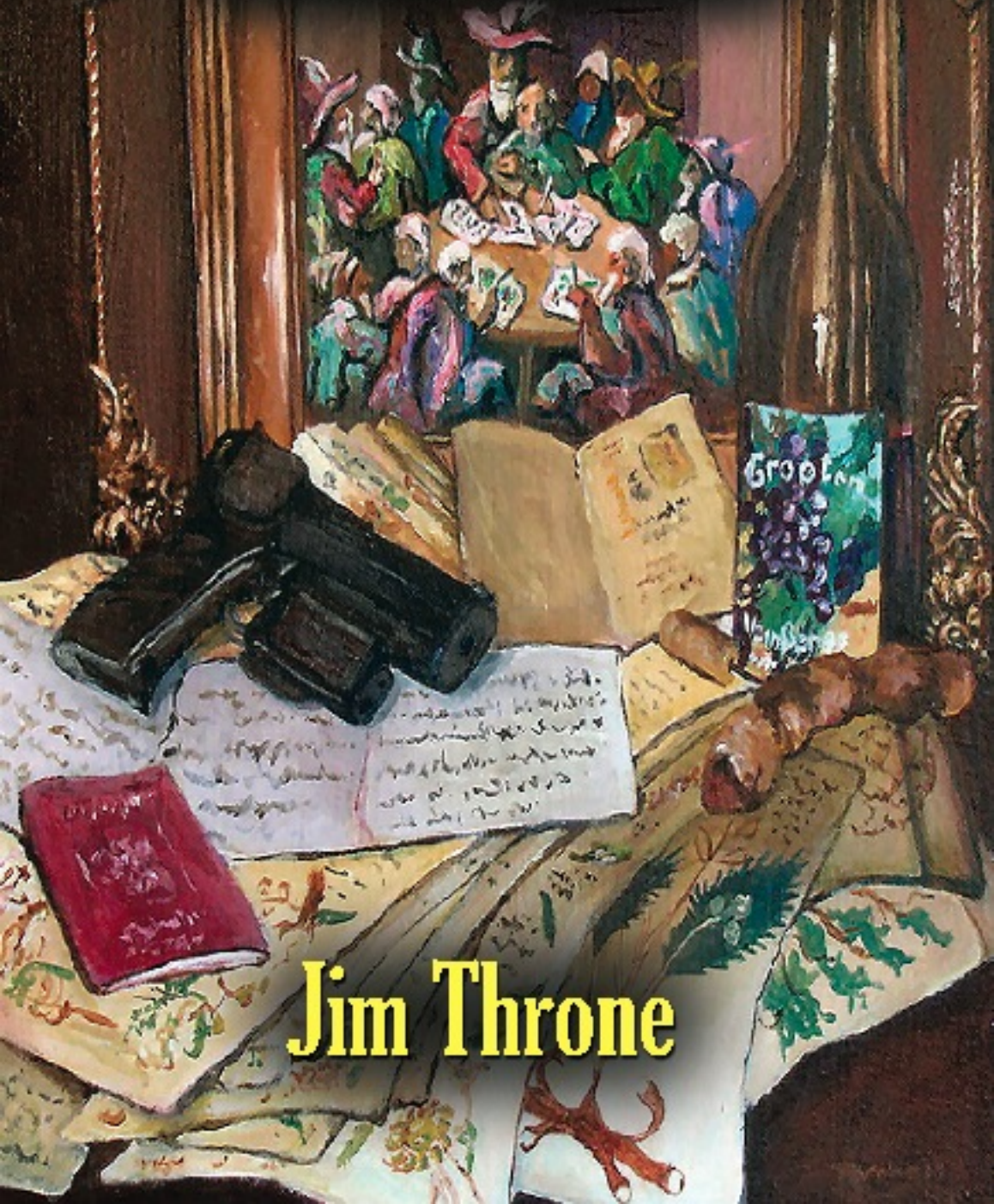


# The Curse of the Gallows

A MURDER MYSTERY



Jim Throne



*For half a millennium, the strange writings and drawings of an elaborate codex have defied the world's greatest cryptologists. Now it and a companion codex have been stolen from Yale University. As Detective Lincoln Barnes searches for international agents who may have decoded them, those who know the documents' secrets are murdered and his life is threatened.*

