

CHASING TIME

.....

[thomas.michael.reilly@gmail.com](mailto:thomas.michael.reilly@gmail.com)

302-528-9009

2413 LANDON DRIVE

WILMINGTON, DE 19810

## PROLOGUE: ROME, AD 52

Lucius Fabius Antonius fixed his gaze across the room at the rectangular strongbox in his atrium and silently prayed to the gods for a miracle. A locking wooden chest, reinforced with iron and brass fittings and richly carved with images of Minerva, the Roman goddess of commerce, it sat securely anchored on a stone base. At this early hour, the intricately designed chest reflected the golden light of dawn pouring through the large, square opening of the roof.

Lucius's silent musings were suddenly shattered by the shrill voice of his wife, Appia, and he braced himself for another tirade.

"Lucius, it's just past the dawn hour and I can already hear the merchants across the street setting up their stalls. I'm so tired of this domus. It might have served us well when we first moved here from that shabby apartment, but that was over five years ago. How do you expect me to entertain guests who are accustomed to the grandest villas? Our situation is simply embarrassing."

Lucius paused to collect himself before responding. "Appia, please be patient. You know I am working to remedy our condition. If the gods see fit, we should be able to move to that villa in the hills very soon. Now leave me, as I have some business to attend to."

In fact, the domus of Lucius was considered modest by the standards of the time, and certainly by the standards of Appia. The single-story stone home sat across the street from the bustling tabernae, or stalls where merchants peddled their various wares of pottery, dishes, silks, spices, and other imported goods. Its main entrance was a large wooden door with prominent brass doorknobs. Beyond the door was a short vestibulum or hallway that led to the central atrium, an open central court where Lucius and Appia would typically greet their guests. No second

courtyard, or peristylum, was present, nor was there any indoor pond. The rooms adjoining the atrium, although brightly decorated in florid colors, were small, and lacked the grand mosaic floors constructed by master craftsmen that were common in the domi of Lucius and Appia's friends. Lucius's trade as an olive oil merchant in one of those very stalls across from his domus had been depressed as of late—the worst in eight years, since the infamous economic depression of A.D. 44. This slowdown did not in any way quell the nearly daily protests from Appia about the humble state of their household.

Lucius was not born to upper class citizenry; indeed, successful Roman merchants rarely came from that echelon. Many traditional patrician families still considered careers as merchants to be demeaning. However, over the past ten years he had built a successful, if somewhat vacillating trade in selling olive oil imported from southern Iberia. One important characteristic that greatly contributed to his success was his obsession with time, and in particular, his uncanny ability to predict future events. From his years as a young boy to the present, he had utilized this forecasting talent to his advantage. This ability manifested itself in many ways. For example, as a child he had amazed his friends and augmented his popularity with them through his knack of predicting when certain boys would win at the various games of chance they played, especially those involving dice. As a young man, he had foreseen the exact date of a trading vessel's return to its home port after an almost year long voyage to the far reaches of India. This had enabled Lucius to seize the opportunity to purchase most of the ship's cargo of rare spices before other local merchants could act. The profit he had earned in selling those spices had enabled him to establish his olive oil enterprise.

Lucius's stare returned to the strongbox with its delicately crafted lock, and he wondered if somehow his unique talent could rescue him from his dire situation. For ironically, the very chest

that he had purchased in an effort to placate Appia's aspirations and impress visitors now held the instrument of his downfall. Stored within the strongbox's confines, along with a few precious gold and silver items, was a contract, scrolled on papyrus sheets and marked with the emblem of Valeri, a prominent mensarii, or banking, family on the Via Sacra. Spurred on by incessant complaints from Appia and by his own personal ambitions, seven months earlier Lucius had procured a huge loan of five hundred thousand sesterces from House Valeri to fund a trading voyage to the olive-rich area of Hispania in the Iberian peninsula.

Lucius recoiled in trepidation as he recalled the onerous terms he had accepted following difficult negotiations with an unyielding mensarii, Attitus Regulus.

