

Jeremy Shuttle Adventures, Book Two

What Next?



Once you have the power to make anything you draw become real, what do you do next? In **What Next?**, the second book in the *Jeremy Shuttle Adventures* trilogy, Jeremy, his mom, and (almost) girlfriend Natalie are pursued by others hungry to seize the power of the magic sketchbook. From Washington, D.C., to France to a land where imagination is the greatest danger, the trio seeks to protect the book and find Jeremy's missing Dad.

What Next?

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Read more about the books in the Jeremy Shuttle series and ask questions of the author at the official website: jeffreymdaniels.com

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Dad, at last!

With a final groan, the great door opened. Standing in the doorway was a man of medium height, a mass of dark curly hair atop his head. He had regular features, bright green eyes and a crooked grin on his face.

“Dad!” Jeremy cried, and crushed the man with a hug 13 years in the making.

The man looked surprised at first and then pained as he gazed kindly down at the curly head buried in his chest. Slowly, he let his arms encircle the boy and murmured into his hair.

“Not exactly.”

Previously

What If?, the first book in the Jeremy Shuttle Adventures, introduced Jeremy Shuttle, a reasonably normal 12-year old boy. Sure, he talked to bugs (particularly ants), but up until then, none had actually held up their end of the conversation.

Jeremy lived with his Mom, Teresa Shuttle. He had never met his Dad, William; he had never even seen a picture of him. His Mom had promised to tell him the whole story for his 13th birthday.

Jeremy was especially talented at two things. The first was drawing, which he never shared with anyone but his Mom. Using a pencil, he had an amazing ability to draw things with startling realism.

Jeremy's other talent was asking questions, something his classmates (and a few of his teachers) *wished* he didn't share. Chief among those Jeremy annoyed was Eddie Vane, whom Jeremy thought of as his "arch-enemy". Eddie lived up to the name, either in having Jeremy humiliated or beaten up.

After one of these times, Jeremy met his best friend, Natalie. They shared a common bond, since Eddie picked on her because of her weight. Jeremy thought she was pretty and was flattered to have her as a friend. Natalie was interested in something more, but Jeremy had not yet gotten the hint.

On the way home from school, Jeremy noticed a strange art store. Inside, he met a mysterious shopkeeper who asked him a number of equally mysterious questions, including about something called "collective unconscious". The shopkeeper then asked Jeremy to draw him something and in return, gave Jeremy a new sketchbook.

The next day, Eddie crossed the line in class, bringing Natalie to tears. Jeremy stepped up to defend her and Eddie made sure Jeremy paid for it after class. Bruised and shamed, Jeremy sought release through drawing. His vision of a monster doing to Eddie what Jeremy could not made him feel better...until he and Natalie witnessed the exact monster Jeremy had sketched come to life in the school cafeteria. Many students were hurt, including Eddie.

After Jeremy's guilt faded, he became excited realizing what he could do with the sketchbook. Natalie, wiser and more cautious,

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warned Jeremy not to use the book because it could be dangerous. Jeremy stubbornly ignored her.

He decided to transform himself into an ant. He met up with another ant, had some nervous moments with the Queen ant and got hurt in a ferocious battle with enemy ants.

The injury stayed with him when he finally returned to human form. He didn't tell his Mom how he got hurt because he didn't want her to take away the sketchbook.

He came up with a plan to use the sketchbook to bring back his missing Dad, but wanted to test the book one more time. Natalie was horrified at his idea and once again asked him not to use the book. She ultimately came to support him, but he still didn't understand that she was doing so because she cared for him as more than a friend.

He used the sketchbook to travel more than 30,000 years in the past. A saber tooth tiger attacked Jeremy and he escaped only when a group of cavemen killed the beast...and then invited him to lunch.

They gestured for him to paint something on their cave wall. Jeremy complied as best he could before he reappeared in the present. After recounting his tale to Natalie, she suggested that perhaps his was the first cave painting in history.

Natalie pointed out that the book once again placed Jeremy in danger and urged him to give up his idea, but Jeremy again ignored her. Finding a picture in his Mom's room of her and two men, he made a guess at which of the two was his Dad.

