches and equally happy groups being led through ancient ruins.

“It looks real,” I say.

“It’s easy enough to make a website look fancy,” Annabel says.

“Why do you have to be so negative?” I ask, my annoyance returning.

Annabel tilts her head and looks at me. “Not negative,” she says. “Just careful. How do you think they found you? And I wonder what the Crype Foundation is. Sounds shady.”

“It’s easy to get someone’s email,” I say.

“Okay, but they sent you mail. And they are going to phone you. Street address and cell numbers are tougher to get.”

“But still possible,” I say. Annabel has a point. *It is* a lot of trouble to go to.

Annabel shrugs. “I guess we’re not as private as we like to think.”

“Maybe I won’t hear from them,” I say. My annoyance fades as fast as it appeared. “But I kind of hope it is real. It’d be cool to go to the Arctic.”

“Especially in winter,” Annabel says with a laugh.

“That was really bad,” I say. “Even for you. But the timing would be great. It would be awesome to see where they found Franklin’s ship.”

“HMS *Erebus*,” Annabel says. “Did you know that Franklin was lieutenant governor of Tasmania before he went on his last expedition? His wife, Jane, was an explorer in her own right. She was the first European woman to travel across Tasmania.”

“Do you know everything?” I ask.

“Of course not,” Annabel says. “There’s always more to know and learn. I’d quite like to learn more about the Arctic.”

“Would you?” I say. “Don’t forget, Enigma Tours contacted me. I can invite anyone. What’s to say I’ll invite you?”

Annabel punches me on the arm.

“That hurt,” I say.

“You deserved it,” she says, looking at her crossword. “Besides, who else would go with you? Now, ‘Nothing to hold a spike.’ Four letters.”

“Nothing...to...hold...a...spike. Four...letters,” I repeat slowly. “If nothing is nil and it’s holding the letter *a*, the answer could be nail.”

Annabel looks impressed. “You’re getting the hang of this.”

“Me and my friend,” I say, turning my laptop to face her. The screen shows *CrypticAid*, your crossword helper.

Annabel shakes her head in despair. “You’ll never learn that way.”

“Maybe not, but I’ll have a lot more spare time.”

Chapter Two

The thick, glossy brochure arrives two days later. There are five pages on the cruise through the Northwest Passage. After school Annabel comes over, and we go through it.

“It’s very fancy,” I say. “Enigma Tours must have lots of money.”

“They do, but that doesn’t mean they are a good company. We’ve crossed swords with

Humphrey Battleford twice. We know he’s rich, but he’s also a crook.”

“But this brochure *is* well done,” Annabel goes on. “It’s not too flashy, and the history is accurate and up-to-date. It has the most recent information on the *Erebus* discovery.”

“Do you think they’ll find Franklin’s body on board the ship?” I ask.

“Not a chance,” Annabel says.

“Why not?” I’ve spent a lot of time in the past two days reading about Sir John Franklin’s lost expedition. It’s no use trying to know as much as Annabel, but I have to give it a shot so that I don’t feel totally stupid. “We know from the note the survivors left at Victory Point in 1848 that Franklin was already dead. Maybe they tried to bring his body home.”

“No,” Annabel says, without admitting that I might be right. “When Franklin died, they had no idea how long it would take them to get home. They couldn’t leave him lying around.”