



*The Body In  
the Tower*

*A Palmer & Pritchard Adventure  
Mark Reasoner*

# **The Body in the Tower**

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# I

Standing outside Mr. Storm's drugstore on the west side of Craigsville's square, Corey Palmer checked the time like most folks did when the bell tolled from the courthouse clock.

*Only three minutes off this time, he thought, not too bad.*

Corey stood in the building's shade, trying to stay cool in the summer heat. He looked around the green common area as he waited for his friend, Michelle, watching people go into the businesses and offices on three sides of the square. The courthouse took up the entire north side.

"I wonder if the stupid thing was ever accurate," he said quietly to himself. He didn't hear Michelle approach.

"What was ever accurate?" she asked, startling her friend.

"The clock and the bell," Corey said, regaining a little composure. "The half-hour chime was three minutes late just now."

"I don't know," Michelle said, "my folks say the bell has always been off. And there's no rhyme or reason."

"It's weird," Corey said. "It's like we have our own time zone or we're out of sync with the rest of the world."

Corey opened the soda he'd purchased and stuffed the jelly beans he'd bought into the pocket of his baggy shorts.

"No Chocolate?" Michelle asked.

"Mixing it up," Corey replied. "Besides, they'll keep better in this heat."

They started walking.

Corey Palmer and Michelle Pritchard were neighbors, classmates, and best friends. Growing up within two blocks of each other, they'd attended the same elementary school and now middle school. Since teachers still assigned seats in alphabetical order, the two sat either next to each other or one behind the other since beginning first grade. As they'd been playmates even before going to school, their friendship seemed entirely natural.

Corey was taller than average for his age, slightly built with light brown hair and blue eyes. He might begin turning heads depending on how he filled out. For now, though, he was more child than man.

Michelle was small for her age, though not by much. Still mostly thin, she'd just begun the changes her mother warned about. Her hips were becoming slightly rounder and bra lines were visible under her usual tee-shirts. Her hair was more medium brown, darker than Corey's. She had green eyes and a few freckles across her nose.

Not that Corey noticed much of this. To him, Shel was just his best friend. She felt the same about him. They thought alike, played, studied, and worked together, and so far, no

hormones lurked to complicate things. Not yet, anyway.

They were twelve years old and basically bored on this sunny June afternoon. School was out until August and neither was taking any summer classes. Seventh graders just didn't do that, or so they said.

"What do you want to do for the rest of the afternoon?" Corey asked.

"I don't know," Michelle said, "The library's closed for the rest of the weekend. There isn't anything going on at the park, and it's probably too close to dinner to grab our bikes and ride down to the lake."

"You want to go over to Bartram's?" Corey asked.

"Not really. They don't like it if you're just looking around."

"We could head home," Michelle continued.

"Nothing to do there," Corey said, "Nothing good to watch on TV and I'm already over my computer time for the week."

"Me too," his companion replied.

"Why don't we call Timmy or Paula? Maybe they want to do something," Corey said.

"I'd love to," Michelle said, "But we'd have to go home anyway. Mom took away my cell phone."

She told Corey how the latest phone bill showed way too many texts and almost a hundred extra minutes used. Her mother took the phone away for the rest of June.

"Is that why I had to call your land line?" Corey asked.

"Uh-huh," Michelle said. "So why don't you call them?"

Corey stopped and turned to his friend. He looked down at his shoes.

"My mom took my phone too. She caught me downloading too many games."

They walked on, reaching the corner. To their right was the courthouse, with city hall and the public safety building behind. Craigsville's police department and the Wagner County Sheriff's Office shared this facility, along with a common jail, run by the county.

"Let's wander around the courthouse," Corey said.

"Why?" Michelle asked.

"It's air-conditioned and there's a ton of stuff displayed," Corey said, "Old paintings, Civil War relics, plaques honoring old politicians and other people. And they've got a neat timeline on the history of this area."

"So what," Michelle said, "We can see that stuff anytime. And I've seen most of it."

"Yeah, but not all of it," Corey replied, "My mom told me they've changed a bunch of the stuff on display recently."