"Lucius Antonius, please recognize the risk in this undertaking. Your galley must first traverse the dangerous currents and pirate-infested waters of the Mare Nostrum (Mediterranean), and then navigate up the Baetis River to reach the olive-rich province of Betica. Assuming your vessel even makes it that far, you must then hope that both the supply and quality of the local olive crop is sufficient to fully stock your cargo holds with premium product. And from there, your galley must again navigate the Mare Nostrum to reach home port safely."

Lucius had countered, "But Attitus Regulus, you must surely appreciate my experience in the olive oil trade. In recent years, I have co-funded many successful journeys. And as you know, the sea route is routinely monitored by naval patrols to protect against marauding pirates. These factors must certainly be considered for reducing the risks of such an undertaking."

In response, Attitus simply shrugged as if Lucius's words had no more relevance than the musings of a young child. "We will accept an interest rate of twenty-four percent on the loan to compensate for the dangers of this sea voyage."

"But twenty-four percent is more than twice the standard rate. Surely we can agree on more just terms," intoned Lucius.

"This is our final rate; we will accept nothing less. And in these difficult times, we must insist on one other condition."

Lucius shuddered at hearing these last words. What else beyond the already exorbitant interest rate could this obstinate mensarii extract from me? he thought.

Attitus continued. "As you are probably aware, in these difficult days the Republic has wisely chosen to suspend its sanction on contracts where the lender may gain rights over the debtor's property. At House Valeri, we have found it necessary to resort to such unpleasant agreements to protect our interests. We must therefore impose an additional stipulation to your contract. If you fail to repay the first installment of your loan, an amount of fifty-thousand sesterces, within six months of the starting date of your voyage, we have the right to claim ownership of your domus."

Lucius felt numb as the banker's words reeled in his mind. Then anger took over. "This is outrageous. Surely you can't impose such oppressive terms on me as if I am nothing more than a spurious merchant."

Responding in an unnerving, calm tone, the banker replied. "We understand your frustration. Nevertheless, this is the way it must be. There is no other option unless, of course, you decide to reject our loan."

Despite his serious misgivings, Lucius eventually accepted the mensarii's onerous terms. Unfortunately, the difficult economy had forced his hand; there simply were no other practical options to secure the required funds. He reasoned that, as sole financial backer of this expedition, he would capture the lion's share of profits on eventual sales of the imported olive

oil, rather than share them with other merchants as was his usual custom. With the expected windfall from this voyage, Lucius could finally put Appia's griping behind him by purchasing that grand villa she coveted in the hills of Rome. Of course such a domus would also reflect his richly deserved status as a member of Rome's elite society. Furthermore, he had convinced himself the risk of loan default was low. Based on his own trading experiences, he expected the voyage to be completed well before the six-month period, by which time profits from olive oil sales would be flooding into his treasury. Notably however, his confidence did not extend to the level where he felt comfortable enough to confide with Appia about this last condition.

Unfortunately, over the past several weeks stories from returning vessels about unusually fierce storms in the western seas had disquieted Lucius and, indeed, the contract deadline was fast approaching with no sign of his vessel. In fact, the six-month deadline was tomorrow, the kalends or first day of Februarius, the traditional time of month for debtors to settle their debts. This unexpected delay and the consequences of a looming default were the reasons for Lucius's recent obsessions and sleepless nights. This morning he was planning to remove the chirographum, or handwritten contract, that represented the evidence for the agreed terms from its locked compartment in his strongbox and review it for what seemed like the hundredth time in vain hopes of discovering some unknown clause or passage that would alleviate his debt to House Valeri. He needed a miracle!

The bronze key to the strongbox's compartment lay dangling from a silver band around Lucius's index finger. Affluent Romans generally wore keys as rings on their fingers, not only to keep them handy but also to signal that the wearer was rich and important. Only the most prominent citizens had jewelry made of bronze, for central Italia itself was not rich in metal ores. Therefore, trade networks from various lands were required to meet the demand from Rome. As

with olive oil, one important source was Iberia, perhaps Rome's richest province. Ever since its conquest during the Punic Wars, this territory, with its rich deposit of mineral ores, continued to provide Rome with a variety of metals, including the copper and tin that were forged together to form bronze.

