



# UNEARTHED

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IQ: 112

I want a refund from ancestry.com.

They traced my family all the way back to the American Revolution. And in all those forefathers and foremothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins, there was nobody like me. No bigmouth hung for treason; no “classe clowne” who they stuck in the stocks and threw rotten vegetables at. The closest match was this guy in the Civil War who jumped off a battlement, whatever that is. And he only did it because the Union

army was firing on Fort Sumter. That's what they put on his tombstone anyway. It sounds like a pretty good excuse to me.

I did things like that. If there were any battlements in my neighbourhood, I'd probably jump off them all. And not because of any army. I'd do it just to see what would happen. "Reckless," my mother called me. "Poor impulse control." That's the school psychologist. "You're going to break your idiot neck one day, or someone's going to break it for you." My dad.

He was probably right. They were all right. But when the *thing* is right there in front of me, and I can kick it, grab it, shout it out, jump into it, paint it, launch it, or light it on fire, it's like I'm a puppet on a string, powerless to resist. I don't think; I *do*.

It can be little things, like throwing darts at a pool float to test my sister's swimming skills, or spitting back at the llamas at the zoo. It can be more creative—a helium balloon, a fishhook, and Uncle Mark's toupée. It can even be the smart-alecky comments that got me voted Most Likely to Wind Up in Jail in my middle school the last two years running.

"Our fans are great; our team is nifty! We're going to get blown out by fifty!"

See, that was probably not the wisest thing to say

on the day of the big game against our basketball archrivals, Salem Junior High. But I didn't just say it; I broadcast it over the PA system to the entire school. I don't know why I did it. The cheer was already fully formed in my mind—the poster advertising the big game had planted it there. It was definitely going to come out. Why share it with only the two Daniels, who were with me in the office awaiting sentence for our spitball war, when there was a perfectly good microphone a few feet away, unattended and live. Okay, it wasn't live. I had to flick the switch. I even had pom-poms—well, a crumpled piece of paper — for sound effects.

The howl of protest that went up all around the building surprised even me. It was like I'd gone from house to house, poisoning everybody's dog. It was probably for my own good that I wound up in detention. If I'd been free in the halls at three-thirty, I would have been lynched. The sense of humour at Hardcastle Middle School didn't extend to their precious basketball team.

“Why'd you say we're going to lose, man?” asked Whelan Kaiser, starting centre, peering down at the top of my head from his six-foot-four vantage.

Why? There was no logical explanation for what

I did. It had to come from my DNA. That's why I needed ancestry.com.

I was the only kid in detention that afternoon. All crimes had been forgiven in order to pad the audience for the big game against Salem, which had to have already started. All crimes except mine—dissing the basketball team. Even the Daniels—two-thirds of the spitball war—had been cut loose while I was doing time.

The Daniels weren't at the game. I knew this because they were skulking in the bushes outside the detention room, making grotesque faces at me through the window. If they could make me laugh—and it wasn't easy to hold back—I'd be in even more trouble. As it was, Mr. Fender was checking his watch every thirty seconds. He wanted to be at the game, not babysitting me.

Finally, he could bear it no longer. "I'll be right back," he told me sternly.

The instant he was gone, the window was flung open from the outside.

"Come on!" hissed Daniel Sanderson. "Let's get out of here!"

"He's coming back," I protested.

"No, he's not," scoffed the other Daniel—Daniel

Nussbaum. “He’s going to the office to watch the feed from the security camera in the gym. You’ve only got ten more minutes. If he’s any kind of basketball fan, you’re golden.”

I was out the window like a shot, breathing sweet, free air. See what I’m saying? The open road called, and I took it. This time I’d needed a little help. That’s where the Daniels came in. They helped me a lot. They’d helped me to the office with our spitball fight, and helped me to the PA mic by daring me to do it. With friends like them, sometimes I wondered why I would ever need enemies.

I turned on them. “Thanks for letting me take the fall alone. Your support was really touching.”

Nussbaum shrugged innocently. “I couldn’t take credit for your poem.”

“It wasn’t a poem. It just happened to rhyme.”

“I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that,” Sanderson put in. “Don’t you think that’s kind of dorky? I mean, who rhymes anymore?”

“Nobody,” I conceded, “except the entire hip-hop community.” I bounced a pinecone off his head, which only made him grin wider.