"Besides," he continued, "I want to see where they added my dad's name to the honor plaque. Come on, Shel, let's check it out."

“Okay, okay,” Michelle said. They crossed the street to the courthouse.

Since it was still before five o’clock, no matter what the bell in the tower said, the building was still open to the public and the two youngsters strolled right in. They turned left from the entrance to begin checking out the pictures and other things displayed. On the long walls in this main area were plaques dedicated to the soldiers, sailors, and marines from Wagner County who gave their lives serving in the various wars throughout America’s history.

Corey and Michelle looked at the ones listing servicemen from the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Civil War, then they crossed to the other side to view the lists of those who died in the Spanish American War, World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. They finally came to the latest, honoring those who gave their lives in the Gulf Wars.

Corey didn’t really remember his father. Staff Sergeant David Palmer died fighting in Iraq when Corey was only three. He’d seen pictures and his mother talked some about the man, but there weren’t solid memories.

Corey stood silently in front of the bronze tablet. He traced his father’s name and dates with his finger.

“I know it’s sad,” Michelle said.

“My mom really misses him,” Corey said, “And I guess I do too, but I don’t really remember much about him.”

“Let’s get out of here,” Michelle said.

Corey turned to his friend. “No, it’s okay. Besides, the newer stuff is upstairs. Come on.”

They climbed up the wide staircase leading to the second floor. This was where the action happened. All the courtrooms were on this second level, along with the Judges’ offices and chambers, along with conference and jury rooms. This was where the lawyers, witnesses, and everyone else hung out.

Corey’s mother, Annette Palmer, worked up here for Judge Theodore J. Danielson. She was one of his clerks, so she sometimes actually worked inside the courtroom. Other times, she worked in the office, typing and filing, scheduling conferences and other things needed to keep the judge’s work running smooth.

Though it was getting late for activity around the place, Corey knew his mother would be working until about six o’clock. He knew he should check in, but didn’t want to take time right now.

He and Michelle began slowly walking down the hall, looking at display cases with antiques and relics from the city and county’s history. There was a lot to see here.

They became separated as they walked and looked. Each was interested in different things, so one would move faster than the other for a while. Corey loved looking at the Civil War things like old surgery kits and Confederate Army hats. Michelle took more time with the things from the early twentieth century.

“So where’s this timeline you were talking about?” Michelle asked as they came to end of displays.

“I’m not sure,” Corey said, “I suppose it’s on another floor. I guess we should ask someone.”

“Ask someone what?” a man asked. The kids turned to see a tall, slightly overweight man approach them. He wore an open black robe and his gray hair was swept back as he walked.

“What are you looking for?” the man asked as he came near. He stopped about three feet from the two and looked seriously at them.

“You’re Mrs. Palmer’s boy, aren’t you son?” He said.

“Yessir,” Corey stammered. “I’m Corey Palmer and this is my friend, Michelle.”

“Yes, indeed,” the man replied, “Yes indeed. Glad to meet you. I’m Judge Barker. Now what are you looking for?”

“We heard there’s a timeline of history on display here,” Corey said, “But we don’t know where.”

“Well,” the judge said, “It’s actually up on the third floor, in a couple of big rooms. But you might want to hurry; they’re probably going to close up pretty soon.”

Corey and Michelle thanked Judge Barker and trotted quickly to the stairway leading up. When they got to the third floor, they quickly found the rooms. Unfortunately, the judge was right. The display was closed for the day.

“Now what?” Michelle said.

“I don’t know,” Corey said, “Let’s see what else is up here.”

The two walked back toward the center of the building. They tried each door, but all were locked. Then they came to a door in the center of the hallway, set back into an alcove. Corey tried the door.

It opened to reveal a stairway heading up.

“I wonder where this goes,” he said as Michelle joined him.

“I don’t know,” Michelle said, “But I’ll bet it’s someplace we shouldn’t go.”

“Come on, Shel,” Corey said, starting up the steps. “Let’s find out. Besides, if they didn’t want people up here, why is it unlocked?”