A man did appear in their home, but it turned out to be Carl, his Dad's best friend and business partner, who also went missing 13 years ago. Carl had changed. He begged Teresa to forget William and leave with him. He didn't even notice Jeremy until he saw the sketchbook. His lust for the sketchbook exceeded even that for Teresa and he seized the book just as Natalie showed up.

Teresa managed to free the book from Carl. Natalie and Jeremy barely avoided capture as Jeremy raced to draw a sketch to get Carl away from them. Jeremy then tried again to draw his Dad back, but no one appeared.

With all three hurt, both physically and emotionally, an air of defeat and longing hung over them. Teresa opened the sketchbook one final time, gasping at a message mysteriously written there.

A message that could mean Jeremy's Dad was still alive.

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Chapter 1

The Room

The light came from a single bulb lamp suspended from a beam in the center of the ceiling. The ceiling was nothing more than a grouping of crisscrossed beams of wood below an even higher ceiling of indeterminate nature, mostly from lack of illumination. Jeremy supposed he should be grateful for even that much light, since he could at least see some of the room below the lamp.

He stood silently for a moment, taking time to acclimate himself. There was always a brief period of disassociation after he suddenly appeared in his drawn location. It was a mental adjustment; he needed his head to “get around” the idea that he had transported himself into somewhere that had only existed in his imagination a few moments ago. He wondered if he would ever get used to that feeling.

This time felt different, though. His senses seemed to have adjusted and he seemed to be able to think and move easily enough, but something about the place didn't feel right. Or real. It was as if everything looked real but didn't *feel* real.

He moved over to the walls, the bulb's light barely reaching the features beneath his thick, curly brown hair. Despite only a few months passing since he first received the sketchbook, he already seemed older. Though it was the same slender face, rounded cheeks and bright green eyes, there was a sense of depth beyond the youthfulness. Jeremy might not even realize the changes himself, but those closest to him could see it clearly...more thoughtful, perhaps even somber.

Jeremy wore his usual outfit, a loose fitting polo shirt and jeans along with blue sneakers. All showed recent wear from the chase in the caves. *I hope Mom and Natalie will be okay*, he thought. His mouth twisted and he rolled his eyes. *I hope I will be okay*.

Reaching a hand out to the wall, he touched it cautiously. It was cool to the touch and damp. The cold stone did little to dispel his odd feeling. Jeremy immediately thought of medieval castles and dungeons. He wondered at the wetness. *Maybe I'm underground and*

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water leaks in? Squinting in the dim light he stared at the stones; he had the odd impression they were crying. He remembered a movie he had seen when he was young about a house that had a painting that began to bleed when scratched. *Wait a minute, that's not red stuff leaking, is it?*

He jumped back from the wall, stifling a cry. He caught himself and stopped. *Oh for crying out loud!*

"It's just water," he said. His voice sounded tiny in the stone room, but it gave him some comfort. He smiled his crooked smile again and went back to study the wall. The stones were not terribly rough, but they were far from polished. He gingerly ran his fingers over the moisture and raised them to his face. *Not red, scaredy-cat.*

He pressed hard against the stone. It was as unyielding as any wall he had ever touched. Still he couldn't shake the feeling of unreality that had settled over him. Abruptly, he pulled away and turned to survey the rest of the room.

There was a long, straight table made of wood near the front of the room (he assumed it was the front, since the door was on this side). The table looked massive, like a picnic table on steroids.

To the back of the room, abutting the far wall, was a bed of simple construction. The bed had a cloth covering and a small pillow not much bigger than Jeremy's head. He moved over to the bed and sat upon it, grunting at its hardness. *It's barely even a cot.* He hoped he wouldn't be here long enough to have to sleep on it.

On the short side of the wall, there was a small table, upon which was a fat candle in a metal holder. He noted the candle was unlit and made a cursory search for some form of lighting tool. The search didn't take long and he found nothing to suggest a way to light the candle.

Outside of the three pieces of furniture, the room was bare. No shelves or windows were present, no paintings or other decorations adorned its walls. It seemed too well outfitted to be a prison cell. The thought occurred to him that he might have traveled in time again and perhaps he actually was in the middle ages. After all, most of the people back then didn't have the possessions of current times.

They also didn't have electricity. He looked up at the dim but unquestionably familiar light bulb suspended above his head. Despite the trappings of the room, he could not be in anything other than reasonably modern times.