We were at the top of the hill, looking down on the gym we shared with Hardcastle High. The parking

lot was jam-packed. A roaring cheer spilled out of the building.

“Man, you couldn’t fit a Hot Wheels car in there!” Nussbaum exclaimed, taking in the crowded lot. “Salem vs. Hardcastle is the place to be.”

“Let’s go check out the score,” said Sanderson. “We can see if our ‘nifty’ team will lose by ‘fifty.’”

“Yeah, Donovan, nice school spirit,” Nussbaum added. Like *he* had any.

We started down, the Daniels jostling each other absently. A kind of friendly belligerence came naturally to those two. Maybe they were descended from the Hatfields and the McCoys. I’ll bet the Daniels had never checked it out on ancestry.com.

And then The Moment was upon me.

I must have passed the statue of Atlas a thousand times going back and forth on the campus of the Hardcastle Public Schools. Yet somehow it was like I’d never seen it before.

It was not the titan’s broad powerful shoulders supporting the bronze globe of the world and heavens that seemed so different. But since when did Atlas have such a big butt? Seriously, I knew he was a titan; but I didn’t know that the most titanic thing about

him was his caboose. He looked like a reject from *The Biggest Loser*.

Suddenly, I was striding toward the statue, in an almost trancelike state. I picked up a fallen tree branch and made my approach.

Nussbaum noticed my zombielike concentration. “Dude, what are you doing?”

I didn’t answer, and he didn’t really expect me to. He knew me. They both did.

I cocked back the branch, and unloaded a home run swing. The impact vibrated up through my arms to my brain stem, and into every cell of my body. The branch shattered in my hands.

I have to say that this was always the best part of it for a guy like me—the split second the tomato hits the car; the very brief flight as I drop from the edge of the roof to the pool; the instant that the balloon lifts the toupée and the sun’s rays glint off that shiny bald head.

Or, in this case, the *go-o-o-ong!* sound from the statue’s bronze behind. The payoff. It was usually downhill from there. Sometimes literally.

Atlas shivered as the vibration travelled through his metal body. The celestial sphere shivered too, rocking

dizzily on his muscular shoulders. At that point, I noticed for the first time that the sculpture wasn't a single piece of metal, but two, bolted together at the nape of the titan's neck.

Corrosion is a terrible thing. It was all in slow motion, but there was nothing you could do to stop it. With a crack, the bolt snapped, pieces whizzing out of sight. The ball of the world and heavens toppled and hit the ground with a *whump!*

I was still wrapped up in The Deed, lost in The Moment. It took the twin gasps from the Daniels to break the trance. And by that time, the heavy ball was already rolling.

Oh, no . . .

The big bronze globe careened down the hill toward the gym, picking up speed as it went. I ran after it, although what I thought I could do to stop it, I have no idea.

"Help me!" I called to the Daniels. But they were heading in the opposite direction. They liked to watch me do stuff; they had a lot less interest in hanging around for the consequences.

Heart sinking, I projected the course of the runaway globe. The prognosis was not good. It was hurtling



straight for the parking lot, where a lot of innocent cars were waiting to get bashed in. Desperately, I threw myself headfirst at the juggernaut. When my shoulder struck the heavy metal, it felt like running into a brick wall. If it changed the direction at all, it was about a millionth of an inch. Flat on my face now, all I could do was watch.

The globe screamed down toward all that expensive machinery, bounced off an upturned curbstone, and caromed toward the building. The cars were safe, but the world and heavens were now on a collision course with the basketball game.

It pulverized the glass doors, sending up a blizzard of shards that obscured the entrance. I heard a very sharp whistle blast, like the referee was calling a foul on Atlas, or possibly me.

There was another relative on ancestry.com. He wasn't very much like me. I doubt I would have remembered him at all, except for his name—James Donovan. I'd wondered if I was named after him, although my mother claimed she'd never heard of the guy. He emigrated from Ireland in 1912, which would have been fine except that the ship he picked was—think Atlas here—the *Titanic*.

As decision makers, he and I were pretty much on the same level.

But get this: He didn't die. He was plucked from the freezing water alive.

James Donovan was a *survivor*.

If I'd inherited any of those skills, I had a sinking feeling they were about to come in handy.