Michelle joined her friend. They climbed four flights to a small landing. On either side were closed doors. Both were locked.

“Storage closets, I bet,” Corey said. On the wall opposite the stairs was a ladder mounted to the wall. Looking up, they saw a trap door in the ceiling.

“Hey, I bet that’s the clock up there,” Corey said. “Let’s go up.”

“No, Corey,” Michelle said, “It’s too dangerous.”

“You’re not afraid, are you?” Corey said smirking. Michelle didn’t answer.

Corey climbed the ladder as far as he could. When he could reach the trap door, he held on to a rung and reached for the old metal latch. He tried moving it, but the rusted metal didn't budge. A few flakes broke off, drifting down.

Several steps lower, Michelle watched her friend's efforts. "See? We can't get up there anyway."

Corey kept trying to loosen the latch. "Hang on," he said, "I can get it." He kept trying to jiggle the black and rusty device. More rust flakes fell to the floor.

"I think it's moving," he said. And then it did. The latch came away from the door frame with a groan. Corey moved it to the inside of the whole mechanism and let go. It stayed in position.

Corey grabbed the ladder again and climbed another rung. With his head almost touching the wooden door, he pushed up as hard as he could. The door opened slowly. He climbed another rung and pushed the door open as far as he could. Grabbing the side of the frame, Corey climbed all the way into the upper chamber.

"Whoa," he said, looking around the dark chamber. He called down to his friend.

"You gotta see this, Shel," he said, "You won't believe it."

"What is it?" Michelle asked.

"It's the clock. Come on up."

Michelle climbed the ladder into the upper space; she stepped onto the old wooden floor and looked around. It was the clock alright. Four actually, as each side of the tower had a clock face. They saw the reverse side of the numbers through the large, translucent, white circles with each having a shaft extending from its center to a spindle and gear in the middle of the chamber.

All around this were brass gears of every size, cables, wires, and other pieces of machinery neither could identify.

Michelle tried to move toward the opposite side, but was blocked by the open trap door. She started to close it.

"Don't do that," Corey said.

"You set the latch open, didn't you? Michelle asked. "Besides, it's blocking us from moving around."

"Okay," Corey said.

Michelle carefully lowered the trap door into the floor. Unknown to both kids, Corey hadn't set the latch open. It was stuck open when they came up, but when the door hit the frame, the latch rattled just enough to engage its spring and it returned to its locked position.

Now they could see everything. There was little sound, though both heard clunks as large gears moved. There was also a low hum of an electric motor from somewhere in the room.

Corey began walking one way around the chamber and Michelle the other. They looked

in wonder at everything. Sunlight came through the clock faces so they easily saw everything. Both of them easily walked under the shafts running from the center of each clock face. Obviously, the numbers and the hands were on the outside, Corey thought.

Above each face were louvered vents for air circulation. Screens covered the openings to keep birds and other critters out. Even with these, the air was hot and stuffy.

Meeting on the other side, they looked up to see a smaller platform with another ladder leading up to it. They could see some clockworks above.

“I wonder what’s up there.” Michelle said.

“I don’t know,” Corey said, “Why don’t you climb up and see?”

“Why me?”

“It’s your turn. I climbed up in here first.”

“That’s not fair,” Michelle said.

“Aw, you’re just chicken,” Corey said.

“I am not!”

Corey clucked in reply.

Michelle raised her hand in a fist. “I’m going to hurt you, Corey Palmer.”

Corey laughed. “Oh, come on, it’s probably just more clockworks. I’ll climb up after you. Nothing’s gonna hurt you.”

Michelle turned and climbed up. As she neared the platform, she could see the bottom of a large flat gear. It connected to a shaft leading down into the main works. She climbed past the gear edge to the platform and stood up. Brushing the dust from her hands, she turned and looked at the top side of the large gear.

Then she screamed louder than she’d ever screamed in her life.

## II

No one beyond Corey heard, and he only heard the first half second of Michelle's shriek, because at that moment, the gear moved another notch and more gears and motors began working. Then the great bell hanging at the top of the tower rang out six loud and long peals marking the hour.