As an olive oil merchant with an acquired knowledge of the commodity trading between Rome and the Iberian Peninsula, Lucius had occasionally procured small supplies of these precious metals for his own personal use. When commissioning one of the foremost smiths in the city to craft his strongbox, he had also provided the craftsman with small amounts of these rare metals and instructions to forge a key that properly reflected Lucius's prominence in the Roman hierarchy. In turn, the smith had created a true masterpiece, a bronze key ring featuring intricate geometric patterns and images. One end of Lucius's key was anchor-shaped and had notches carved into its tip that were designed to fit into the slit of the compartment's lock, lift the metal pin tumblers, and pull the lock's bolt to one side. The other end featured an easy-to-grasp bow with a hole where it was attached to a finger ring with a tiny metal clasp. The key's most prominent feature was its five-inch shaft. Unlike most keys of the time, whose shafts were very simple rods or crudely shaped animal forms, this one was exquisitely sculpted in the image of the Roman god Janus. Lucius had specifically requested this image because his obsession with time triggered a particular affinity towards Janus, the god of beginnings, transitions, and time. Janus was depicted as a two-faced image, representing both the past and the future. The small icon appeared almost lifelike to Lucius, complete with its penetrating eyes, flowing beards, and graceful, twisting torsos chiseled on both sides.

As Lucius looked down to grasp the key, he suddenly noticed small but piercing red beams of light emanating from one set of eyes. How they shined, like glowing embers, sparkling and

dancing, in the ashen residue of a dying fire! This was odd; he'd never noticed such light discharges before.

He then recalled the words from the smith who had forged the implement. "Never has such a bellowing flame been crafted as in the forging of this key of bronze; it was as if Janus himself was directing my efforts." Lucius had dismissed the man's words at the time, but now he pondered them. Could there be some divine magic behind this key?

Lucius momentarily dismissed his thought as the red lights dissipated. He removed the key from his finger, inserted it into the lock slot of the compartment on the strongbox, and turned it to unlock the bolt. Removing the chirographum, he began to study the contract in detail. After so many reviews, Lucius had most of the clauses and dates committed to memory. Therefore, he was astonished when he came to the last page of the agreement, for he noticed a new heading and text, words he had not seen before. Under the title of *Contractus*, it read as follows: On this day, the Kalends of Februarius, the Argentarii Guild hereby renders payment of fifty-thousand sesterces to citizen Lucius Maximus Antonius.

How had these words materialized on his contract? Except for his own intrusions, the compartment was always locked, and he carried the only key. In fact, he had examined the contract just yesterday and he knew that no such words were included. Yet here they were, staring him in the face. How could this be?

In studying the new text, Lucius realized the contract referenced a future date, tomorrow, the kalends of Februarius. Recalling the strange lights emanating from his key moments earlier, he wondered if this was a sign of some divine intervention by Janus. If so, was this message offering him a path forward to save his estate from the onerous terms of the Valeri bank loan? He knew he had to act on this information.



The new contract referenced the Argentarii Guild, a league of bankers Lucius knew only by reputation. Argentarii were private citizens who managed money and mercantile transactions, not in the service of the Republic, but in the interest of their own tabernae. This contrasted with the role of the mensarii such as Valeri, who were public bankers conducting business in service of the state. In spite of the burdensome terms he had negotiated with Valeri, Lucius had purposely rejected any dealings with the argentarii because so many of their members were unscrupulous and dangerous. Furthermore, several of Lucius's colleagues who had dealings with them spoke of the argentarii with contempt. However, his situation was now critical, and Lucius rationalized these desperate times required desperate measures. He knew that many argentarii conducted their business in shops in and around the area by the Janus Geminus shrine, which was a small arch dedicated nearly three centuries earlier in honor of Janus. This additional connection with the god of time did not escape Lucius.