# **The Curse of the Gallows**

**Order the complete book from**

**[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)**

**<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/6232.html?s=pdf>**

**or from your favorite neighborhood  
or online bookstore.**

**Your Free excerpt appears below. Enjoy!**

## **The Curse of the Gallows**





## Chapter 1

### The Fire

“Yo, Linc? Lincoln Barnes? Heard New Haven’s finest were on their way. Didn’t expect that they’d send you. Jesus, man, long time no see. ’Member me? Ernie? Ernie Ledbetter, first battalion?” A mountain of a man, wearing New Haven’s finest outrageously yellow firefighting garb, from the helmet to the gum boots, emerged from the dense smoke of the Beinecke Library basement.

Before Linc could acknowledge him, Ledbetter continued, “’Member, we took that terrorist training course together ‘bout two, maybe three years back? Anyway, it’s good to see ya on this mess. I’m Logistics Chief on this. Pretty important, huh?”

“Yeah.” Linc didn’t remember him but shook his hand anyway, almost immediately regretting his action as his ice-cold fingers were crushed. “Got a call from Fergus. He’s on night patrol. Said something big was happening.”

“Sure as hell coulda been with all the goddamned books and papers in this place. Fire started down here, went up an electrical duct to the main floor. Lit up some drapery. But, I gotta tell ya, Linc, it’s a helluva lot bigger deal than just an itty-bitty fire.”

It was three in the morning on the first week of 1997 and Linc had just trekked through shin-high snow, around a plethora of emergency vehicles, and past *Mother Marie’s Hot Sandwiches and Coffee*, a locally-owned roach coach, to reach the Beinecke where he’d been directed to its smoke-filled cavernous basement. His eyes burned and he smelled and tasted the acrid smoke despite wearing an approved smoke mask.

“Watch your step, Linc. Water,” Ledbetter cautioned, his flashlight beam playing off its surface.

“Shit,” Linc growled as the inky-black water quickly sloshed over his shoe-tops.

“Sorry ‘bout the lights. Hadda turn them off in case it was electrical. And the smoke kinda hangs down here, don’ it? Waitin’ for the smoke eater. It’s over on the South side, at a grease fire.”

“Ernie, you said this was a bigger deal than a fire. What’s bigger than a fire?”

“How ‘bout safe crackin’ and assault? Or at least it seems like that.”

The beam of Linc’s flashlight penetrated only a few feet into the smoke. “Did you say ‘safe’ and ‘assault’?”

“Yeah. Back there’s a humongous safe of some sort. The door’s open and the EMS guys are working on some dude in a uniform. Prob’ly a security guy. Prob’ly got bashed during the robbery.”

Barnes waded into the smoky darkness. Ledbetter followed. Slowly two white-suited forms emerged. They were kneeling in the water, working on a prone uniformed shape. Both were wearing self-breathers. One was doing CPR while the other handled an oxygen mask.

“How’s it going?” Ledbetter asked.

One worker gave a thumb’s-down. The other just shook his head.

Behind them loomed an enormous grey box, easily eight feet high and twice as wide. The door of the safe was standing ajar. Linc eased around the EMS and their victim, trying not to cause a wake as he made his way to the door. He eased the door nearly closed, away from the EMS guys and off the victim’s feet. He stuck the flashlight under his chin as he examined the door jam and the vault’s locking mechanism. After a minute or so, he knelt in the ice-cold water and examined the bottom of the door, concentrating on the area at its end. He dragged over a metal crate, stood on it, and examined the top edge of the door. Ledbetter inched around the emergency medics to get a better view of the detective’s work. By the time Linc was ready to step off the crate, Ledbetter was only inches away.

“Whaddaya got there?” Ernie acted like a little kid, craning his neck, trying to see what Linc was seeing. *Like he wants to see the bullfrog I just rescued from the mud*, he thought.

Linc did not respond. He stepped off the crate, pushed past him, and eased his way back around the techs and the body.

“How come you workin’ the night shift, Linc? Thought you blues hadda whole passel of detectives that’d handle this.”

“I’m a detective now.”

“Y’are? No shit. Big promo, right?”