Michelle's screaming placed extra pressure on her eardrums from inside her skull, and this likely saved her hearing for the moment. The bell tolls were louder than a jet airplane at full takeoff power. Almost as loud as a typical rock concert, but inside the confined area, it echoed and reverberated extensively.

Standing on the lower floor, Corey heard his friend's scream followed by the bell's first bong. He reacted as most people would, by covering his ears with his hands as best he could.

As the sound of the last peal faded, Corey called out.

"Shel, are you okay?"

Michelle couldn't scream anymore, but she was still in shock.

"Corey! Omigod! *Corey!*" she rasped. Corey scrambled up the ladder.

Michelle sat on the platform with her hands around her knees. Her eyes were wide and she shook visibly.

"What's wrong?" Corey asked her, "What happened?"

Michelle couldn't speak. She just pointed shakily toward the large flat gear behind Corey. Corey turned and saw what freaked his friend out.

Lying prone on the brass was a very dead body. Not even much of one as little flesh remained on the bones. Whoever it was, whatever it was, it looked to have been there for a long time. Corey could see part of a face looking back at him through empty eye-sockets and saw what looked like leather covering what was left of the face. One bony arm was pointed straight out sideways and the other looked to be extended toward something, but the gears blocked Corey's view.

"Holy crap!" Corey said, "Is that what I think it is?"

"Mmm-hmm," Michelle muttered, nodding her head.

"Is it real?" Corey reached over to touch it.

"What are you doing!" Michelle screamed.

"I'm going to check it out."

"Are you nuts? *It's a dead body!*"

"It's not gonna hurt us and maybe we can find out who it is."

"It's gross and it's creepy," Michelle said, getting up from where she sat. "Let's get out of here."

She began climbing down the ladder to the main area. With a sigh, Corey followed.

Michelle got to the trap door first. Grabbing the metal handle, she yanked upward, but the door did not move. She tried again.

“What’s wrong?” Corey asked.

“It won’t open,” Michelle answered, “I think it’s stuck.”

Corey moved to join her. He grabbed the handle and they both pulled. They felt a little movement, but the door still didn’t open.

“Oh my god,” Michelle said, “It’s locked. I thought you set the latch open.”

“I did,” Corey said. “I’m pretty sure.”

“Oh no!” Michelle cried. “We’re stuck! We’re trapped up here with no way out and we’ll probably die.” Her voice grew louder and more anxious and she stomped around the confined space.”

“Take it easy, Shel,” Corey said. “We’ll figure something out.”

“Like *what*?” Michelle said, coming back to where Corey stood. “We’re locked in up here with no other door, no phones, no food, and there’s some freaky dead thing hanging over our head!

“What are we going to do?”

Corey placed his hands on his friend’s shoulders, but Michelle shook them off.

“We’re gonna die,” she whined.

“We’re not gonna die,” Corey said, “I’m sure someone will find us.”

“Like they found that person?” Michelle asked, pointing up toward the platform they’d just climbed down from.

Corey didn’t answer. Michelle went over to the wall of the clock chamber and sat. She wrapped her arms around her knees and lowered her chin to them. Corey sat beside her.

He felt something rustle in his pocket. He reached in and pulled out the bag of jelly beans he bought earlier at the drug store.

“Hey,” he said, holding the bag for Michelle to see. “At least we’ve got something to eat.”

She didn’t reply. They sat silently for several minutes as the clock gears turned and clunked. The room wasn’t completely dark as some light came in through the vents at the top of the tower and shown through the clock faces.

“Someone will find us, Shel,” Corey said.

“They won’t even look for hours,” Michelle said. “My mom’s working late, my dad’s on the road, and I don’t even have to be home until dark.”

“Yeah, it’s the same for me,” Corey said. “I always liked that about summer break.”