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He decided to examine the door to the room. In this, he was suitably impressed, for it was a massive thing. A combination of wood and a dull silver metal he decided was iron. Near the center of the door on its left side, there was a circlet of metal suspended from the mouth of a lion that he presumed was the door handle. Diagonal beams of wood crossed above and below a wide midsection of iron. Iron bolts punctuated the wood crosses at the tops and bottom.

As his inspection ended, Jeremy sensed, more than felt, the sketchbook in his hand. He moved over to the table, pulling out one of the massive chairs. He was surprised how heavy the chair was and he struggled to get the chair to move.

On the cover of the sketchbook was the same animal-like shape as ever, the color shifting even in this dim light. He opened the book with his breath held and released it quickly as he stared at the first page. There was the drawing of the room he was in, exactly as the shopkeeper had described it to him.

The existence of the drawing troubled him in some way. In the couple of times he had drawn a sketchbook in with him previously, there had never been anything on the pages inside. It seemed identical to the actual room, even down to the bad illumination from the light. His mouth twisted into a sardonic grin. *Maybe next time I can draw a halogen light up there.*

He closed the sketchbook carefully. After waiting a few moments, he opened it again. The drawing was still there. He could not say why, but a small chill traveled across his nerves.

He looked in the spine for the pencil he always kept there and noted with alarm that there was no drawing implement. He scattered his view around the room but was rewarded only with a confirmation of his previous review...other than the candle, there was no loose item in the room.

The shopkeeper told him to draw this room and not go anywhere. He was supposed to wait and everything would reveal itself to him. He supposed this could be a special place, like a meeting room or a place where visitors came together.

He noticed he had gotten up from his chair and was pacing around the small room. With a conscious effort, he stopped and sat himself back down at the table. *All right. Let's see if we can piece a little of this together to decide what I need to do next.*

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He was almost certain that he would find answers somewhere in this strange place. The shopkeeper had been adamant about him waiting here. A sudden thought struck him. *What if there's nothing else but this room? What if I were to open that door and find nothing but a great wall of nothingness?* Jeremy began to wonder just what the rules of this place were...or if it truly existed.

The strange feeling of unreality returned, stronger than before. *What if this place isn't real?* If that were the case, it would surely be safer to just follow instructions and wait for something to happen.

The prospect of what might await him outside the door worried and excited him. He imagined his Dad would not simply sit in a room and wait to see if anything would happen. *Plus, I don't know what's happening with Mom and Natalie back in the "real" world.*

He did not think this was part of "his" world. That thought led to a feeling of excitement...and an undefinable tingle of fear. He was more certain than ever he needed to get out of this room. Now.

As if in response to his thoughts, there came a loud banging on the door. Jeremy jumped, first in surprise and then with a breathless anticipation. He moved swiftly to the front of the room and pulled mightily at the heavy door. It showed no acknowledgement of his efforts. He planted both his feet wide apart at the base of the door and grabbed the handle with both hands. He immediately felt the strain in his shoulders as his joints creaked and stretched. He now began to feel equal parts excitement and desperation to get the door open, a feeling he thought could turn to panic if he did not make some progress soon.

Were it not for his eagerness, Jeremy might have recalled that all his previous uses of the sketchbook had brought him danger. Even now, as he tried to get the door to open, he did not even consider the possibility that whatever waited on the other side of the door might not mean him well.

Another bang rang out from the other side of the door, this one seeming more insistent. Jeremy sensed there was nothing the person on the other side could do to help him; the door must open from within. A momentary flash of vampires needing to be invited in flew across his mind before he sent it away amid another bone-creaking yank.

He moved his feet so they braced against the wall just outside the doorframe and increased his pull on the handle. It began to feel like

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his arms were going to separate from his shoulders. Spots began to form in front of his eyes and he felt dizzy. The door finally budged. It did not actually move, but he felt it give in to him just a little bit. As if that little nudge was all he needed, he felt a renewed strength flow through him and he exerted even more effort against the door. This time the door did move. Slowly, battling him for every inch, it gave more ground. A sliver of space appeared, then a gap. With a final groan, the great door opened.

