



SWIFT ENTERPRISES PRESENTS

## Ed Longstreet Adventures Vacation in Kabulistan

As told to T. Edward Fox

Ed Longstreet is the first cousin of Tom Swift, and the nephew of Tom's mom, Anne. Blessed with almost unlimited funds, the young man fills his life with travels and trying to hunt down as many archeological mysteries as he can.

While this gets him into trouble every now and again, it means he is never bored. Ed is hot on the trail of a mysterious and cursed giant gem, one that just seems to have appeared one day and then disappeared almost a hundred years later.

Follow along as he describes his travels in search of either the actual gem, or at least to fill in the where and why of it all.

And, what starts out as a deep, dark mystery—complete with curse—almost ends up with Ed serving hard time in a foreign prison where not even his family fortunes can help him.

©Copyright 2010 by the author of this book (T. Edward Fox - pseud.). The book author retains sole copyright to his or her contributions to this book.

This book is a work of fan fiction. It is not claimed to be part of any previously published adventures of the main characters. It has been self-published and is not intended to supplant any authored works attributed to the pseudonymous author or to claim the rights of any legitimate publishing entity.

This book is dedicated to adventurers. You know who you are. Find a little clue and off you go. On the good side, you often uncover important things. On the bad, do you actually realize how much danger you put yourselves in? I mean, really?

SWIFT ENTERPRISES PRESENTS

**Ed Longstreet's Vacation in Kabulistan**

## FOREWORD

What does young man who has money enough to have everything do? In the case of Tom Swift's cousin, Ed Longstreet, having all that money means that you can enjoy your favorite past-time.

Exploring.

Ed has always had everything he wanted with one exception. A sense of purpose. He has been wandering around the world searching out archeological mysteries in more countries than even he can remember visiting. The last time I spoke with him he was filling out the paperwork to get a new Passport; the one he received just three years ago is already packed with stamps.

He pops up in Shopton every so often, but usually just in time to involve Tom in one of his mysteries. This time, however, Ed is on a solo adventure. Like all of his modern-day trips, he had kept an audio dairy of everything he has been doing.

Fortunately, before heading off to Japan the other day on yet another adventure, he digitized his tapes and simply handed me about fifty CDs to go through.

I hope I have done his story justice. If not, blame it on having far too much to go through. But, that's Ed.

*Thackery E. Fox*

**CHAPTER 1/****"You Are Here"**

IF WE haven't had the pleasure already, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Ed Longstreet. I am an adventurer. Well, I flatter myself by that, but I do love to travel around the world. Adventure usually comes to find me.

Let me see. What to tell you so you even care about my little story.

I am the cousin of the mother of the famous Tom Swift, he of invention fame. We've been related since the day I was born. Auntie Ann is a great woman, my pop's younger sister, and she is married to Tom's father, Damon Swift, also pretty famous!

I'd better start with the bits that will make you question whether I'm a nice guy or a lazy, spoiled rich kid. My hope is that by the time you finish reading this story, that you will think better of me than you might at the start.

My father became a very rich man on the day he turned twenty-three. That was the same day he married Geena Bartle, the heiress to the Bartle transportation company fortunes. Her pop, Old Matthew Bartle, made it big with a capital B when he purchased an old steam locomotive and a few rail cars, and then turned that into Bartle Locomotive Transportation, the largest privately owned rail system in the world.

You've seen the trains with their signature "**B-L-T**" logos on the sides.

Can't help but spot them. Every time *I* see one I immediately get hungry. Wonder why?

Anyway, Old Matthew passed along just six days after Mom and Dad were married, leaving her—one of his three heirs—something like one hundred and fifty million dollars in

company stock. It's probably good thing she married my father, since her brothers almost talked her into selling up her shares. Dad, on the other hand, believed they would be worth a lot more if they held onto the shares.

Long story short, my maternal uncles all sold out their shares within months of getting them and then proceeded to lose most of their money on other, some say rather foolish, ventures.

Only Mom and Dad came out on top, eventually amassing about twice what she inherited.

That leads back to me.

My folks sort of piled on the money when it came to my supposed happiness. Ever since I can remember, I've had practically unlimited funds to do whatever I wanted.

They were pretty tunnel visioned on making more and more of it that it kept them from spending much formative time with little Eddy. Nannies came and went on practically monthly basis.

Now, it *wasn't* me. I want *that* understood. I was practically a saint as a child.

Unfortunately, most of the girls and women who took care of me weren't hired for their skills. Dad had quite the eye for cute, young things. Mom generally left it up to him to select nannies as she claimed to have no sense along those lines.

But, as soon as Dad got a little friendly with the help—oh, nothing bad, not even friendly little pats on the backsides—but Mom would quash that really quick and a new nanny would arrive a few days later.

It was probably guilt, but Dad substituted parental closeness with money. As a result, I have had practically unlimited funds for whatever my latest fancies have been since I was about fifteen.

Fortunately, that has never included drugs or excessive alcohol. My money-burning habit is travel. Travel, and archeology. I can't get enough of it. It's as invigorating as it is dangerous. As you can imagine if you've seen the Indiana Jones movies, there is plenty of stuff that can go wrong when you are out on an adventure.

For instance, I just came back to the good old USA from a trip to the small nation of Moldova. This guy I know... gee, I kinda hate that expression. It makes it sound a little shady. Anyway, this man I know, name of Barnes Hines—a fellow explorer I run into on occasion—told me about a rumor regarding a lost treasure trove over there.

I got there by traveling through Bulgaria and Romania, found a nice little hostel in the capital city of Chisanau, and then headed to the local library to see if I could find anything.

Within a few days I located an old volume that looked like it hadn't been opened for a decade or more. It was the census ledger for Chisanau from a dozen years ago. Thinking it might make a nice little detour, I started looking through it. Within a couple hours I found a little scrap of paper in the middle. Cheap newsprint and it had become brittle, but it had the most interesting thing on one side.

A hand-drawn map, very crude and almost not recognizable, along with a string of Cyrillic words—you know, like Russian or that sort of language—where the only thing I recognized immediately was 'СССР,' the old Russian name for the Soviet union. The only thing I really knew was that they pronounce the letter 'C' as if they were saying the word for the letter 'S' and their letter 'P' is pronounced like the word 'air' and is really their R.

So, what I could read was 'Ess Ess Ess Air' and not anything else.

It took me another couple of weeks of asking around, really carefully, because nobody I've run into in any of the former

Soviet countries actually likes having a nosy American asking about what happened before the “fall” of that regime.

I asked for help from a few people in cafés and from a woman who took a little interest in me and wanted to try out her knowledge of English. In time, and taking it word by word, I was able to come up with something like, “СССР (something) are in below ground (something else) holding (yet another something) where Petru lies.”

The good news is that I eventually figured out that the note meant that a cache of artworks, probably stolen by the former Soviets, was hidden in an underground crypt where the former president of Moldova was buried.

The bad news is that as soon as I started to try to locate that place I was picked up by the local constabulary and taken to a seaport town about fifty miles away and loaded onto a freighter headed for Turkey. Minus my luggage. Oh, well. I pack as light as possible. This happens with rather greater frequency than I would like.

Also bad, my passport was stamped with their version of *persona non grata*. So, scratch Moldova off my list of countries I can go back to. That goes on the list along with Burkina Faso in Africa, and the island nation of Koror, in Micronesia. Not all of Micronesia, mind you. Just Koror. And, no matter what you might hear, I *did* pay for that small idol statue and had absolutely no idea it was a stolen antiquity. Honest!

That put me in Turkey last week. I followed up on a story I heard, oh, starting seven or eight years ago about a large gemstone, maybe one hundred carats or larger, and supposed to be cursed.

Its last known sighting was in Lithuania, but the woman who owned it, or is said to have owned it, now lives in a retirement facility in Michigan. Nice little town called Cassopolis in the lower, Western part of the state.

Tomorrow I head out there from my house; my poor, little-visited and in very sad condition from my neglect, house in Norway. That’s Norway, Maine, by the way. Small place but only about fifty minutes from Portland and my lobster fix at Captain Newick’s. Two two-pound lobsters and all the fixin’s *and* a beer for a twenty. Yum!

So, tomorrow morning it’s a commuter flight from Portland to Boston and then over to Detroit and then another commuter—with three stops—to get to Cassopolis.

Man, I sure hope this lady is coherent. Here caregiver tells me that she comes and goes and is “away” more and more frequently these days. Fingers crossed!

And, so... that gets you from a little about the *why* of me to today’s me—right here, right now.

*You are here*, as the signs say.