As the bell in the tower tolled what should have been six o’clock, Judge Danielson walked from his office to the larger part of his chambers where his staff worked. The

judge, known as Theo to his friends and colleagues and Your Honor to most everyone else, usually wrapped the week up by four o'clock on Fridays. But today was different and he'd needed to hold some of his staff later than usual.

He let everyone go as they finished their work, and the only person still working was Annette Palmer. She was helping finish a backlog of filings, case briefs and other paperwork.

"That's the last of them," the judge said, setting another pile of folders on Annette's desk.

"Great, sir," Mrs. Palmer replied, "I can finish with them and get them down to the main records office."

"Forget it, Annette," Judge Danielson said, "They're closed for the day and Monday's fine. Go on home and enjoy your weekend."

"I'm just glad things should be back to normal next week," Annette said.

"You're right," Danielson said, "The calendar's light and Judge Rollins will be back."

He pointed to the pile of folders now on his assistant's desk and chuckled. "Not like this silliness. Over one hundred drunk & disorderly, public intoxication, and property damage cases all from one crazy high-school party."

"I'm just glad my son's not old enough to be part of something like that."

"But he will be someday, my dear," the judge said.

Annette looked up at the judge's smiling black face. Danielson was the only African-American Judge in Wagner and the surrounding counties. Since he was from a town in the same general part of the state, he easily fit into the county's close-knit community and no one made a deal about his race, milestone or not.

He was also the closest thing to an adult male influence in Corey's life.

Annette went to work for him after several years over at city hall, wanting more flexible hours. Unfortunately, flexibility cut two ways, as this week proved. Judge Danielson's court was booked solid dealing with all the cases arising from the out-of-control escapade some of the high school's seniors put together out by Lake Cyrus.

"By the way, Your Honor," she asked, "What have you heard from Judge Rollins? Is everything alright with her daughter and the baby?"

"Apparently so," Danielson replied, "They had to do a c-section, but everything worked out alright. Suzanne e-mailed some details, along with a picture of her new grandson."

"Now go on and get out of here," he continued, "These things will keep until Monday."

They said good night, and Annette left the building by a side door. On the way home, she stopped at the store to pick up some food and other things, arriving home around seven.

As she walked in, she called out for her son. "Corey, I'm home. Come here and help put up the groceries. Then we'll figure out something for dinner."

No answer.

She called again. “Corey, are you home?”

Silence again.

*That’s funny, she thought. He knows I get home around now. Oh well, he’s probably over at Michelle’s. I can call later.*

She continued putting things away.

When Corey hadn’t come home by seven-thirty, Annette began to be concerned. It wasn’t like him, but still—with his absolute curfew being sunset, or at least to account for himself by then—it wasn’t a crisis yet.

Annette decided to at least trace Corey as far as the Pritchard’s. She dialed Michelle’s mother.

“Hey, Annette,” Mrs. Pritchard answered when her phone rang.

“Marybelle, is Corey over there at your house?”

“I couldn’t tell you,” Mrs. Pritchard replied, “I’m still at the library. It’s inventory and I’ll be here until at least eight. In fact, I thought Michelle would be with you all. Is anything wrong?”

“They’re not here. And I’m kind of worried.”

Marybelle Pritchard also became worried. “Have you called him?”

“Well, I would,” Annette said, “but I took away his phone. You wouldn’t believe how many apps and games he’s downloaded.”

“Oh yes I would, honey,” Marybelle answered, “In fact I had to take Shelly’s phone away too. She texts way too much.”

The women were silent for a few seconds. Then Annette spoke.

“Oh my lord, that means we can’t get hold of either one.”

“Oh dear, you’re right,” Marybelle said. More silent seconds passed as the women gathered their thoughts.

“Tell you what. I’ll finish up here and come over. We’ll figure something out.” Marybelle said finally. “In the meantime, check Corey’s phone and see if anyone’s been trying to reach him. Maybe their friends know where they are.”

While Annette waited for her friend to arrive, she turned her son’s phone on and checked for messages. There were a couple from earlier in the day. Still, though, maybe those kids would know where her son and Michelle were.

She called the numbers, but had to leave messages.