“No. More like a lateral arabesque. At one time we had a lot of detectives, Ernie, but we’re down to three now.”

“No shit. Budgets again?”

“Yeah.”

*The Curse of the Gallows*

“So, you been with them guys for some time, right? So, how come you’re workin’ the night shift?”

“Because Hildago has seven stair-step kids and a shrewish wife. And Perkins is single so right about now, he’s out prowling. Besides, there’s nobody at home, I can’t go up, and I ain’t gonna voluntarily retire.”

“Hey, ain’t you the guy who was goin’ to some paradise islands? Goin’ there ta look up some nekkid natives, right? Y’gotta tell me where ya went and what ya did.”

“Let’s scope out the scene here first, okay?”

“Yeah. Good idea,” he murmured, cowed.

Linc maneuvered around Ledbetter and the EMS guys who were packing up. One of the medics shook his head, and gave a thumb’s-down.

“I guess the old guy didn’t make it,” Ledbetter said, stating the obvious.

A fire extinguisher lay a couple of feet from the dead man’s head. Linc stretched on neoprene gloves, fished it out of the water, and elevated its top. “The guy never got a chance to put out the fire,” he said, pointing to the extinguisher pin that was still in place.

“Wow, I’ll be damned. Didn’t see that before.”

“Don’t move that,” he said, gently lowering the unit to its original place.

“In my business, Ernie, we call that evidence.”

“Think someone cold-cocked him with it?”

Linc shrugged and waded cautiously through the thick smoke to a large pile of carbonized paper and cardboard boxes that were piled next to a utility duct. They were now thoroughly soaked, either by the sprinkler system or by New Haven’s finest yellow jackets.

“Fire started here,” Ernie said smugly, as if Linc had missed this fact. He nodded anyway. “It spread up. The duct acted as a chimney.” He played his light up the wall. “Flame got to some kinda drapes on the first floor. I think it was a display of some sort, right by the duct.”

Linc focused his flashlight at a corner of the sodden ash pile. The beam just barely penetrated the residual smoke. He surveyed the pile for a long minute before hunkering down at its edge. He brushed away grayish mud that once was ash, and gingerly picked up a foot-long rod.

“What’s that?”

“The source of your fire,” he said, holding it out so that Ernie could peruse it.

“Just what the hell is that? A welding rod?”

"No, not a welding rod. It's a special rod - a pipe, actually. It's made of pure iron." Linc turned it into the beam of his flashlight. "With dozens of rods of pure iron packed inside it."

"I don't get it," Ernie said, peering into the end of the rod.

"And at this end there's a fitting," Linc pointed. "It's an oxygen fitting."

"Wow, a cutting rod."

"Precisely. Oxygen is forced through the iron pipe. The end of the pipe is ignited, probably with a propane torch. The iron is converted to ferric oxide, producing a flame of more than 3500 Celsius. That's enough heat to melt even the toughest steel alloy."

"Wow, a real pro job, huh?"

"Yeah." Linc moved back to the vault door. "The bad guys knew the workings of this vault. They knew where the two door locking pistons were, one up here." He shined his light to the top of the door. "And one down here." His light beam sought the bottom edge of the door.

"The bad guys knew if they cut through the door at exactly those points, the locking pistons would drop and the door mechanism would default, meaning, of course, that the door would swing open."

"No shit. You gotta guess as to how many pros know how to do this?"

"In New England? There are fewer than a dozen. There may be four or five at most."

"So, it oughta be easy to track 'em down, right?"

Linc shrugged. He peered inside the vault. The little smoke inside had probably drafted in from the room. Everything was coated in a dry white powder.

"A-B-C," Ernie said, smiling. "There's an inside unit, built in, triggered by the flame of the cutting torch."

"Or maybe, once the door swung open, it was triggered by the smoke from there." Linc pointed to the ash pile.

*Thank God these water-happy yo-yos didn't wet down the vault, Linc thought. And thank God the vault had a substantial lip on it to keep the rest of the room from flooding it.*

"Ah, Ernie," Linc said, gesturing into the vault. "At this time, I don't know what the perps were after in there. Until I do, this is part of the crime scene, understand?" He pointed to the shrouded body of the sentry that was now being slid onto an improvised back board by the two technicians.