**CHAPTER 2/****...And She's *Not* All There!**

I'M NOT going to bore you with the play-by-play of yesterday's fifteen hours of travel. Suffice it to say that my bottom is sore and my back is killing me. And, Cassopolis has not one, but practically zero motels or hotels.

To be fair, I should have checked. If I had, I would have discovered that the flying part only got me to Kalamazoo and from that point on a bus. All part of the airline ticket, mind you.

I might also have seen that Cassopolis is about seventeen hundred people strong and not technically even a town. It is a Village. Officially, it's a Village. You have to ask people what is going on "in the Village," and not "in town." They get a look in their eyes and then become more than a little curt.

The Village has two service stations where they still pump your gas for you, a few stores, and what use to be a national chain motel. It isn't open all the time and it required a couple hours for someone to come over to open a room for me, take my fifty dollars, and tell me to just toss the key up onto the office balcony when I decided to leave.

Also, no room service.

Oh, and a hearty, "Welcome to Cassopolis, gateway to other exciting cities in Cass County like LaGrange, Jefferson, Ontwa and Pokagon."

I thought he said Pokemon and *almost* laughed and mentioned it, but he didn't seem like such a reaction would sit well with him.

Sigh!

I'm not certain why, but I expected to be able to rent a car once I got here. Cue almost uncontrollable laughter. I could rent a tractor at the John Deere store just outside of town. \$500 a month. Such a deal. I passed.

The good news is that the entire core part of the town that contains this motel, as well as Cass County Retirement Village, all fits in an eight-by-ten block area. Wouldn't you know it, though, but I'm staying at the almost exact opposite side of town from my target, or rather, from my appointment with a Mrs. Evshka Fomaova, the lady who once was the owner of the gem.

As I walk over there it strikes me that I haven't heard of it being called by a single name. The gem, I mean. Always the same description—pale blue, possibly a rare diamond or one with a healthy proportion of Boron in it. Based on varying measurement types, it is described at between one hundred and two to one hundred and five carats in weight, seventy-eight facets with a lightning-bolt impurity right in the middle of it.

Oh, and it is cursed. One of those, "He who takes possession of the stone, will be cursed from skin to bone," non-specific curses.

The strange thing is that all my research shows that whoever had possessed it for more than a year have either disappeared or outright died within the next ten years.

And, that is over the past ninety-six years it seems to have been in existence. No mention of it before then, and no news stories talking about a huge gem discovery.

Another strange thing is that no reference is made to where it originally came from. It sort of— "Hey! Kid! Watch it!"

"Sorry, mister. Sorry..."

Darn kid came out of nowhere and just about plowed into me on his bike. Geez. Well, that will teach me to watch out for oncoming traffic.

Anyway, the gem just appeared in a few reference books just under a century ago. I found it called “Ocalli Diamond,” and “The Boyai Stone,” and “The Kotawalis” among others. It has to be the same stone because the curse comes along pretty much intact with each new name.

Let’s see. Her place is supposed to be on this street somewhere. Hmmm?

Ah. I see it. Note to self: when in a small town, or village, don’t look for a large retirement facility. It’s that two-story house over there.

No bikes or cars to run me down, so I’ll head over right in the middle of the block. Besides, except for the three-block downtown business area there aren’t any crosswalks around here.

“Oh. Hello, ma’am. My name is Edward Longstreet. I am here to visit with Mrs. Fomaova.”

“Well... is she expecting you, young man?”

“I spoke with her on the phone two weeks ago when I was in Europe. I believe we also spoke briefly. She use to live over there and I am trying to track down something she may know about. She said she would be glad to meet with me. Is she in?”

“Well... Evie is physically here, but she is... um... how do I describe it? She’s not always *here*, if you get my gist. Did I mention that to you on the phone?”

*I’m pretty sure I know what she means. Physically here is different from mentally here for some people.*

“Yeah. You did. Is she lucid right now? I mean, is she likely to know who she is and all that, even if she doesn’t specifically remember talking to me?”

“Well... with Evie is can be hit and miss. She was fine yesterday, but she had a fitful night and that always means a

few, um... issues?”

*Yeah. ‘Issues’ is a good, safe word. Well, I’m here, so I might as well try—*

“Since I’m already here, if you think it would be okay, I’d like to speak with her. Even if she isn’t able to help me today, maybe I could come back tomorrow or the day after and she might be better then.”

“Well... I suppose you’d better come in then. If you’ll just go through to the living room. I go up and see if she wants to come down.”

“Thank you, Miss... er, Missus?”

“Oh. It’s Miss Daniels. Use to be Mrs. Merryweather, but he died and I never liked that name so I changed it back. Please, call me Jackie.”

“Thanks, Jackie.”

*I hope that her Evie is able to help. I can wait around a few days, but I’ve got a flight from Boston over to Bucharest in five days. Let’s see. With stops and changes, that will be another nineteen hours on top of two fifteen hour travel days for a total of about two full days of travel out of seven.*

*Ouch! My backside is already feeling it.*

“Oh. Hello, Jackie. And I assume that this is Evshka Fomaova. Salut, madam. Ce mai faci?”

“Ah. You are American, no? And you do not speak Romanian. Not very well. A pity. But I thank you for attempting. I am, by the way, fine. A little tired, perhaps, but fine. Do I know you?”

“Not directly, Mrs. Fomaova.”

“Please, it would be nice to have you call me... uh, call me...”

“Evie, Mrs. Fomaova?”

“Da, I mean, yes. Thank you, Jackie. Please my young male friend, you shall call me Evie.”

“Wonderful. And, I am Ed Longstreet. Evie? Do you remember that I contacted you about two weeks ago when I was overseas? From Turkey?”

*Ah, rats. I don't like that vacant look she's giving me right now. Please, please remember...*

“I'm not certain, young man. What did you say your name was?”

“Ed Longstreet, ma'am. I called you two weeks ago this past Monday. We spoke for about five minutes. It was in regards an old gemstone you owned years ago. Do you remember?”

“It all seems so mixed up. I am not sure. Jackie? Can you get me a glass of lemonade, please?”

“Certainly, Evie. Mr. Longstreet? Can I get you something?”

“Uh, I guess lemonade sounds good to me, too. Thanks.”

“So. Evie. Do you remember our conversation?”

“Of course I do. You are that nice young man who brings the sausages and the bacon to us every day. Right?”

*Crud!*

“Oh. No, Evie. I'm not that man. We spoke on the phone two weeks ago. It was about the Boyai stone. Do you remember that you once owned it?”

*There's that look, again, Come on, Evie. Remember. You can do it!*

“Oh, thank you, Jackie. Wow. That's wonderful lemonade. Not sure I've tasted something this good in years.”

“I put a bit of lime juice in it plus I finely mince up some of the

lemon and lime peel and let it all sort of marinate overnight.”

*Have to remember that. I hope that while we talk Evie will begin to remember.*

“Young man? What did you say your name was?”

“It's Ed Longstreet, ma'am. Ed Longstreet. We spoke on the phone a couple weeks ago.”

\* \* \* \* \*

That went not well at all. Not by a long shot.

Jackie warned me about her bad days. Just wish this hadn't been one of them. Guess I'll go back tomorrow and see if Evie's back from la-la land.

**CHAPTER 3/****Lithuania, Here I Come**

WELL, HERE it is, day three and I have to leave tomorrow or else I'll miss my flight to Romania. Three days and five visits to see Evie and nothing to show for it. It's almost like I've never been there before. I guess I may have to do more detailed digging once I get to Bucharest.

Let's get this last visit over with.

"Oh. Hello, Mr. Longstreet."

"Hello, Jackie. I do wish you'd call me Ed."

"Well... Ed. Evie had a very good night last night. She's been waiting for you."

"Wonderful. Good morning, Evie. How are you feeling today?"

"Oh. Good morning, Mr. Longface."

"Longstreet, ma'am."

"Yes. I know. My little joke. Good morning to you. I understand that I have been a little... vague, shall we say, during your visits the other day. Do forgive me. I have a condition that makes my mind come and go."

"Alzheimer's?"

"Surprisingly, even at my age, no. I suffered from what I believe you call scarlet fever when I was a younger woman. It affected parts of my brain. As a result, I have regular bouts with fluid build-up and that pressure causes my brain to wander. Sometimes it is only mild, and sometimes I can barely remember young Jackie's name. My apologies that you came here and saw me at *not* my very best."

"It's okay. Do you feel like you are all here today?"

"Yes. I do. Now, you called me from Europe. Where were you?"

"Turkey."

"Ah, yes. Turkey. You asked me about my diamond. The Boyai. Is that right?"