Calling for his slaves to prepare his litter, he was carried through the muck of the crowded city streets to the northeast part of the city where the shrine was located. As he approached the temple, he studied it closely. It was a small rectangular structure with two brass doors opposite each other; these doors were arched to join at the top and flanked by two columns. By tradition, its two doors were opened to indicate that Rome was at war and closed during times of peace. Carved into one niche on the right-hand door was a bronze statue of Janus with his right hand extended and grasping a golden key. Lucius couldn't help but think of his own Janus key, and shuddered in apprehension as he remembered the piercing red beams of light that had emanated from its eyes. Congregating under the arch that provided cover from the intense, mid-day sun, he noticed several argentarii conducting their business.

As Lucius descended from his litter, a small, elderly man with a furrowed, weather-beaten face appeared mysteriously, almost like an apparition emerging out of the blinding sunlight. As the old codger opened his mouth to speak, Lucius noticed two rows of yellowed, pointed teeth that reminded him of the spinous canines in wild dogs that roamed the poorer sections of Roma.

“What is your business?” the stranger asked Lucius.

“What do you mean?” replied Lucius warily.

“I mean, what is your trade?”

“I am an importer and seller of the finest Iberian olive oil.”

“Ah,” answered the stranger. “Iberian olive oil, truly a precious commodity. Let me assist you with your dilemma. For a small portion of your oil shipment that will arrive shortly, I will pay you fifty-thousand sesterces to alleviate your debt obligation. Meet me here tomorrow morning and we will finalize our agreement.”

Lucius stared at the man in astonishment. How could he know the exact terms of Lucius’s first payment to Valeri? Also, Lucius was struck by the stranger’s prediction that his hoped-for oil shipment from the Iberian peninsula would be arriving shortly. How could the banker know if Lucius’s ship would even reach port safely? Lucius’s first impulse was to reject this man’s proposal; it seemed too mysterious to be legitimate. But then he recalled the strange events of the day with the mysterious Janus key, and his premonition that it was meant to provide a solution to his problems. He agreed to the follow-up meeting.

Lucius returned home and immediately pulled out the chirographum from his strongbox. Just as mysteriously as the text describing his transaction with the argentarii had appeared, now the words had vanished. Truly some mysterious force was at work.

The following morning, Lucius returned to the Janus Geminus shrine, where he met the stranger and completed their agreement. In return for the fifty-thousand sesterces that the man handed over, Lucius agreed to provide ten amphorae of olive oil, stone jars that held approximately seventy liters each. By all mercantile standards, these were extremely favorable terms for Lucius. He then had himself carted to the Via Sacra, home of House Valeri, where he paid the first installment of his obligation, fifty-thousand sesterces.

#### TWO WEEKS LATER, PORT OF OSTIA

The city of Ostia was the principal commercial port for Rome. Daily, its citizens would watch ocean-going craft from across the Mediterranean dock at wooden piers, unload precious cargo, and transfer their payload to barges for the final twenty-mile transit up the Tiber River to Rome. This day, clear and sunny, many viewers noticed a ship bearing the flag of House Antonius on its mast entering the port. The vessel's keel sank low in the water, indicating it was fully loaded with important cargo of some sort. In fact, the ship was laden with virgin olive oil from Iberia.

## CHAPTER ONE

April 1, 1965

Anthony Lucas, known as Tony to his friends, squirmed in the seat of his eighth-grade classroom as he waited anxiously for the school day to end. As usual, his obsession with time had led him to play a favorite mental game, predicting the exact time remaining until the 3:00 p.m. dismissal bell sounded. Sixteen minutes after two o'clock he noted to himself, and then confirmed his prognostication by turning to witness the second hand slowly sweep past three on the large clock hanging on the front left wall, indicating a time of exactly 2:16 p.m. Forty-four minutes to go.