"This means, Ernie, that you gotta keep your people outa here. And you gotta keep the goddamned water outa here, too. Got it?"

Ernie grinned and gave Linc a thumbs-up.



*The Curse of the Gallows*

"By the way, do you know who knows about this?" Linc asked.

"Bout what?"

"About the vault? About the contents of the vault?"

"Dunno."

"Maybe I can help you, sir." A small figure emerged from the swirling smoke, sneezing once, twice, three times. "My name is Horace Reader. I'm the head librarian and curator here." His voice was high, shrill, muted by his mask. He nervously knitted and unknitted his fingers, again and again.

"I'm Lincoln Barnes, Mister Reader. I'm a detective with the New Haven Police Force. This is Lieutenant Ernest Ledbetter of the New Haven Fire Department."

"It's Captain, sir. Glad ta meetcha," Ernie said, holding out his ungloved hand.

Instead of acknowledging the fireman's extended hand, the Librarian he stared at the stark vista before him. "My God," he murmured. "My God, what happened?"

"Mister Reader? Are you responsible for this room? The vault?"

"My God, my God," he repeated in an ever-weakening voice.

"Ah, sir, can you explain to us why anyone would want to murder your watchman?" Linc pointed to the medics who were manhandling the body bag up the stairs.

Reader spun back toward the stairs. He stammered, "Are you telling me that my watchman is dead? Aaron Jackson's dead? Murdered? Oh my God."

"Mister Reader, do you know why someone would want to cut into this vault?"

Before Linc could complete his thought, someone shouted down the stairs that the smoke eater had arrived and that the basement needed to be evacuated. The two medical techs yelled back that they needed to make certain that they had collected all their gear. And one of them yelled, "Where the hell is the goddamned photographer? I took some pictures but goddammit, it really isn't in my goddamned job description, y'know."

Someone clattered down the steps yelling that he was the goddamned photographer and that no one should move anything, especially the body, until he'd taken a ton of pictures. And besides, the guy from the Register wanted to know just what the hell was going on, anyway.

As the formerly quiet basement scene erupted into chaos, Linc pushed past Reader and Ledbetter and headed toward the stairs. It wasn't because he wasn't interested in the mayhem that was just beginning. It was because his eyes and nose burned, and he had to pee.



## Chapter 2

### The Vault Contents

Linc sat on the steps to the second floor of the Yale University Rare Book and Manuscript Library, a windowless monolith known to Yalies and even some locals as The Beinecke. He was rubbing his eyes and licking his lips, and marveling at the choreography before him. The building was dark except for a chorus of light beams that seemed to crisscross and ricochet off every wall and the floor. Some beams even penetrated the hanging smoke cloud to reflect off the ceiling.

Everyone seemed to have a flashlight and each seemed to be pointing it randomly this way and that. Yellow tape was everywhere. Portable floodlights provided some light and a lot of generator noise. Someone else was yelling instructions over a megaphone somewhere, his tinny words garbled and often accompanied by squeals and squawks.

The Beinecke Head Librarian paced back and forth, wringing and unwringing his hands. Linc observed him as if he was working on his police blotter description, part of the training that all good cops were expected to do with all people.

He was short, a head and a half shorter than Ernie who had by now disappeared into the yellow-slickered crowd. And he was skinny, nervous, weak, pallid, and thin-lipped. He was balding, with a ring of hair just above his ears, a tonsure, with an extensive comb-over, big ears, and big watery eyes, hidden, mostly, by black horn-rim glasses with bottle bottom lenses. Even at this ridiculously early hour, he wore a powder blue jumpsuit under his powder blue parka with its snow white fur fringed hood.

*He's gay*, Linc thought but after a moment thought again. *Nope. He's a librarian. Always thought those folks as being asexual*, he smiled as he reconsidered.

Two smoke eaters scraped a huge fan across the marble floor and bounced it down the steps. A long blue flexible tube trailed, the end of which extended through the library doors. One of Ledbetter's yellow jacketed workers unsnarled the extension cord and plugged it into an oversized portable

*The Curse of the Gallows*

generator now just inside the door. An ear-wrenching squeal, followed by a whoosh and a continuing baritone rumble, signaled that the fan had kicked in.