"Yes, Evie. I did. I've been trying to trace it through it's time in Western civilization, and trying to either locate it now, or at the very least find out where it might have come from. Do you know?"

"Let me think. I am going to close my eyes for a minute or two. Do not be alarmed. It is the way I do my deep memory searching."

*I hope she's right. I only hope that she really is all here and comes back with some answers. That's a curious little twitch in the corner of her mouth. Almost like she is trying to grin. Fingers crossed that she—*

"I believe I do remember, Mr. Longstreet. May I call you Edvard?"

"Or, Ed, if you like. Most people call me Ed."

"No. I like the sound of Edvard. It rolls off the tongue so regally, don't you think?"

"It sounds very nice the way you say it."

"Fine. So, Edvard. The Boyai. It is a cursed stone... did you know that? Ah, yes. I can see in your face that you do know all about that. But, did you know that I am the only one to have owned it who has lived for more than ten years?"

"The deaths have always come within ten years of when the owner has lost or relinquished the stone, from what I've read. Did you get rid of it more than ten years ago?"



“Yes. It will have been twelve years ago in September. Several months from now. And, bad brain and all, I am still here and the heart remains strong!”

“Do you mind answering some questions for me?”

“Not at all. Please—”

“Well then, there seems to be a gap of more than five years from one owner until you received it. By the way. Is it actually a diamond?”

“Some say so. Personally, I have some doubts. It is too blue to be a pure diamond and it has that horrible flaw right in the middle. That black lightning bolt. But, it is a very hard stone. It cuts glass. It might be a diamond after all.”

“Okay. Who had it before you and how did you hear about it?”

“Let me see. I was married to the Count two years before that. Count von Schiffel, a very minor Romanian royalty. I called him ‘schniffles.’ Drove him crazy. A good man with a healthy appetite for amorous... ah, but I can see a blush peeking up from your collar. We shall leave it at ‘healthy appetite,’ then. He had an acquaintance in a small northern town. Bacău. Like all good stories, that man also had a friend who had a friend who knew a man who might know someone with a spectacular gem for sale. To the right person, you know? And, by that I mean with the right amount of money and no curiosity. Anyway, a months later a little, dirty man came to the door of our home, handed me a small dirty rag with something in it and disappeared.”

“The diamond?”

“Yes. That and a note with the curse written on it.”

“When was that?”

“Let me see. That would have been fifteen years ago. Yes. I had it for almost three years before it disappeared one night. Along

with my Count, the rest of my jewelry, and a young servant girl I suspected might be carrying his child. Oh, don’t look so shocked. It happens all the time. I, myself, started out as a kitchen assistant at a summer estate of a famous Romanian general, and he had me with child before my eighteenth birthday. A wonderful woman she is now. Her adopted family has never told her, but I use to see her every evening. She is a journalist in Bucharest.”

*What an interesting life she has led.*

“So, you don’t know the name of whoever it was that owned the diamond before you?”

“I found out later that it was either a man called Sibiu, whose family has a city named for them, or possibly a woman called... oh, I had that name a moment ago. I think it was Sandulescu. Yes. Svetta Sandulescu. A fat and disgusting pig of a woman whose husband committed himself into debtors prison in order to escape buying her trinkets and such. She died just months after I received the gem. Most likely terminal flatulence! I hope it wasn’t her.”

“It’s becoming a little clearer, Evie. And, I think I can help. I found one reference to a possible owner with the initials ‘S. S.’ It just might refer to Sandulescu.”

“A pity. Had I known it had been touched by her hands I might have refused to take it! Anyway, it was too big and too noticeable and every jeweler we took it to wished to cut in into smaller stones, so we placed it in a vault in a bank and left it there until it disappeared. Sorry to say, I was upset with my husband for abandoning me in such a way and I never thought to look for the damned thing.”

“Well. You’ve at least given me some help with the history. I wish I could find out where it went to, though.”

“Ah. I did not say that I do not know where it went. I simply said that I had no wish to look for it.”

*I sure hope my face isn't showing how fast my heart rate just went up. Deep breath, Ed. Don't let the voice crack.*

"I see. And, where do you believe it went. Evie?"

"About a year earlier, or was it... oh damn. My mind is wandering. I know where it went. I really do. Just give me a minute."

*Here comes hovering Jackie. Please don't ask me to go. Not just yet. Give the old girl a minute. Okay?*

"Ed. Perhaps if you came back later—?"

"No. I'm fine, now. Edvard. It was discovered in my dead husband's stomach a year later. He had been poisoned—probably by that girl as I heard he abandoned her when she gave birth to a defective child—and someone left his body in an alley."

*Ugh!*

"Because we were never legally divorced, the doctor who did the autopsy contacted me with the results, including that he had found a large blue rock in him."

"What happened to it?"

"Before it could be sent to me, it was stolen by a nurse. A woman from Lithuania. She disappeared the same day the diamond did and was later found hanging from the rafters in her apartment in Vilnius, Lithuania."

"I don't suppose that you know what might have happened to it after that."

"Oh, the odd rumor, Edvard. The odd rumor. One of those rumors said that she had the diamond inside of her. It was suppose to have been found at the funeral company. They evidently kept it in payment for her burial. After that, I am afraid, I have no further idea."

"Evie. You have been an enormous help to me. Really you have. I can see that you are tired, and I guess you can't help me any more, but you have given me at least a couple of good leads where to look next. I really want to thank you. And, you as well, Jackie. I'd be very happy to keep you up to date on what I find out, if you would like that. Would you?"

"I'm very sorry, young man. I am so tired. I just want to take a nap now. Leave the sausages with Jackie there and she'll see that your manager is paid."

*Oh, dear!*

**CHAPTER 4/****Farewell, Lithuania**

IF GETTING to Romania is a bit difficult, then add an extra full travel day and two other flights plus several days of waiting for an entrance visa to that and you, too, can go right to Lithuania!

I'll catch you up on the last eight days.

Let me see. I left Michigan the same day I had my only productive interview with Evie. I was really high on adrenalin from finally getting a good, solid set of clues, until it hit me. What if everything she told me was the product of her slightly wonky brain?

That one struck home about fifteen minutes after my flight from Detroit to Boston took off. I sat there, feeling quite sorry for myself the rest of the way.

I stayed the night at one of the hotels down by the wharf, had a good but unmemorable seafood dinner and then went to the Conciliate that Lithuania keeps in Boston.

They started the paperwork for a visa but told me I would either have to wait ten days, or I could go as far as Germany and then pick it up there in five days.

So, trip home, clean underwear and water the almost dead flowers, then back to Portland and then to JFK and a flight over to Berlin.

Only, we had a small technical problem and had to spend nine hours in Glasgow. For an international airport, it is pretty dinky. A Burger King and a few shops and not much else. And, yeah. That's what I thought, too. *Burger King in Scotland?* Ugh!

When I arrived in Berlin I only had to wait a couple days for the visa and then another two for a seat on an Aeroflot flight to Vilnius in a shake-rattle-and-roll TU-154.

I've taken a few pants-wetting flights in my time, but this was my first in a Soviet aircraft known for having had more deadly crashes than any other ever built.

If you don't know, the Tupelov TU-154 is to modern flying as the Lusitania was to safe ocean travel.

Today is day eight since flying out of Michigan. And, boy, are my arms tired. And my bottom. And, there isn't enough aspirin here to take care of this headache and sore back.

But, enough about me. How are you doing? Anyway...

I'm heading to the local library in hopes of finding an old telephone directory. I tried to contact an operator but was told that they only connected emergency calls and to stop bothering them.

In looking at this building in front of me, I am reminded that not all public places are created equally. This is as ornate as a Gothic cathedral—flying buttresses and crenelations and gargoyles and all. If this were night I'd say that this is the stuff of nightmares. Cue the lightning and thunder!

I hope that the librarian speaks a little English or at least can understand my pidgin German. I read a *Lithuanian for Travelers* book on the way here, but—

"Hello. I wonder if you might be able to assist me?"

"Ho. American? Ne. Ne English."

*Well, that went well. I hope she is heading over to find someone who can help me and not just going off on her coffee break.*

"Am I able to providing assist for you, sir?"

“Oh. Ačiū. Yes. Thank you. I am trying to locate a telephone directory from ten or eleven years ago. Do you keep them?”

“Ummmm. We have, in archives, many telephone reference books. Are you looking for exact person or business?”

“I am looking for a business, a jeweler, but I do not know the exact name. I hope that seeing all of the names will help me.”

“Here is permit to view reference books. Take it to that woman in kiosk over there. She will help. Oh. Please give it back. She understands no English so I must write your need on paper. There you are. Have a happy day.”