It had been a curious school day at St. Bridget's Grammar School in the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn. This was the occasion the entire school had been anticipating for several weeks, the date when, finally, the sixty-year-old time capsule would be opened, and its contents revealed. The student assembly had been abuzz since last month, when construction of a new gymnasium had unearthed a small copper box buried under the cornerstone of the original red-brick school building. Various rumors, ranging from plausible to fantastical, had circulated about the box's contents. Tony's personal favorite, which had been started by his friend, Joe Hubbard, suggested that the box contained the brains of an unidentified body that had been discovered several months ago in an abandoned building, just a mile or so from their school. A few days later, St. Bridget's principal, Sister Mary Stella, had put an end to most of the wild speculations with an announcement over the school's loudspeaker that the box was, in fact, a time capsule, buried

there by the first graduating class of St. Bridget's sixty years ago, in 1905. Furthermore, the school would celebrate the capsule's discovery by holding an opening ceremony on April first of this year, exactly sixty years since its burial.

Earlier that day, Tony, along with the entire student body, had assembled in the large auditorium for the ceremony where Mr. Cato, a prominent parishioner of St. Bridget's, and whose local grocery store was the principal sponsor of the school's little league baseball teams, had strolled onto the stage carrying the rusted, soldered, copper box. Approximately two feet long and one foot wide, it was not very remarkable in appearance. As the students watched in amazement, Mr. Cato attacked the box with a vigor that seemed more appropriate for a construction worker wielding his hammer drill than a mild-mannered store owner. The din from the pounding and sawing with hammer, chisel, and hacksaw reverberated throughout the auditorium until the lid was successfully removed.

Now was the moment of revelation; Tony silently hoped Mr. Cato would uncover something really surprising inside. Slowly he pulled out the first item, a yellowed piece of crumbling newspaper. Sister Stella, who shared the stage with Mr. Cato, immediately assumed the role of narrator and announced in a booming voice that seemed totally incongruous with her small, delicate physique, that it was part of the front page of The New York Times from April 1, 1905. This two-person act was repeated as Mr. Cato drew item after item from the box with Sister Stella providing a short narrative description: stamps, coins, an old black and white photograph of President Theodore Roosevelt, colored marbles, a pocket knife, a list of signatures from the 1905 eight grade class of St. Bridget's, until the box was empty. Nothing earth-shattering there, thought Tony, feeling a bit deflated after all the earlier excitement the box had generated. Sister Stella brought the ceremony to its conclusion by announcing that one lucky member of the

eighth grade would be chosen that afternoon to take the box and its contents home for the night and share them with his or her family, after which the items would be returned to school for display here in the auditorium.

Back in his classroom, Tony's thoughts had already returned to his beloved Yankees and their upcoming baseball season, which was set to start in a few weeks. He snapped to attention when his teacher, Sister Constantia, asked that everyone write their name on a piece of paper and submit it for a drawing to determine the lucky student who would win the privilege of taking the time capsule and its contents home for the night. Tony passively completed this task and waited while Sister Constantia collected the papers, placed them in a cardboard box, and drew out one crumpled piece. "Anthony Lucas," she called out.

Tony's first reaction was surprise; he had never won any important contest in his life. He then remembered that the prize was somewhat underwhelming; why couldn't the award be something nifty like a new car, or a trip to Europe, or almost anything else? Nevertheless, he sheepishly acknowledged the applause of his classmates.

Upon the sounding of the dismissal bell, Tony ambled down to the auditorium to pick up the box and its contents and received a short, instructive lecture from Sister Stella about the proper care and treatment of the historic articles.

"Remember," she declared, "they are a symbol of our school's past; treat them with the respect they deserve."

"Yes Sister."

By the time Tony exited the school building carrying his bookbag with one arm and carefully cradling the copper box in his other, all his friends had disappeared. He started the six-block walk home, and soon turned onto the busy Third Avenue thoroughfare with its commercial

storefronts, businesses, and overhead apartments. He approached Louise's, his family's favorite Italian restaurant, where they often celebrated important occasions such as birthdays, graduations, and the like. Tony noticed a cluster of large, empty cardboard boxes in front of the restaurant, lined up in a row for pickup by the sanitation truck later that afternoon. Luigi's Virgin Olive Oil-Imported from Italy read the label on each box. In smaller print were the words: May contain up to 50% olive oil from Spain. Wow, thought Tony to himself; they sure go through a lot of olive oil here.