"Okay, Mister Reader," Linc began, ratcheting up the volume of his voice a couple of notches.

"Doctor Reader, sir," Reader said abruptly, pushing his glasses back into position. "I have a doctorate in Library Science from Boston College. My thesis was on..."

"I'm sorry, very sorry. Okay, Doctor Reader, it is," Linc interrupted, emphasizing 'doctor'. "Tell me what is, or was, in the vault."

"We keep our rarest manuscripts in there. Nearly all are priceless and completely uninsurable. Oh my, oh my."

Reader launched into an elaborate description of The Beinecke, pointing out that the Beinecke family was extremely wealthy, their fortune having been made from the creation of S&H Green Stamps, the ubiquitous Sperry and Hutchinson trading stamps that were first created in the nineteenth century and which were given out as bonuses at grocery stores and gas stations throughout the first part of the twentieth century.

"Walter Beinecke, the great-grandson of the founder, Thomas Sperry, donated a huge chunk of money to Yale. His daughter, Frances, wanted to attend Yale, just as several other male Beineckes had in the past. However he learned that she couldn't, simply because, from its very existence, Yale had been an all-male school.

"So he offered to build a most important edifice if the Board of Regents would allow her to be the first female student. We'd been acquiring rare books for more than a century but had no repository specifically designed for them. So I urged the board to acquiesce to his demand only if he would build us a special library for our collection.

"He did and they did. She graduated in the first Yale class to include females. According to rumors, the old man wanted the walls of the building to be clad in pale green, a green akin to the Green Stamp color. After much debate, the Yale architect convinced him to go with the amber marble instead."

Reader continued, in a most sing-song nasal tone. "The Beinecke contains one of only forty-eight known copies of the Gutenberg Bible, original folios of Shakespeare, and two complete collections of Audubon. We have hundreds of early maps, including the only known copy of the Vinland map."

The more he lectured the more animated and the louder he became. "Lieutenant, we have the most complete collection of 16<sup>th</sup> century documents anywhere in the free world."

No matter how much Linc rubbed his eyes, they still burned. He now regretted not flagging down the EMS guys for some eye drops. His mouth was dry, smoky dry. While Reader droned on and on, Linc's mind wandered to the building's architecture. The building always gave him an impression of a morgue. Now it was a morgue with a not-quite festive, not quite vertical almost two-story Christmas tree in the far corner of the lobby. Someone had pushed it there to clear the general area.

For just an instant, he was sure that the four-story exoskeleton-style open-book stack that occupied the core of the building was leaning precariously, ready to topple toward him, toward the workers. He quickly realized that because no one else in the bustling gaggle seemed to be concerned, it was just a phantasm.

His thoughts now turned to the crime scene. It was after four when Ernie came bounding up the steps and yelled that most of the smoke was gone and nearly all the water had been removed.

Reader was still going on about Erasmus when Linc rose and shook his shoulder. "Ah, Doctor Reader? Sorry to interrupt you but we can now see the extent of the damage."

Reader stopped lecturing in mid-sentence. When he realized what Linc had said, his shoulders slumped. He seemed to shrink half-a-foot. Tears welled in his watery eyes. He pushed his glasses back up his nose and nodded slowly, as he turned toward the stairs. Linc followed, his hand on Reader's shoulder.

\* \* \*

"Smells better, right?" Ernie laughed. "And the water's gone."

Linc shrugged. His eyes were still burning. Ernie had set up a floodlight just inside the room. Most of the water in the area in front of the vault door had been suctioned up and mats had been placed there. Linc moved the mats and carefully examined the floor between the vault door and the steps and then up the steps. He shined his light inside of the vault before kneeling and examining the floor.

"Footprints?" Ernie asked.

"No. If someone had been inside when the fire extinguisher had fired off, they would have been obliterated by the dry chemical."

Reader pushed past Linc toward the vault entrance. Just as he was about to step through the opening, Ernie grabbed his arm and pulled him back.

*The Curse of the Gallows*

"Stop, now. Put these on," Ernie snapped, handing Reader booties. He cowered at the fireman's tone, but obeyed. He handed him a dust mask. Linc handed him a pair of latex gloves.