She looked through more of the phone’s history, but nothing stood out.

Then she had an idea. The kids used text messages more than calls, so maybe there would be something in that history. She checked, but again didn’t find anything current.

*Good grief!* She thought as she scrolled through just the past two weeks. *No wonder the*

*phone bill was so high.*

A door opening caused her to look up. Marybelle Pritchard walked in and sat.

“Anything?” she asked Annette.

“No,” Annette said, “but I have an idea. Maybe we could send a message to everyone they talk to or text and see if anyone’s seen them.”

“That’s a great idea,” Marybelle said. “You do that and I’ll get us something to drink.”

Annette opened the message window. She knew everyone who looked at her message would think it was from Corey. So she needed to write something kids would notice. Short and to the point, but without raising any alarms. She thought for several seconds, and then started keying:

*From Corey’s Mom—*

*Have you seen Corey or Michelle P.? Have  
them call or come home.*

*Text reply.*

*Thx*

Annette hit the *send* button and put the phone down. Marybelle came back with two tall glasses of iced tea. The women drank the cool beverage.

“I guess now we wait,” Annette said.

“I guess so,” Marybelle answered, “but you know those two. They get doing something and lose track of time.”

“Aren’t you worried?” Annette asked.

“Kind of, but I’m not ready to panic yet. It’s still light outside, and the kids know the rules.” Marybelle sipped her tea.

“Besides,” she continued, “they’ve probably both forgotten they don’t have any way to check in. Let’s see what happens with your message and wait until it gets dark.”

“Then we can panic.”

Annette smiled at her friend.

Corey’s phone began buzzing with replies. Annette picked up the phone and started checking the messages. She ran through several as more came, but most said the same thing.

*“Sorry, haven’t seen them”*

*“Not at the mall”*

*“Haven’t seen them today”*

And so on. Only one gave any clue: *“Saw C & M on the square PM. Drg Str?”*

“What does this mean?” Annette asked, showing the phone to her friend.

“I’m not sure,” Marybelle answered. She sounded out the last two letter groups.

“Drug stir? Oh—drug store. Someone saw them outside of Storm’s downtown.”

“Well, that’s a start,” Annette said. “We can call them to see.”

“I’ll call Betsy Clark,” Marybelle said, “I think she was working today.”

During the hour or so their mothers shopped and finished work for the day, Corey and Michelle sat silently up in the clock chamber. Corey kept checking his watch so he’d know when to cover his ears to block the bell’s sound as best he could. At six forty-five, he began wondering what was going on.

“The bell’s really messed up,” he said.

“No it’s not,” Michelle said, “It doesn’t ring at night. At least I’ve never heard it.”

“Yeah, you’re right.” He stood up.

“This would be a great time to check out that body,” he said. He moved to the ladder leading to the upper platform.

“Corey, don’t,” Michelle pleaded.

“Oh come on,” Corey said. “I want to see if there’s any clue. It’s a mystery.”

Corey began climbing. On the platform he looked over at the body on the large gear wheel. The face and head now faced the other way, up to where a large vertical gear’s cogs meshed with the flat one’s teeth. The body’s legs faced the platform. Corey saw old high-topped sneakers covering what must have been what was left of the feet. Above the legs, Corey saw a lump on the person’s left side. He tried to make out what it was, but couldn’t. Walking to the edge of the platform, he measured the distance to the gear itself.

Not far, he decided, so he took a step back and jumped. He easily cleared the gap and now stood over the whole carcass. He could see one side of the face, or rather skull. Dried and desiccated skin covered the sunken cheekbone and the body’s teeth protruded from what was left of the mouth.

*Yuck!* Corey thought. *That would scare anyone.* He looked away from the face and saw the extended arm caught at the wrist between the meshed gears at the other side.

*I guess that’s how he got trapped.*

Taking a step toward the middle of the gear, he looked down at where he’d seen the lump. Left rear pocket. *A wallet, probably,* he thought. *Maybe it will tell who this was.*

As he reached down to check the pocket, the gears moved again, almost knocking him down. Corey kept his balance and carefully reached into the jeans pocket. He pulled out a brown leather bi-fold wallet. Having been surrounded by denim and away from the air, the leather was in fairly good shape. The hinge hadn’t broken and the old cowhide was worn about the same as Corey’s dad’s old baseball glove.