Jeremy stood hunched over for a few seconds, panting heavily and his arms numb from his shoulders to his elbows. He shook those arms and rolled them in circles above and below his head. He spared a single thought for how these would be hurting for days to come and then darted around the massive wooden door to the opening he had created.

Standing there in the doorway was a man of medium height, with a fedora hat upon his head, which he removed to reveal a mass of dark curly hair. He had regular features, bright green eyes and a crooked grin on his face. He looked exactly like the man in the photo with his Mom.

“Dad!” Jeremy cried, crushing the man with a hug 13 years in the making.

As he felt his shirt dampening from the small head pressed against it, the man looked down with a kind, but pained expression before wrapping the boy in his arms.

“Not exactly.”

Chapter 2

“I’m not real”

Jeremy stayed in his Dad’s arms for what seemed like hours. He was giddy over the feeling of those two arms encircling him and the fact that he had finally succeeded in using the sketchbook properly. Long moments passed when he simply stopped thinking altogether.

Slowly, his mind began to process information again. Time began to flow and his senses returned. His brain sent him insistent signals, made more urgent by his refusing to acknowledge them. He stiffened, stepping back from him as the grip loosened.

“Wait. What?” he stammered in confusion. “What do you mean ‘Not exactly’?”

The man pushed his hat back into shape; crushed during Jeremy’s hug. He looked kindly at Jeremy.

“Are you my Dad, or not?” Jeremy asked.

A bright smile flashed across the man’s face and was gone. Rolling his hat between both hands, he looked directly at Jeremy and answered in a clear, friendly voice.

“Yes.”

Jeremy growled in frustration.

“Yes what?” he asked angrily. “Which question are you answering?”

“Both,” the man replied.

“Both. Oh, thanks. Very helpful,” Jeremy replied sarcastically. *What was I thinking about the sketchbook working right this time?* The man grinned again as he watched Jeremy seethe, which only infuriated Jeremy more.

“So let’s see. I’m in some weird place that looks like a medieval castle, but has a light bulb, that I materialize into by drawing in a magic sketchbook that I’m trying to use to find my Dad and when I do, he says he’s ‘not exactly’ my Dad. Have I got that all right?”

“Everything but the magic part,” the man said, still smiling.

Jeremy just stared at the man, mouth agape. He looked exactly like the man in the picture he used to draw to get his Dad home.

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Jeremy paused. *Yes. Exactly like him.* Every detail was the same as in the photo, except for the hat.

"It looks like you're figuring it out," the man said, still watching Jeremy closely. "Why don't we sit down and get to some explanations?"

They moved to the big table and Jeremy once more struggled to pull out a chair. His "Dad", he noted wryly, had no such problem.

For a moment, they sat there, son and not-exactly-Dad.

"Why don't you go first?" Jeremy offered testily.

The man chuckled and nodded. Dad or not, Jeremy found himself liking this man exactly opposite to how much he disliked the last man he had encountered from that troublesome photo.

"The short answer to your question is that I am your Dad."

"But, I'm not real." He held up his hand to halt Jeremy's barrage of questions. "This will go faster if you allow me the time to get some information out of the way first."

Jeremy swallowed his questions gracelessly. He felt just like his first time with the shopkeeper, who had also held up a hand to stop Jeremy's questions. He sat back with an air of impatience that elicited another chuckle from the man.

"I know that look. Had it most of my life...or your real Dad did."

"First, let me correct myself. It is true I am not real. Neither is the table and chairs, or even this room. On the other hand, it's all real, especially here.

"For lack of time, let's just say that you're sitting inside the collective unconscious. It's not so much a place as a thought of a place. And in this place, every thought can be real.

"But not every thought *is* real. That takes someone and something special. For now, that someone is you and that something is your sketchbook.

"For now."

Jeremy couldn't restrain himself any longer.

"But you said it isn't magic! So, what is it and why me?"

The man chuckled. "That didn't last very long, did it?"

Jeremy smiled back, feeling the care the man had for him the way he always hoped his Dad would have. His *real* Dad, he had to remind himself.

"Okay, okay," Jeremy conceded. "But can we come up with a name I can think of you as? I mean, since I can't call you Dad?"

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“How about Will?” he replied and Jeremy rolled the name around in his head. After a few mental attempts, he found he could get comfortable with the idea. He nodded at Will to continue.