*Well, this might be easier than I thought. Although, looking at ‘woman in kiosk’ doesn’t give me much hope for a friendly chat. She looks more like the old Soviet leader, Brezhnev, than a nice, little old lady.*

“Salut, madam. Ši... uh...” *What’s that word for book?* “Uh, Ši knyga. Ačiū.”

*Whew! Pulled that one out of nowhere. I hope she comes back with what I need. Nice place if just a bit musty, but I guess it wouldn’t be a library without the musty smell of old paper. That was fast.*

“Ačiū, madam”

“Jūs nesate Lietuvos? Ar esate prancūzų arba Amerikiečių? Ar žinote, Elvis Presley?”

*Oh, geez. I only understood the part about ‘American’ and ‘Elvis.’ Ummmmm, I guess I could try...*

“Ne, madam. Nežinau Elvis. Uh— Taip, aš esu Amerikos.”

“Pah!”

Well wasn’t that special. Was it the ‘I am American’ or the ‘I don’t know Elvis’ that she took exception to? At least she gave

me the phone book before she headed off.

Let me look at this thing. D, E, F. Funeral. Home? Parlor?

Ah. Right. I don’t know the word for ‘funeral’ in Lithuanian, and I’ll bet it doesn’t start with an F.

“Excuse me, Miss. Thank you for your help with the permission slip. Now, can you tell me the Lithuanian word for a funeral parlor? A place where people are taken before they are buried?”

“Funeral?”

“Uh, yes. Oh! Dead man or woman? A place they are taken to prepare the body and to let family make their last visit?”

“Oh. Laidojimo biuras. A burial preparation business. Correct?”

“Yes. That’s it. So, lady jim...”

“Ne. Laidojimo. Please. I will write it down for you.”

“Thank you!”

So. It’s out to the L’s. Ah, and there they are, and there’s only about a half dozen. I wonder how many of them are still in business? Trusty notebook and pencil in hand, our stalwart adventurer begins to copy out names and addresses he has no hope of finding on his own. Oh, well.

Next stop is going to be the newspaper office to see if they have papers from back then and someone who might be able to remember about what date it was when they found that nurse.

\* \* \* \* \*

I won’t bore you with the first two hours of my afternoon at the Vilnius newspaper office. They are hoping to purchase a microfiche camera and reader sometime in the next five years. I haven’t seen microfiche used for almost ten years back home. What I ended up doing after looking through several file

cabinets—that turned out to be the wrong year anyway—was finding an old cleaning man who was puttering around down in the basement where they keep stacks and stacks of old papers. Actually, he found me and followed me around until I asked if he spoke English.

He does. Amazingly good English.

He has been working there for fifty years. Told me he was the assistant Editor twenty years ago, and then they ‘retired’ him to his current position.

The good thing is that he recalled the story. And, after a lot of memory searching he even pulled up the remembrance that it happened just as the lilies were in bloom that year. That narrowed it down to a couple weeks or so, and then we found that stack of papers.

Guess where on a stack about, oh, four feet tall the issues I wanted were located.

Uh-huh. About six inches up from the floor.

But, once he helped me move most of the stack and I pulled out a thick handful of them, it only took an hour to find the story. Unfortunately, it didn’t have anything about the gem.

My new friend, Pavel, asked what I was really looking for. He seemed genuinely interested in being a help, so I broke one of my primary rules. I confided in him.

For my trust and trouble I was rewarded with an uproarious laugh. He laughed so hard that his eyes began to water and he started to wheeze. I thought he was going to have a stroke or something.

After he quieted down, he came over to me and confided something that made my blood run cold.

“I am, today, only a cleaning man in a smelly basement, but many years ago I was a top KGB man here in Lithuania. It was

my job to identify people like you and to turn them over to the KGB. Many disappeared. Forever! But, you, my American friend, have found me far beyond those years. Do not look so pale and distressed. KGB? Gone. My youth and desire to serve those masters? Also, gone. Let me tell you something. The story of the missing gem came up perhaps a month after the dead girl was found.”

*Get your breath back, Ed. Breathe.*

“Do you know what happened to it?”

“I know many things. Remember, I was a very well connected man years ago, and I have kept up with some of my contacts over the years. I know, for example, that the body went to a funeral business called Gyvenimas Begalybė, or ‘live forever.’ The man that owned the business was known to steal jewels and gems and even gold tooth fillings from the people he prepared. But, like too many things, local authorities turned a blind eye so long as they received their... shall we call them ‘gifts?’”

“What else can you tell me?”

“I can tell you that he was arrested and was found to be in possession of a very large blue diamond, although he claimed that it was a worthless piece of blue quartz. He is still in prison, though I hear that his health is poor and he may not even be coherent. To cut to the end of my tale, I must tell you that the diamond was taken into custody by the local Governor General. It disappeared about five years ago when the man was removed from power when his successor claimed that crimes had been committed against the people. The last thing I heard of it was that it had been taken out of the country and to one of the Asian countries. I believe that it is in Kabulistan.”

*Nuts! It would have to be Kabulistan. I’m about this close to being kicked out of there for good. They told me the next time I came into the country that I would be able to stay only a few days and that it ‘must be on a recognized vacation, not an*

*business or adventure!’ or I would be in big trouble.*

“Pavel. Are you certain it is Kabulistan? As in the Kabul area of Afghanistan?”

“Yes. I am quite certain. In fact, I believe that you will find that it reached as far as Qandahar. At least, that is the last I ever heard of it. You know, Edward, that confiding in anyone in this part of the world can be dangerous, don’t you?”

*Oh-oh!*

“Uh, yes I do, Pavel. But I hoped that a gentleman like you might be trusted. Was I wrong?”

“No, my American friend. You were not wrong. What I was about to tell you was that we might have avoided the past several hours of searching and lifting heavy piles of old newspapers if we had been in a time or place where we might have trusted each other from the very beginning.”

“Well, thank you, Pavel. I appreciate your assistance. My I give you something as a reward for your help?”

“It is a sad truth that if you gave me a gift, the state would take it from me. If you gave me money, I would only use it on foolish drinking to try to forget my worries. If you will, I would ask that you give me your hand. I wish to shake the hand of a truly free man. A man that I hope will remain my friend.”

*The man is about to make me cry. Geez!*

“Pavel, my friend. I offer my hand in friendship.”

That was about the hardest thing I’ve been through lately. I wish I could do something for him. Ah, well. At least I was able to get the information and get out of there in one piece. Now I just have to work on getting out of Lithuania and into Kabulistan!

## CHAPTER 5/

### Doin’ The Kabul Shuffle

LET ME give you a word of advice. It is a cinch getting from any former Soviet nation and into Pakistan, even on a U.S. passport, and easier than it would have been had I tried getting here from, say, England.

Even Afghanistan, former sworn enemy of the Soviets, has fewer restrictions on them than they do on North Americans—and that includes Canadians.

I arrived yesterday and only spent nine hours waiting for some “official” to come interview me as to my intentions, once they saw my passport. I didn’t dare tell them my real purpose, so I simply said that I was “on vacation” in their lovely land.

That earned me a rather stern, disbelieving stare over the top of his thick-rimmed glasses. A really long stare. Really long!

Finally, he sighed and made a few tick marks on whatever paper he had on his clipboard and then handed me back my passport with a piece of pink paper stuck in it. It read:

Bearer, known as: Edward Matthew Longstreet, is granted entrance to the Nation of Afghanistan from this date: May 23 until: May 28, a period of no greater than five (5) days.

It went on to say that I could not work in any capacity, and that I had to report my accommodations once I obtained them. Further, I was limited to 100 kilometers travel distance outside of the city unless I provided 24-hour notice to the ‘proper authorities.’ Oh, and that if I didn’t leave when I was suppose to that I was subject to three years in prison, followed by deportation.

I looked at him, and he looked at me, giving me a big, mean-spirited smile with a mouth full of half-rotted teeth.

Now I have to find a place to stay, and then figure out a way to look like I am just a tourist while I try to hunt down the gem. I don't anticipate that it will be as easy as it all sounds.

\* \* \* \* \*

Found a hotel. Actually, it is in pretty good condition given that this is a terribly run-down city and country. I guess I would be too if I had played host to a couple of wars and was alternately ruled by religious zealots and terrorists, and then by borderline democracy.

I'm going to walk around a bit, just in case the two men following me with the subtlety of a giraffe in a village of pigmies are trying to catch me doing non-tourist things. Fortunately, visiting shops, especially jewelry shops, is exactly the thing a tourist is likely to do.

That one over there, for instance. The sign is all in Hindi, or something, but having a giant, glass diamond ring hanging from it is sort of a give away.