Tony continued walking past the restaurant when he noted a glint of sunshine reflecting off a point in the sidewalk between two of the cartons. Bending down to examine the source of the reflected light, he observed an old, rusted, metal ring attached to an ancient-looking key with notches cut into its tip. The most remarkable feature of the key was its shaft; it was approximately five inches in length and intricately carved in the figure of a two-faced, ancient-looking man. Picking the key up to study it in more detail, he noted a set of piercing, almost life-like eyes on each face staring back at him. What a neat little souvenir, thought Tony. He dropped it in his book bag and continued home.

## CHAPTER TWO

The large, three-story, white-stucco colonial stood out from the neighboring homes on the block by nature of its large front yard, unusual for this section of Brooklyn where most fronts were matchbox sized. Tony raced through the stout, oaken front door, past the narrow entranceway, and into the spacious living room whose floors were lined with authentic oriental rugs that were his mother's pride and joy. Tony always enjoyed coming home; he viewed it as his safe and happy environment.

In an excited voice, he yelled out, "I'm home; guess what I won!"

As his mother joined his older sister Karen to greet him, she replied, "My gracious, what's so exciting?"

"I won this," he said, pointing to the rusty copper box. "Well, I didn't exactly win it. But I won the drawing at school to take it home and examine the contents with you guys. It's a time capsule with stuff from the first class of St. Bridget's in 1905. I have it for the night. Then I have to return it to school tomorrow."

"How wonderful!" his mother exclaimed. "Let's look at them tonight when your father returns from his calls."

Tony's dad was a pediatrician who spent Thursday afternoons attending rounds at the local hospital, and then driving all over Brooklyn until late evening, making house call visits to his sick patients. Following his dad's return home a few hours later and a delicious pot roast dinner, the family assembled around the copper box, prominently displayed in the center of the living room coffee table. Despite their sixty-year-old age, most of the memorabilia in the box were



well-preserved, and the family spent several minutes removing and examining the various items. The exception was the yellowed, partial front page of the April 1, 1905, New York Times. Most of the bottom half of the paper had withered away, probably due to a bit of moisture that had infiltrated the box. Eventually, Tony's dad carefully cradled the ancient newspaper page in his steady physician hands and spoke..

“Tony, this is amazing. You are providing us with an authentic piece of American history. Listen to these headlines from sixty years ago: '\$12,600,000 Discrepancy in Gas Company's Bonds'; 'Alfred G. Vanderbilt Arrested for Speeding'; 'H.H. Rogers Defends Rockefeller's Methods'; and 'Robbed Senator's House-Mr. Burrows of Michigan.'”

Tony asked his father. “Dad, those stories hardly seem like the kind of news that make headlines. No stories about foreign countries or world events. What's the big deal with speeding, robbing, or company bonds? That kind of stuff belongs buried inside the paper, not on the front page.”

Mrs. Lucas interjected. “Tony, Karen, you have to realize that back then America was a much different country than it is today. News stories from that era tended to be much more provincial, reflecting America's relative isolation from most world affairs. It wasn't until world War I ended in 1918 that America started to emerge as a major player on the world stage.”

Karen then asked. “I know a Rockefeller is the governor of New York. Does this headline refer to the same family? And who were the Vanderbilts?”

Dr. Lucas answered his daughter. “The Vanderbilts and the Rockefellers were titans of American industry in the early twentieth century, specifically in railroads and oil. Any stories about those families attracted considerable attention from the general public. They were like the

rock stars of their day. Our governor, Nelson Rockefeller, is the grandson of John D. Rockefeller, the founder of the huge oil empire.”

The Lucas family spent the next several minutes discussing the contents that had survived sixty years in a metal box and reflected on life for the average person at a time with few phones and cars, and no television or computers. Finally, Tony’s parents agreed that this had been an excellent and educational evening, thanked Tony for sharing his success with the entire family, and sent the kids off to bed.

In his bedroom, Tony was changing out of his clothes into his pajamas when he remembered the key he had stored in his book bag. Retrieving the small icon, he marveled at its intricately carved details and wondered about its history. It seems so old, he thought. I bet there are some interesting stories behind it. Promising to share his discovery with his friends and family in the morning, he dropped the key into the opened copper box that was lying on the floor next to him, replaced its lid, and hopped into his bed.