Not wanting to lose his balance again, Corey quickly jumped back over to the unmoving platform.

“Hey, Shel,” he called down, “I found something. Come take a look.”

“No,” Michelle said, “I’m not climbing up with that thing.”

“Okay,” Corey replied, making his way down the ladder. He went back to where Michelle still sat against the wall.

“I found a wallet in a pocket.” He showed it to his friend.

“We shouldn’t touch that. We’ll get fingerprints on it.”

“So what? We didn’t kill the guy.”

“It’s still wrong. Besides, who knows what’s on it.”

Corey shook his head and opened the wallet. On the left side was a card slot with clear plastic window. Corey saw the word *IDENTIFICATION* in faded ink. Below a space were labeled lines for name, address, and date of birth. None of them were filled in. On the right side was another slot for cards. He reached his fingers into it and drew out a heavy paper card.

“Oh wow,” he said, “Look at this.”

“What is it?” Michelle asked.

“It’s a library card. Really old, too. It’s got a name and date and everything.”

The small card had *Craigsville Public Library* printed across the top. Typed in the space below was a name, *Phillip E. Cooper*, and below that were the dates, *1961 – 1963*. The word *Adult* was printed in the lower left, and there was a signature in the lower right.

“Let me see.” Michelle looked at the card. “Oh wow. My mom showed me cards like this. She said the library used to use these before they had computers.”

“Yeah,” Corey said, “and look at the date. Over fifty years ago.”

“You mean that thing’s been up there for fifty years?” Michelle said.

“Maybe,” Corey said. Michelle took the card and looked more closely.

Corey opened the bill compartment. He found two one-dollar bills and pulled them out. Before he could look at them, Michelle punched his arm.

“Know what else?” she said. “He had to be at least twelve years old.”

“How do you know that?” Corey asked.

“Because it says *Adult* on it. I just got my adult card this year, didn’t you?”

Corey nodded and looked back at the bills he’d found. One looked like the normal dollars he spent each day, but the other didn’t. Rather than green printing, the numbers and the U.S. Treasury seal were blue. He’d never seen one like that. Across the top of this were the words *Silver Certificate*.

“Look at this, Shel,” he said, “I don’t think this is real money.”

Michelle looked at the dollar. “I just think it’s old, Corey,” she said. “Look at the date at the bottom.”

The lower right showed the words, *Series 1957B*. Corey checked the other one. It had the words, *Series 1963A* in the same spot and the words *Federal Reserve Note* across the

top.

“Wow, these are old.”

“Anything else in the wallet?” Michelle asked.

Corey had the wallet in his left hand and the dollar bills in his right. Without thinking, he stuffed the bills into his pocket so he could check all the other slots. He found nothing.

“No, that’s it.”

He put the library card back where he found it and checked one more place. He slid his fingers behind the unfilled identification card and felt something. He pulled out a folded slip of paper.

“Hang on,” he said. “Here’s something else.” He closed the wallet and put it in his lap.

“What is it?” Michelle asked.

Corey unfolded the paper. It was torn on one edge, and there was nothing on it except some faded numbers. He held the sheet up so light would bleed through and highlight the writing.

“It looks like some numbers,” he said, “I think it says 5-9847.”

“What’s that mean?” Michelle asked.

“Beats me,” Corey replied. “That’s all it says. And there’s nothing else in there.”

“But at least we know his name,” he continued, “Phillip Cooper.”

“Yeah,” Michelle said. They sat silently for awhile.

Feeling her stomach growl, Michelle asked Corey for some jelly beans. Reaching into his pocket, he stuffed the folded paper in with the bills as he took out the bag of candy. They split the beans evenly, though Corey took all the licorice. Michelle didn’t mind, she liked the red ones best. They finished their dinner before the sun went down.

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