Geez but it's hot in here. That's another note to anyone figuring on a visit here. Water? Bad, unless you want to stay in the toilet. Food? Okay so long as it is cooked and still hot. Air conditioning. Ha-ha-ha! As Chico Marx use to say to Groucho in their movies, "That's a some good joke, eh, Boss?"

"Excuse me. Do you speak English?"

"F'la."

*My Arabic isn't very good, but I think he says that he does. Let's try another one.*

"I am interested in jewels. Do you sell them loose?"

"F'la."

"Do you say anything other than, 'I do?'"

"When it pleases me to do so, yes. 'F'la. May I please examine your passport?"

"Uh... certainly. Might I ask why?"

"It is because those two men standing across the street are government inspectors, I believe would be your word. I call them Jnā'iy—criminals! Thank you. Please make a visible show of taking it back from me. Yes. And now, we will speak with many smiles and much gestures. All for their benefit."

*Okay. This might be interesting.*

"My name is Edward. I am looking for large gems. Very large ones. Perhaps even one that is old. Might I find something such as that in your store?"

*He is taking a really long time looking me over. I'm not sure about the local customs. I might try offering him money, but that might be seen as suspicious and I certainly can't do it in the open with the goon squad out there!*

"Should I ask the question in some other say, sir?"

"No. It is not that. There are many things one can purchase here in Kabul. Many new things. Many things we buy from China for very little and then haggle with Americans and English tourists until they pay ten times the cost. And, there are many old things. Some may be purchased and some are not for sale at any price. My belief is that you are looking for the latter. Hmmm?"

"Well, I am not looking for anything that might be thought of as an antiquity. In fact, what I might be looking for is less that a century old. I do not believe that anything like it has been produced in the last one hundred years, that's all."

*Again with the staring up and down. I have a bad feeling about this. I may have come on too specific too soon.*

“Sydy is, of course, within his rights to inquire. I am within my rights, you will agree I hope, that I should not wish to be involved in the purchase of something like Sydy has described.”

“Yes. I apologize for asking more than I should from you. I thank you for your time. I will go now. Thank you.”

“Please, Sydy. If you might, take this paper and pencil and move to the far side of that display. If you could write down your hotel information. It is a strange fact that often things asked may be considered at a later time and a beneficial answer provided. Do you not think so?”

“Yes I do. Let me write that down.”

“Ah. Please allow me to fuss about near my front window while you do so. The Jnā’iy will only see me and will pay no attention to you.”

*Boy. Either he’s done this before, or he’s seen a lot of spy movies. Okay. Where’s that business card? Oh, right. Shirt pocket. So—Hotel Pleaso...and the room number... and their phone number. Right.*

“Alright, sir. I have the information written down. Now what?”

“Now, Sydy, please just set the paper on that display and come back to me. We must still smile and gesture for another few minutes while I show you some worthless crystals cut like diamonds. You should appear to be foolish enough to believe they are real. Nod a few times. Yes. And, now I mention a price you believe to be far too high. They cannot see your face, so I will look disappointed. I suggest another price. You shall shake you head now, please. Yes. Now, give me back the ring and begin going for the door. Stop. I beg you to come back. This is much fun, is it not? We are actors for an audience of two idiots.”

“You seem to have gone through this before. Am I correct?”

“Ah. When you live in Kabul and deal with terrorists, Jnā’iy,

and even the occasional honest tourist, you need to develop the skill of—I do not remember the word. Pan—? Pan something.”

“Pantomime?”

“Ah. Sydy is a reader of minds. Exactly. Pantomime. Wide waving of hands, big smiles and even bigger frowns that might be understood by the incredibly stupid from their perches across the street. And, now you must make your exit. I suggest that you visit several other stores such as mine in order that your keepers should see that you are, I think the expression is, shopping for a window?”

“Window shopping. I understand. I will only be in Kabul for four more days before my visa expires. When might I hope to hear from you?”

“Soon, my friend. Soon, indeed.”

So, my shadows have been joined by another two. And, look at that. It’s just gone four ‘clock. Must be shift change time. This is my chance to try to shake them while they are doing the hand-off. I use to watch these scenes in movies and wonder how the hero always was able to duck in and out of stores and buildings and then shake the tail in about one minute.

I’ll try this shop.

Good. Lots of tall displays to hide behind. And that one over there is perfect. Plenty to cover and a good view of the door. Will you look at that? All four of them walked right past the store. And, boy did they look worried.

I think I’ll just stay here for another—

“Wāsmḥwā Ly Msā’dh?”

“Wha—? Oh. Hello. Do you speak English?”

“Lā. Ne. No Hanglash. Hl Ttklm al-Frnshy?”



*Did she just say 'French?'*

"French? Français? Je parle un peu français."

"Bon. Puis-je vous aider?"

"Non. Merci! Il suffit de regarder."

Gosh, that went better than I thought. I tell her I am only looking and she just walks away. Time to check if the coast is clear.

Well, it looks clear the way we came and I don't see them the other direction. So, out the door and away I go!

## CHAPTER 6/

### Sit and Rest a Spell

LET ME catch you up on the rest of my day. My tails finally caught up with me during my visit to the forth jeweler. In one of those Keystone Kops moments, they sort of barged into the shop, probably checking out all jewelers, and saw me. Then, cop number one stopped suddenly and cop number two plowed right into his back, knocking them both to the ground.

It was the least I could do to go over and help them get back on their feet. We probably don't speak any common language, but acute embarrassment is universal.

But, I'm getting ahead of myself. A little. Store number two was definitely meant for tourists. Knock-off watches from many manufacturers, cheap trade-them-to-the-natives-for-Manhattan beads and bangles, and a lot of 'gemstones' that looked like they were cut from different color soda bottles.

They might have been at that.

I ended up buying a "true and absolutely guaranteed ruby of highest order, perfect for wife or mother!" at the unheard of price of five dollars. That was two hundred and forty-five Afghani and I'm sure that he told me I was stealing food from his children's mouths at that price.

Right!

I'll probably have it mounted and give it to Auntie Anne's daughter, Sandy. She's just about to go into her senior year of high school and it might make a great conversation piece for her.

Store number three was just across the street from number two. He had seen me buying something and asked to see it. Of course, according to his expert eye, I had just purchased

“trash” and “that scoundrel over there should be dragged through the streets of Kabul for selling it to you!” Of course, he was more than willing to sell me a better gem at only twice the price.

His “steal” was a fairly nice-looking emerald. Or, it could have been some glass from an old 7-Up bottle bottom.

Anyway, I asked if he had any kunzite. It is a beautiful stone and comes in many pinks and light greens. It is difficult to fake, so if he had any, it was probably real.

He smiled another of those ‘my teeth started to rot twenty years ago’ smiles at me and then put his chump gems away. He went to a locked display case and brought over a tray of beautiful light pink gems.

“Sydy knows of kunzite? These are my pieces. I give good prices, too. You like?”

*Oh, my god. He’s got a really beautiful heart cut. That’s got to be at least twenty carats! Let’s see. I can get stones for about ten bucks a carat back home, so that one would fetch two hundred fifty at least.*

“Yes. I do like. If I pointed to the stone I really want, would you give me your best price, or would you ask high and want to bargain down?”

“Please, Sydy. You show me the stone you like and I will give you my best price. I will tell you that I buy kunzite for about one hundred fifty Afghani per carat. I buy part-cut and do the finish work myself. I must make something for my troubles, but I will not cheat you like he did over there.”

*Here goes.*

“I like that heart cut stone. How large is it?”

“Twenty-eight carats. Is it not nice? No flaws. My favorite. I sell it to you for six thousand Afghani. You buy?”

*Let’s see. That’s got to be around a hundred-thirty to a hundred-forty bucks. I’ll never find anything that nice back home. And, If he’ll let me look at it using his loupe, then I’m pretty sure I can spot if it’s a fake or not.*

“May I examine it?”

“Yes. My eyepiece, please. Look closely. It is very nice. I guarantee it.”

So, to cut to the chase, I bought it and left his store a happy man.

That took me to store four and the two stooges performance. After I picked them up, they hustled outside and across the street. I made a show of looking at the gems in that store, but left after five minutes.

I even made a big show of clearing my throat and getting their attention before I and my tails headed back to the hotel. I checked at the desk and there was no message for me.

The hotel has a restaurant that the desk manager assures me is “the best in the entire city, sir.” I went down there and had a meal of flavored rices, heavily spiced meats—and I didn’t ask the origin of the meat—orange segments with almonds in honey and olive oil with mint, and even a tasty dessert featuring yoghurt and fruits. I don’t have much to compare it to, but I would have to say that it is certainly one of the restaurants I would go back to.