"Do not stir up that powder, sir. It's ammonium phosphate," he said. It's pretty corrosive when wet," Ledbetter cautioned. He stood near the door, trying to focus the halogen lamp into the vault. Linc handed Reader his flashlight and took up a position against the door jam.

Reader moved slowly into the vault, shuffling and writing furiously on a pad that he'd procured from somewhere in his jumpsuit. The vault was partitioned into two aisles with floor to ceiling shelves on all walls and down the vault center. Each rack contained many aluminum bins, each with a detailed label and a lock. Covered fluorescent lamps ran the length of each aisle.

*Lights would sure help speed this up,* Linc thought.

"They're working on the lights," Ernie intoned as if reading Linc's thoughts. "What's he doing?"

"He's pulling out each bin and brushing the powder away," Linc whispered, not wanting to disturb the Librarian's concentration.

"I'm checking the number on each lock," Reader mumbled, sorting through keycards on a huge holder. When he found the appropriate card, he opened the lid of the bin and sorted through the contents, comparing them with the information on the bin lid. When he was satisfied that the contents were all there, he locked the lid and slid the bin into its proper place.

\* \* \*

An hour passed. Linc was getting antsy. To him, idleness never consumed time as rapidly as busyness. Ernie had departed unannounced, about the time Reader was about halfway through his review. While he was idling mentally, Linc scanned the room again, this time examining a small metal table just inside the door.

"Hey, doc? What is this table for?"

"It's there for anyone who accesses the vault. They can sit there and examine documents."

"What was on this table?"

"What's on the table? The log."

"Log?"

"Yes. When a person accesses the vault, they sign in, posting the time. When they leave, they sign out, posting the time again. Why do you ask?"

“Well, whatever was here is no longer here.” Linc pointed to a rectangular spot devoid of white powder.

Reader gasped “Oh my God.”

Linc observed that the document had been taken after the dry chemical had been discharged. No footprints in the powder meant that someone had returned to the vault afterwards to specifically take the book.

*They got it just by reaching into the vault from the doorway. Gotta dust down the edge of the door and the wall for latents,* he thought, although he doubted that anyone so sophisticated about safe cracking would be so dumb as to leave prints.

Minutes passed. “How are you coming, Doctor Reader?” Linc tried not to make his voice sound irritable but he doubted that he had succeeded since Reader made no response.

The Librarian was near the end of the partition, examining the shelves at the end of the partition nearest the vault door, when he gasped, “Oh my God, oh my God.”

“Find something?”

“Oh, my God, it’s gone. Look, Bin b2D, the whole bin. It’s gone.” Reader was pointing to the bottom of the partition, where, apparently, a bin should have been but wasn’t.

“My God, my God.” Suddenly he slumped. Linc, alarmed, stepped into the vault, grabbing at the librarian to keep him from falling into the fire extinguisher residue. Instead of falling, he just sagged against Linc.

Linc stepped further into the vault and examined the area. The shape of the bin was demarked at the edge of the powder. The shelf under where the bin had been was also covered with powder but only with a fine dusting, though. *The torchers were determined. They continued to work even while being doused with fire retardant.*

“Is this the only one missing?” When Linc got no response, he repeated, “Doctor Reader? Is this the only bin missing?”

“Ah... Ah...” Reader was obviously in serious distress, shock. He was about to shake him when the little guy shook his head. *Trying to clear it,* Linc thought. “I don’t know,” Reader said in a quavering voice.

“Doctor Reader,” Linc said, no longer trying to hide his impatience. “I need to get on with this investigation. I have a dead body, possibly a murder, arson, a breached vault, and now theft, undoubtedly grand. So, please, Doc, let’s move on, okay?”

*Besides, my eyes, my nose, my throat are burning.*

*The Curse of the Gallows*

\* \* \*

It was dawn, a weak dawn, but dawn nonetheless. Ernie and his gang had long since departed but the yellow tape remained, everywhere. Captain Vinny LaRusso, Linc's boss, had come and gone, insisting, as usual, that Linc provide him with a detailed report of the event by morning. To his surprise, the state crime scene guys had been there, photographed everything, and were already gone.