Tony awoke promptly at six-forty-five the next morning. He continuously surprised his parents with his uncanny ability to anticipate the hour and wake up, unaided by any alarm, in time for any occasion or event, such as a 6:00 a.m. mass where he had been assigned to serve as an altar boy at St. Bridget’s Church. He just had a special sense about time, whether it was predicting it, anticipating it, or making the best use of it. His parents often joked that he had a passion for time.

Rushing to complete his pre-school routine of a quick hot shower, a breakfast of frosted flakes and milk, and a goodbye hug to his father as he headed off for his early hospital rounds, Tony headed back to his room for last-minute preparations. Squinting his eyes at the sunshine streaming through the window as he peeked at the outdoor thermometer, he noted an

unseasonable temperature of 68° F. That's great, he thought. It's warm enough to wear my Yankees jacket today. He threw open his closet door and started rummaging through the hanging garments until he located the lightweight jacket among the jumble of tangled jerseys, sweatshirts, and pants. Tony grabbed the jacket and put it on.

Bending down to retrieve the rusted copper box containing the old artifacts, he suddenly remembered the ancient-looking key from last night. Removing the lid to retrieve the key, he recoiled in utter surprise as his gaze was met by two piercing red beams of lights emanating from one set of eyes on the two-faced icon. Transfixed by the penetrating stare from the icon's face, illuminated to almost lifelike form by the beaming lights, Tony actually wondered if the old man was trying to communicate a message to him. Recovering from his momentary shock, he nervously cradled the key in his right hand and tried to locate any on/off switch or small battery compartment that might be the power source of the emanating lights. He found none. How strange!

Recovering from the startling episode, Tony stashed the key in his jacket pocket and examined the contents of the box to assure all was in order before returning them to school. Taking a moment to gently remove the yellowed, tattered newspaper page and read it for himself, he received his second, jolting surprise of the morning. The date printed on the top line read, April 1, 2025.

Wait a second, he thought. Yesterday the date read April 1, 1905. Today the paper is dated sixty years in the future instead of sixty years in the past! How can that be?

He then turned to read the headlines his father had recited to them last evening, and again was astonished to discover none of the headings were the same. Rather, they referred to stories about events or people that were alien to him. One headline read, "Former U.S. President Bill Clinton

Appointed as Special Envoy to Sudan.” Bill Clinton? questioned Tony as he quickly scanned the few lines of the story that were still visible in the remaining top half of the newspaper page. They briefly described the long career of the forty-second United States president, William Jefferson Clinton. Tony quietly recited to himself the last few presidents he had studied in American history. Let’s see, there was FDR, then Truman, and Eisenhower, followed by Kennedy, and now LBJ. I never heard of a President Clinton, he thought. The only Clinton I know is Robby Clinton from my class.

A second headline turned to a more familiar subject, but again seemed strange and futuristic. “Yankees Look to Rebound from Last Year’s Disappointing Season.” What particularly caught Tony’s eye in the ensuing story was a reference to the worst collapse in Yankee history since their momentous fall from grace in the 1965 season. 1965 season? That was this year, and the season hadn’t even started yet. And how could the perennial powerhouse Yankees, who had won the last five American League pennants in a row with their formidable lineup of Mantle, Maris, Howard, and the rest, fall from grace this year? The team had unfinished business to attend to after last October’s disappointing loss to the St. Louis Cardinals in the seventh game of the World Series.

The strangest headline read like science fiction to Tony. “Miracle Cure for Crippling Disease.” Most of the few remaining lines in the underlying story were unrecognizable smudges of ink. The few words that Tony could decipher included pioneering, discovery, and the name George Janusowski. Tony had no way of determining if that name represented a patient, a doctor, a discoverer of the cure, or someone else associated with this story. In addition to these few words, Tony could also make out short snippets of letters that made no sense to him: “BMAA-

in...” and “Almed.” Tony rubbed his eyes in confusion. The whole thing was too strange; what was he looking at?