To top it off, I discovered that my meal was twenty-percent off because I was staying at the hotel. Bonus!

Now, it is time to catch up on some missing sleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

My day two in Kabul was a truly uninspired time. I spent most of today walking around and trying to look like a tourist. That meant lots of stopping and admiring things I wouldn’t be seen

with back home or wouldn't consider giving as gifts. I had several offers of a young boy's older sister's, shall we call them 'negotiable affections?' I was grabbed by several merchants who seemed desperate to dress me like a local in clothing that smelled of previous use and poor hygiene.

I am not certain why, but I found several German restaurants in the main part of the city. One provided lunch and another dinner.

By the time I got back here to the hotel, and checked for any message—none—it was almost ten and time to hit the pillow. Geez, but I hope tomorrow will be better. I may have to go back to the first jewelry store to prompt him. I've only got another two nights and two full days plus a morning before I've got to blow out of here.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some time during the night, someone came to the hotel and left me a message. I evidently picked it up just before my tails of the day arrived and went to the desk. The clerk pointed over to me and the two men—new ones yet again—turned red and spun away from me when they saw me looking right at them.

I'm pretty sure that they threatened the clerk as he turned deathly pale and suddenly sweaty when they spoke to him. He must have been describing that he had already given me the message they seemed to want to have.

That was an hour ago and I'm heading out to see my jeweler. According to the note, he wants to meet me at his business.

Before I get there I'm trying to shake this tail. These guys are a bit more on the ball than the other ones. I've ducked into a couple shops to no avail. One comes in and the other stays outside, watching. I was really hoping to sneak out when they headed to the back of the shops.

Not happening.

Wait. This alley is perfect. Lots of little shop stalls all along both sides. Let's see if I can get lost in here. In fact, that one on the right. Fruit boxes piled high with lots of hiding room. And, there they are. On schedule. Oh, that's precious. They look all bothered that they don't see me. Just as long as the woman running this stall keeps paying attention to the couple she's selling to and doesn't look at me...

Good. Jog right past. That's good. Now get up to a good run. I *must* have run down there and out the other end.

Well. That's that. Now I just have to get about ten blocks away in fifteen minutes and everything will be fine.

Oh. Guess I wasn't where thought I was. There's his shop just down the street. Must have lost track with all that zigging and zagging. Looks like he is open, so—

"Good morning."

"Ah, my American friend. You have come back. I trust you have had an enjoyable morning with your Jnā'iy followers?"

"It has been an interesting morning. I evidently picked up your message just before they arrived at the hotel."

"Oh, no! No, Sydy. I did not send you a message. Oh, my. Oh, this is not good. You must leave right now. Quickly, before they catch up to you. And, destroy that message. Oh, my. Go!"

Geez! Talk about a bum's rush. Now I've got to get away from here. Fast!

Shoot! There's Frick and Frack and they're looking for me. They haven't seen me, yet. Got to get out of here.

Oh-oh!

"Are you mister Edward Longstreet, sir?"

*Damn. Damn. Damn.*

“Yes, officer. I am. Can I help you?”

“Your passport, please.”

“Certainly. Here. Can I ask what this is about?”

*Okay. The silent treatment while he pretends to read my passport. I can wait him out.*

“Mister Longstreet? We have a report that you may be acting against your specified intention while in our country. What have you been doing?”

“Mostly walking around your city and doing a little shopping. Why? I stated that I was here as a tourist, and that’s what I’ve been doing.”

“Hmmm. We have a report that this is not the case. You will accompany us now. We will determine if you are who you say you are.”

*Well. On the bright side, he didn’t put me in handcuffs. On the negative side, Frick and Frack are walking along ten feet behind us. Guess I didn’t lose them enough!*

“Inside here, please.”

*Well, I may not be able to read the characters, but a police station is a police station.*

“Sit over there. I will be back as soon as I speak with the chief of this station.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Okay. I’ve been sitting here for about six hours. Surely he’s had that conversation by now!

## CHAPTER 7/

### **Kabulistan is Just a State of Mind**

EVERY now and again people fall through the cracks. Sometimes it ends badly. Sometimes it ends well. And, sometimes, somebody comes along and stares at you, then says, “So, why are you still here? The Chief Constable gave orders to release you many hours ago.”

*Nice.*

“Uh, nobody came here to release me. The men who brought me in disappeared. I think they still have my passport.”

“No, sir. Your passport will be with the guard at the front desk. He will provide you with it plus a paper that seems to have fallen from it. It says that you must leave Afghanistan in two days. Have you done something wrong?”

“Not that I know of. When I came in the other day, the immigration man took a dislike to me and issued that paper.”

“Ah. Did you give him five hundred Afghani?”

*Was I supposed to bribe him?*

“No. Was I supposed to?”

“It might have avoided many problems for you if you had. It is, of course, too late now, but the next time you come to Afghanistan it might be wise to simply place the appropriate bank note inside your passport.”

*Well, that’s great. Oh, but for the lack of a ten dollar bribe I’m stuck with an order to leave the country in just forty-six hours, and I’m nowhere nearer to finding out anything about the Boyai Gem than I was a week ago. That must be the desk.*

“Hello. I need to pick up my passport, please.”

“Yes. Here passport. Sign.”

*Okay. I sign. Right where he pushed his rather dirty finger. Ick!*

“Thank you.”

And, it’s out the door for our intrepid adventurer. It’s just gone four. I think I’ll go back to the shop and see if the jeweler has anything for me.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Hello. I’m back!”

“Oh, Sydy. I was worried about you. When the police take people away, it is not a good omen. For them or the people they speak to. Did they ask about me?”

“No. Actually, I’m not sure what was going on. First I receive a note that seems to be from you, and then I run out and into the arms of the waiting police, and then I find out I should have bribed the immigration man, and... I’m not sure.”

“Well, you are here now. Did they follow you?”

“I don’t think so. I wasn’t really paying attention. They sort of forgot about me back at the police station.”

“Good. I have received some news. There is an old gem, possibly a diamond, that seems to have come into this country several years ago. It is quite large. Perhaps even one hundred carats. Does this sound like what you seek?”

“If it is blue, it does. Did your source say anything about a curse on the gem?”

“No. That is new to me. Is it suppose to be a cursed diamond? What they call a blood diamond? Many deaths associated with it?”

“Only those who possess it.”

“And, you wish to possess it? Do you invite death?”

“No. Actually, I am just trying to find out where it has been and where it is. It is my hobby—”

*Well, that brought out a blank look. Let’s see. Do I know any other language?*

“Umm, what I mean is that have a curiosity and spend time following that curiosity. It is something I do for enjoyment. Just like some men carve wood or stone for enjoyment? Yes. That is a hobby. Or, as some children build models. A hobby. Anyway, my hobby is to try to find out what happened to things. Gems. Old idols. Lost civilizations.”

“Ah. You are Indiana Jones, correct?”

*Someone really needs to teach these people about oral hygiene!*

“Something like that, only I don’t want to take the gem. I just want to know who has it and where it has been for the past several years.”

“Well, Sydy, I only know that it is in Kabul. But I know a man —”

“Who knows a man, who knows a man who might know who actually has it?”

“Ah. I see that you have been in this position before. Yes. Only the man I know is the person who knows the owner of the gem. May I ask a question?”

“Yes.”

“Does this diamond have a name? Like the Hope Diamond or that movie diamond, the Pink Panther?”

“It has had many names, but the most recent is the Boyai Gem.”

“Boyai. Boyai. Interesting. Is it a person’s name?”

“Yes. An owner from about thirty years ago named it. That would be eight owners in the past. Or more.”

“Very good, Sydy. The man you seek is named Esfandyar. He is a man of only slight legal status. Not a true criminal, but a man with questionable motives. He is not truly dangerous, not physically, but I do not trust him.”

*Oh, good. A shady character who isn’t physically dangerous to me. Great!*

“How will I find him?”

“It has been arranged. He will meet you at a small café behind your own hotel. At midnight, tonight. You will know him easily. He always has a small monkey on his shoulder. A very nasty monkey. Watch out if it reaches around to its backside. Nasty indeed.”

*Yeah. I’ve been the victim of a monkey flinging its own— Well, anyway—*

“Will I be expected to pay him? It’s just that I found out today that I should have bribed the immigration man—”

“Ah. Yes. It has been arranged that you will pay him one thousand Afghani and he will tell you who the current owner of the... the Boyai is.”

“That’s it? I pay him that much money and all he does is give me a name and disappears into the night? What if he gives me a phony name?”

“I am not certain of this phony. It means?”