Linc was still waiting, again sitting on the library steps to the second floor, sucking down his second coffee, the last cup from the roach coach that had since departed. It was tepid and bitter but at least it was helping to dissolve the acrid taste of smoke and fire extinguisher residue in his mouth. He sat, craving a smoke, and waiting for Reader.

The power was back on and the extent of damage now apparent. *Mild*, he thought. Some drapery around a display in the lobby was charred and there were smoke stains to the side of the stairway.

"Sergeant?" Linc was surprised by Reader. *Sergeant? The little weasel snuck up on me.* "I think that there are only two things missing." Reader said in a raspy, weak voice.

Linc waited for him to tell him about the 'only two things that were missing.' Finally, when Reader just stood there, Linc sighed and said, "Okay, ah, Doctor Head Librarian. Tell me what's missing." He pulled out his notebook and his nub of a pencil. He wetted its tip and waited.

"Ah, Bin 42D and the logbook."

"Good," Linc nodded. "Thank you," he snapped.

*Jesus, Mother Mary and Joseph. I knew that more than an hour ago.*

He sighed. "Now tell me, Doctor Reader. What valuable, priceless things were in Bin 42D?" His words were again lined in impatience.

Reader opened a bound file and began to tick off the items. "There are eleven items, in all. All are 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century documents. There's a folio written by an Italian, three letters from a Vatican Cardinal Vincenzo, four important letters from a Pope, and a draft of *The Praise of Folly* by Desiderius Erasmus. He was a Dutch priest who is considered one of the leaders of the Reformation, even though he chastised other reformers for rejecting the concept of free will. In later years..."

"Enough, Reader," Linc snapped. "Is that it? According to my count, that's only nine."

"...and two manuscripts." Reader had continued, now in a near whisper. "Codices, actually. *Steganographia*, a 15<sup>th</sup> century manuscript by Trithemius.

Johannes Heidenberg Trithemius, was an abbot and a mystic. The manuscript was on permanent loan from the British Library. We had borrowed only Volume Three of the three-volume codex, though. And a 15<sup>th</sup> century codex called the *Voyrich Manuscript*, simply because we don't know its original title."

Linc had been writing, at least until Reader had read the names of the two manuscripts. Then he had stopped. "What's a codex?"

"Technically, a codex is a medieval method of cutting folios into discrete pages that are then hand-sewn together."

"It's a book, right?"

"Well, I guess you could say that. It's more like today's paperback, except it was sewn rather than glued, like higher quality tomes used to be."

"The names of the missing books? Can you spell those?"

Reader spelled them.

"And their value?"

"Priceless. I told you, sir, that none of these documents can be insured. They are priceless."

"And, in your opinion, Doctor Reader, who would want these documents?"

Reader laughed, a thin, reedy laugh, through his bloodless lips.

"Captain, these documents are well known worldwide. They cannot be sold. The persons who possess these must understand that."

Reader hesitated before continuing, "There is an even more compelling reason to not steal these things. They're all online," he said softly, a catch in his voice.

"What do you mean, 'online'?"

"All of our documents have been photographed and posted on Telenet, Bitnet, and World Wide Web for everyone having a computer and a telephone line to access."

Linc shrugged. He was from another generation, computer illiterate. "So? Who'd want them?"

"There is no rational reason, Captain." Reader thought for a long moment. "Maybe just a private collector."

"A private collector? Are you telling me that there's someone out there who's willing and rich enough to hire pros to cut into a safe? Someone willing and rich enough to have a watchman killed and to set fire to this place?"

Reader shrugged his head in resignation. "I just don't know, sir." He took off his glasses, and wiped their lenses with a tissue that he'd extracted from somewhere. He held the lenses to the light and wiped some more, then



*The Curse of the Gallows*

repeated the glasses on the bridge of his nose where they promptly slid down ever so slightly. He was so pale that Linc thought he'd pass out any second.

\* \* \*

Linc jotted notes for several minutes while Reader continued to pace, mumbling, and every so often saying, "My God, who would want to do this?"

"Hi, boss. Chief said I oughta get my butt over here to help out." Linc hadn't seen his assistant arrive. He always thought of Jack Olson as another Jimmy Olson, Clark Kent aka Superman's sidekick.