“Fake. False. Made up.”

“Oh. I see the confusion. No. He is bringing with him the man who now owns the gem. You will pay him and then meet with the man.”

*I can see this coming out badly. I meet with guy one and he introduces me to guy two and then they beat the snot out of me. This, I do not like!*

“It has all the makings of a trap. Do you understand what I mean?”

“I do. All I can say is that even though Esfandyar is a Jnā’i, he has never been known to harm anyone.”

\* \* \* \* \*

So, I’ve spent the last couple hours in my room. I’m nervous about tonight. Too nervous to eat. Now, here I am behind the hotel, right where the exhaust from the hotel restaurant comes out with all those smells... and I am both nervous *and* hungry.

It just hit me. I haven’t had anything to eat since last night. Rats.

I’ve got about five minutes before I’m suppose to go in there. Wish I knew more about this Esfandyar guy. Nobody’s gone in with a monkey, yet. Either he got there a half hour early, or he’s going to be right on time.

Or, he’s going to stand me up.

Here goes. That’s strange. There’s nobody in here. Wait. That looks like a monkey peering over the top of that booth. Yep. Can’t miss that screech.

“Excuse me. You must be Mister Esfandyar.”

“N’m. I am. You are the American with my one thousand Afghanis?”

“I am. But, before I just hand this over, tell me where this other man is. It isn’t that I don’t trust you, it is just—”

“That you do not trust Esfandyar. Esfandyar the crook. Esfandyar the cheat. Esfandyar the qdhr—the *dirty!* I would

not trust Esfandiyar if I were you. You are wise to question me. And, I will tell you. The man you will meet is right behind you —don't turn around. Not just yet. My money, please?"

"Okay. Half now and half when I begin talking to the man who is suppose to be behind me. Right?"

"HMMMM? Esfandiyar is not use to haggling. But, I see that you are a man without a weapon and without anyone to make your back safe. So, I will trust you. Five hundred."

"And, here it is. Now I get to turn around?"

"Oh, yes. Turn."

*That's why I never heard him walking up behind me. He's in a really quiet wheelchair.*

"Good evening, mister Longstreet. Ah, you are surprised that I know your name?"

"I am. I must admit that. And, you are?"

"My name is Shanbeh Harkeshi. Most people called me Shane when I attended university in England. But, as you can see from this rather withered body, that was many, many years ago. If you will be so kind as to give our mister Esfandiyar his remaining money, he can leave us in peace."

"Right. Here you go."

"Thank you, 'fndy."

"Fine. Now that he has left us, might I offer you a drink? Oh, don't look surprised, mister Longstreet. This may be an Arabic country, but there is plenty of alcohol to be had by those who flaunt the laws and are old enough to not care. Like our treasured Kabulistan, strict Islamic rules extend to many, but are simply memories and ignored concepts to the rich. Things we nod our heads over but then ignore to meet our needs and desires. And, Kabulistan only exists to the satisfaction of those

who need it. We are simply the city of Kabul in Afghanistan. So? A drink?"

"I haven't had anything to eat today. Been too busy. I'd rather have a sandwich if it's all the same."

"Yes. Of course. You were detained, weren't you? I am sorry to say that that was my fault. I heard that you wanted to find the owner of a certain gem, and I had that note delivered to you. Little did I know that you would have to play hide-and-seek with your minders. I had no opportunity to pick you up on your way to the jeweler's shop. Ah. Aarif? al-Mā'z Shṭyrh. Mnāqsh. Lm Yblgh Mn al-'Mr! Sry'. Wāthnyn Mn al-Byrh. I have just ordered you a sandwich and a beer that I hope you will join me in drinking."

"Thank you. So, is it impolite to ask you directly about the Boyai?"

"Is that what the gem is called? I had been told that it is called The Kotswalis."

"The Kotawalis, with an 'a'."

"Ah. I see. The Kotawalis. But you know it as the Boyai?"

"Yes. It was The Kotawalis up until about 1968. After that, the then owner, a Chinese woman named Tsu, renamed it in honor of an American Italian chef. Strange, but that's what she did."

"I have all night, mister Longstreet. Can you tell me more about the Boyai? Then, I will tell you what I know about it during its stay in Kabulistan."

\* \* \* \* \*

"... and that is when it is suppose to have disappeared from Lithuania and was brought here. Uh, is there any possibility of another of those sandwiches and another beer?"

"Absolutely! Aarif! Thānyh! So, now, it is my turn. My

understanding is that the gem came into the country with a foreign diplomat or politician. Not, I might say, in the usual way. He is supposed to have swallowed it on his way here. To avoid detection I suppose. But, someone must have known he had the gem. He arrived one day and disappeared the next. His body, viciously cut open, was discovered a week later.”

“Ouch! But it is a cursed stone after all.”

“Of course. Would it surprise you that the man was bringing it to me? That I knew of it when it was in Lithuania? That I had him taken, disemboweled and dumped like trash? Well, rest assured, that I did none of these. I have been accused of it, but I did nothing. In fact, I only heard about the stone a year or so later. In a state of foolishness I had taken a young woman to be my bride. She, of course, only was seeking my riches and not my love. I put out, I believe the word is ‘feelers,’ trying to find a large gem with which to impress her.”

“And you bought the Boyai?”

“I did. At a wonderful price. The person who had it was afraid of it. He had heard of a curse on it, and had soon taken ill once he cut it from the Lithuanian. I got it at a steal and gave it to my young wife. She rewarded me by sneaking out of our home that very evening with the jewel, many pieces of gold and silver, and a man from Qandahar.”

“So, the Boyai disappeared? You don’t know where it is?”

“The gem was returned to me a week later. My bride had killed her lover and cohort, and had been arrested. I told the police that the gem was worthless quartz, but that it had sentimental value so they gave it back. For her adultery and theft she was stoned to death a month later. It is a sad thing in our society, but it is the accepted punishment.”

“I don’t mean to sound callous, but does that mean that you still have it?”

“No. But, I can give you the name of the man who bought it

from me. Abdul Azim al-Abdullah. To the best of my knowledge, he had it with him when his jetliner crashed in the northern mountains several months ago. If it is a real diamond, it could still be with that wreckage—they only found about fifty percent of the pieces. If it is not a diamond, well then—”



**CHAPTER 8/****Heading Home?**

I HAVE TO tell you something. Adventuring and exploring has about a five percent success rate. I guess that's why not a lot of people do it. I can only believe that the constant disappointment would be like constant rejection is to an actor.

In the case of this adventure, everything hits the full stop at the same time that jet hit the mountains. It isn't that I want the darn thing, but it would be nice to know what ultimately happened to the Boyai, and I can't go up there because I have to leave tomorrow and can't go that far away from the city without getting into trouble.

Well, I had a nice couple of goat sandwiches and two cool beers and all for the bargain price of about a twenty dollar bill.

Now, and after sleeping half the day away, I have about twenty hours to kill before heading back to Germany and then on to the U.S. I'll be back in my own bed in three nights. Hurray!

In the mean time, I'm going to sit here in the lobby and people watch until it is dinnertime.

"Mister Longstreet?"

"Huh? Oh, hello officer. As you can see, someone eventually came along and let me go. You must have been called away or I'm sure that you would have come right back from your meeting and released me."

*I hope that sarcasm isn't a crime here.*

"Mister Longstreet. I must ask you to come with me. You are under arrest for the murder of Tarik Habib and the theft of a large gem from his home."

"Tarik Habib? I've never heard of him. No. I met last night with

Shanbeh Harkeshi. Old man in a wheelchair? Educated in England?"

"Mister Longstreet. Tarik Habib is a man of no more than fifty years and in the peak of health. You were reported to have met with him, had a violent argument and then poisoned him! You are under arrest. Come with me now or I will have you beaten and dragged out of here!"

*Holy crap! What's going on?*

"Officer. Listen. I tell you that I met with an old man named Shanbeh Harkeshi and we spoke about a piece of jewelry he use to own, but no longer has. No violence. No argument. No poison!"

"Either you get up from your seat and come with me or I call my men. Well?"

"Okay. Okay. No men. No beating. I'll come along. This is obviously a mistake."

*Please let it be a misunderstanding!*

\* \* \* \* \*

"Sit down. This woman will take down everything that is said in this interrogation. I know that you Americans believe that you have rights in such matters. That might be so in America. You are in Afghanistan. I will ask you questions and you will answer."

*This isn't going to go well.*

"Now, last evening you met with a man named Esfandiyar. This is correct?"

"I briefly saw Esfandiyar. He was arranging a meeting with another man. Shanbeh Harkeshi."