"Whatcha got?"

"Doctor Reader, this is Jack Olson, my worker." Reader offered his limp hand to him which Olson shook, then shrugged and raised his eyebrows to Linc and grinned.

"Jack, did Fergus ever get back?"

Olson grinned. "Yeah. He told me that when he saw you duck into here, he decided he wasn't needed any more. So he decided to head to Koffee Korner for a brew and one of their lead sinker donuts. Turned out when he came back to retrieve the squad car, he got stuck trying to get outa the student lot over on Elm. I hadda dig him out. So, what's this all about, boss?"

Linc recited mechanically. "What we have here, sonny, is a smorgasbord of crimes, including littering, arson, theft of priceless but uninsured docs, safe cracking, and lest I forget, possible murder."

"That's it?"

Linc looked at Reader. "No. I want major charges filed against the head librarian for insulting a New Haven officer of the law."

"What? How'd he do that?"

"First off, I wanna nail him for lecturing *ad nauseum* about obscure documents and explaining, in detail, about computers, that's how. But the greatest charge is calling a simple detective a Sergeant, a Lieutenant, a Captain, or even worse. You're not gonna believe this, but you know what he called me? He had the effrontery to call me Sir."

Olson howled. "That last charge will get the perp at least five to ten."

Reader looked askingly at the two who were now grinning at him. After a moment, he shrugged before returning to his notes. He occasionally raised his glasses to wipe one eye with a pink tissue.

Olson was the department's only non-detective. He was a bright high school grad who wanted a college criminal justice degree but had no money. The New Haven Police Department hired him and, over LaRusso's vehement objections, assigned him to the detective bureau.

So Jack Olson, easily six-six and one-forty, at best, with carrot-colored hair, several million freckles, and skin so fair that he'd burn even on a cloudy day in a Connecticut winter, became Linc's lackey. He held the made-up rank of Assistant to the Detective Agency of the Police Department of the City of New Haven, Connecticut. All of that was printed on his business card.

"So, Mister Olson, what do you think about this case?" Linc asked after a quick run-down on the case.

"Easy case, boss. My guess? Some rich dude wants some priceless shit for his collection. So he sets up a contract job. The watchman catches the burglars torching the safe. They waste him. Their torch sets stuff on fire. The vault is sprayed with retardant. The bad guys panic. They just grab shit nearest the door and beat it. Case solved." He rocked back on his heels. "Whaddaya think, boss?"

"Not bad, except if the torchers were pros on a mission to grab some really priceless shit, as you call it, nothing would have prevented them from emptying the vault - not the watchman, not the fire, not anything. And besides, they wouldn't've grabbed the log book."

"Meaning?" Olson sounded disappointed.

"Meaning that, in my humble opinion, the bad guys got exactly what they came for."

"What did you say?" Reader, overhearing Linc's comment, pushed his glasses up and moved to the two cops.

Linc turned toward Reader. "I said that the pros specifically came for the contents of the box. What did you call it? Oh, yeah, Bin 42D. And after they snitched the box, they took the log book 'cause it contained clues as to who they were, or who had sent them on the job."

"Whaddaya want me to do, boss? Round up the usual suspects?" Olson's eyes sparkled at the thought.

Linc sighed at Olson's exuberance. "No, Jack. I want you to begin..."

"No, please, sir, not background checks," Olson said in a mock shocked tone, his index fingers in a cross before his face in an attempt to wend off Linc's words.

"That too. First, see what you can find on torchers active around here, including the New England area. You might wanna check with the folks maybe in Montreal or even Toronto, too. Y'know, Canada?" He paused, then said, "And then get busy..."

"On the background checks," Olson said, his exuberance faded. He gave a half-hearted salute and slunk away.



*For half a millennium, the strange writings and drawings of an elaborate codex have defied the world's greatest cryptologists. Now it and a companion codex have been stolen from Yale University. As Detective Lincoln Barnes searches for international agents who may have decoded them, those who know the documents' secrets are murdered and his life is threatened.*

# **The Curse of the Gallows**

**Order the complete book from**

**[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)**

**<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/6232.html?s=pdf>**

**or from your favorite neighborhood  
or online bookstore.**