"So *you* say. Now, mister Esfandiyar has told us that he never introduced you to Tarik Habib. Tarik Habib who owned a

clothing store that you visited the other day. A shop girl tells us you spoke to her. In French. She distinctly remembers you and identified you from a picture.”

“I admit that I spoke to a woman in a clothing shop. She asked me if she might assist me. In Arabic. Then we discovered that we both spoke some French. I thanked her and told her I didn’t need help. That’s all.”

“Hmmm. Why were you in that particular shop?”

“I was trying to get rid of the two men you had tailing me. Actually, it was four that time. They ran right by the shop.”

“Okay. About your meeting last night. The one with Tarik Habib.”

“I never met with that man. The man I met with was an old man, probably eighty, in a wheelchair. He had the cook make me a goat sandwich and we both had—”

*Oh-oh. Best not mention the beer.*

“—I mean I had two sandwiches and we talked. Talked about a gem he owned a year or more ago that I was curious about. It has a curse on it. I was just curious.”

“So, you poisoned him when he refused to sell it to you. Then, you went to his house and stole the gem. This you cannot refute. We found the very gem in your belongings at the hotel. Here it is!”

“Oh. Ha-ha. That’s just a kunzite gem I bought a couple days ago. It’s worth about six thousand Afghani. That’s what I paid for it.”

“Hmm. This is not the cursed gem? Is that what you are telling me? But, it is a gem like the description of the one stolen. And there is the matter of the dead man.”

*What the heck is going on here? Oh, Eddy. What have you*

*gotten yourself into this time?*

“Listen, officer. I come from a very rich family. If I wanted a gem that was for sale, I could and would pay for it. Even if it were a million Afghani. I’d never kill for something, and I didn’t kill anyone!”

“Riches do not an honest man make, or so goes an old proverb of our people. I must also add that even a criminal such as Esfandiyar must not be automatically thought to be a liar.”

“Listen. I tell you that I am innocent. I met with a man that Esfandiyar introduced me to. I paid him about one thousand Afghani for his services. That man was old and in a wheelchair. He knew the cook at the little café by name. We spoke about the gem he use to own and how it had been purchased from him by another man named Abdul something Abdullah who died with the gem in a jet crash in the mountains.”

“Wait! Wait one minute. You say that the old man said he sold a gem to an Abdul Abdullah? Did he say Abdul Azim al-Abdullah?”

“Yes. I’m pretty sure that was the name. Why?”

“Hmmm? Well, I need to leave you for a while. Perhaps overnight even. I must investigate something.”

“But, wait. I’m supposed to fly out of Kabul tomorrow. Wait!”

Well, rats! Guess I’m stuck. I didn’t even get the chance to play the ‘card’ where I tell him I’m related to the man that helped their nation become rich back in the 50’s.

Where’s a Swift when you need one?

\* \* \* \* \*

“Wake up, mister Longstreet. I have news.”

“Huh? Wha—?”

“Stand up, please, and come with me. All will be explained.”

*Geez. Wonder what time it is. My back is killing me.*

“Mister Longstreet. Please take a seat. I have much to tell you and there is some that you need to tell me.”

“Okay. What?”

“To begin, allow me to repeat your story to see if I have it correct. You came to Kabul five days ago, and are suppose to be a tourist. No. Don’t speak yet. Please allow me to continue. That very day you went to several jeweler’s shops. You remained a lengthy time at one and shorter times at the others. Plus, you were able to lose yourself from your, let us say, protective escorts.”

“Yes.”

“Fine. During the next three days you went to other jeweler’s shops, a few other merchants and into the store of Tarik Habib, our dead man.”

“I swear that I had no idea who the owner was. I’ve never heard of Tarki Habib. Ever!”

“Ah, but you do know the man. Let me tell you how. You met just after midnight with two men in the Café Fez. One, a man with a monkey and another in, as you have told us many times, in a wheeled chair. You dined, drank beer—don’t deny it; it is the least of your worries—and then parted ways an hour later.”

“Pretty much what happened. So, how do I know Tarik Habib?”

“Tarik Habib was the man with the monkey.”

“What?”

“Yes, mister Longstreet. The man with the monkey was Tarik Habib. The old man in the wheeled chair was, in fact, Abdul Azim al-Abdullah. Educated in England. He is very much alive and did not perish in any crash of a jet aircraft in our

mountains. He is, however, a man wanted for the murder of his young bride more than a year ago!”

“Oh. And who is Esfandyar? Did I ever meet him?”

“As it happens, Esfandyar had been in the local hospital for the past two weeks. After we questioned him last evening, he disappeared. I do not know where he is now, but I have a strong suspicion that he is only involved in your troubles by name. One question, please. The man who prepared your food that evening. Describe him.”

*Wow. I never paid much attention, but he doesn’t want to hear that. Let me see...*

“Well, he was a fairly tall man. Perhaps six feet and two or three inches. Uh... about one-hundred and eighty-five or ninety centimeters. Heavy build. Beard—but that doesn’t help, does it? Oh! He had one lazy eye.”

“Lazy?”

“Yeah. Sort of... looking off in a different direction?”

“Ah. I understand. The circle is becoming complete. *That* man is most likely Shanbeh Harkeshi. The... er... lazy eye was the telling clue. This is all very strange. Harkeshi is a known importer of merchandise that circumvents legal channels. He is a criminal who is well known to us, but very secretive. If you met with him, then something very sinister was happening.”

*Tell me about it.*

“So, *do* you believe that I had nothing to do with this Takik Habib’s death? That I was just looking to find out about a gem?”

“Let me tell you something. When you entered the country an alarm went out. You are a known man, mister Longstreet. You are a relation of the famous Tom Swift twice removed. Tom Swift is a very important man in the memories of those of us

who served Kabulistan as it was entering the modern age. One of his original atomic flying automobiles is in our History Museum.”

“But, if you all knew who I was, then why the men following me? Why the arrest? Arrests?”

“To try to keep you from harm, mister Longstreet. al-Abdullah, Habib and many others immediately were made aware that you were... what is your word for looking with your nose?”

“Snooping?”

“Ah, yes. Snooping. You were *snooping* around looking for a very large diamond, one that several people have been killed over in recent years. Here and in other nations, I assume.”

“The diamond has a curse on it and, so far, it has been pretty good at killing the owners within a few years of their selling or losing the diamond. But, officer, I never wanted to get it; I am only interested in its history and whereabouts.”

“You may call me Hammah, and I shall call you Edward. Is that agreeable?”

“Yes, Hammah. Please make it Ed. So, what is next?”

“Well, Edward... Ed. Next we take you under guard to the airport and place you on your jet. Then, you go away and we try to find who actually murdered Tarik Habib. I suspect that it was al-Abdulla’s doing. One of his minions at the very least.”

“When do I leave?”

“First, you and I will have a nice breakfast in my office. After all, if the Chief of the Kabul police can not have servants bring him his meals, what good is the office?”

“Then?”

“And, then, we return all of your belongings, including the beautiful pink diamond you purchased—”

“Diamond? No. That’s kunzite. I paid just about six thousand Afghani, not fifty times that amount. I bought a kunzite.”

“Well, Ed, you may object to the description, but my brother is a man with a great knowledge of gems. I showed him the stone last night and he almost passed out. What you have, or will have as soon as we return it to you, is a pink diamond worth, in his estimation—and he did the conversion into dollars—worth about ninety-five thousand dollars!”

“How is that possible?”

“Well, twenty five carets multiplied by—”

“No, Hammah. I mean, how did I end up with a diamond? I looked at the stone and it was flawless, but I was pretty certain it was kunzite. And, now you tell me it isn’t?”

“It is not. It is not a pure diamond, and that is why by brother says it is not worth five times more. I suggest that you just be happy and take it back to America and give it to a young lady.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Well, I packed the gem that had been wrapped inside a sealed box they gave me into my carry on, plus the sealed document they provided me so that I could get it through German and U.S. Customs.

After clearing U.S Customs in Boston I looked at the letter. It stated that the “gem in this container is a cheap, man-made stone with a value of under twenty-five dollars.” Who do I believe now?

Everything went smoothly, and I was so tired that I didn’t check the actual stone until I got back to the house here in Maine.

I just opened it all up and took out the diamond. It is a beautiful, pink, rectangular-cut diamond. I’m going to take it down to Portland for an appraisal.

It is certain to be worth more than the heart-shaped kunzite I actually purchased.

I'm not sure what happened or how I ended up with this, but I think asking questions right now may not be a good thing. Some day, though... I'll head back and see what I can dig up.

Heck. Even if it turns out to be worth less, I will keep it as a memento of my little vacation.