“Again, I’ll shorten the answers a bit so we can move into more pressing matters. I don’t know how much you’ve explored collective unconscious since your talk with the shopkeeper.”

Jeremy showed no surprise at Will’s knowledge of his time in the art store; he just took it in stride with the rest of the weirdness going on. He shook his head.

“I didn’t think so. Briefly, the collective unconscious originally grew out of primal thoughts, those of food, safety and family. Billions of minds across time have always had these primal needs within their thoughts. It’s one reason your quest has allowed you swift access to the immense reservoir of coalesced thought. Drawing upon one of the three primal needs opens pathways for certain people.”

Jeremy listened, transfixed by the possibilities. He ventured a question.

“Is there a reason the shopkeeper had me draw this place rather than just go straight to my Dad?”

Will nodded.

“I can explain that, but it will be easier if you first tell me what happened from when you got your Dad’s message to how you ended up here.”

Jeremy started. “That will take forever! Can’t you just tell me what I’m supposed to do?”

Will shook his head. “It’s not that easy. Part of the answer will reveal itself by your story. Tell your tale first.”

“But Dad needs me!” Jeremy exclaimed. “And Mom and Nat are in trouble!”

Will nodded gravely. “I understand. We have some time. Actually, we have quite a lot of time. It can be made to work differently here.”

“But...” Jeremy persisted.

“Tell me your tales,” said Will, holding his hand up again. “It’s the only way I can help you.”

Jeremy’s face flashed from anger through frustration to thoughtful. *This guy is just as annoying as...as the shopkeeper!*

“Let’s save the speculation for later, too, okay?” said Will, as if reading Jeremy’s thoughts.

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“Okay,” Jeremy sighed. “But it’s a long tale.” He frowned. “I should have drawn a bottle of water in here with me.”

“Flashlights, bottles of water...it’s the little things that really matter,” Jeremy added with a grin. He looked at Will and saw him grimace and then lean back, eyebrows raised expectantly.

“Okay, okay,” he said. Now that he was on it, Jeremy felt a growing eagerness to tell his story in this not-real room to his not-real Dad.

Chapter 3

“I think it’s a message”

“Well?” Will asked.

Jeremy looked at him helplessly. He was eager to start, but he couldn’t decide how far back he should go.

“Relax,” Will said softly. “Begin from when your Mom saw the words in the sketchbook.”

Jeremy looked up, startled. “How do you know about that?”

Will just grinned. It was warm and friendly, instantly disarming any irritation Jeremy might have felt.

“Okay, Mr. Mysterious. I suppose that’s as good a place as any...”

“What do you want to do, Mom?” Jeremy asked.

Teresa was still holding the sketchbook and looking at the words at the top of the page.

“Knowing what you’re looking for does you little good if you don’t know where to look,” Natalie read aloud. “I know the shopkeeper told you that before you got the sketchbook, but why is it so important?”

Teresa and Jeremy looked at each other. Jeremy made a move to tell Natalie but Teresa interrupted him. She patted a space on the sofa and Natalie sat down next to her.

“It’s more than the shopkeeper, honey,” Teresa began quietly, but with a trace of excitement in her voice. “This was my husband’s -- William’s -- favorite phrase. He would tell this to clients when he was preparing to find some lost or sought after item for them. The way he said it, with matter-of-fact conviction and confidence, would always convince them to trust him. Carl...” She shuddered for a moment. “Carl used to say that it was his job to hook the clients and then William would land them.”

She smiled at the recollection of happier times, a better Carl than the maniac who had threatened them. Jeremy smiled at the information, too. He was always hungry for more stories about his Dad, whom he had still never seen in his life. *Well, apart from that*

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photo with Mom and even then I guessed wrong. His smile slipped as he once again felt a twinge of guilt at how he put them in terrible danger. Bad enough he seemed to be ensnared every time he used the sketchbook, but this time his Mom and Natalie were hurt by his carelessness.

That's why he had vowed to himself not to use the sketchbook again until he could gain more control. He truly believed he could use the sketchbook for good, but so far, only bad things seemed to be happening. He knew he needed to find out more about the book and its origins. He had the power, now he needed the knowledge to use it wisely.

Natalie watched the expressions on the two people who were as close to her as her own family. On Teresa's face, she saw that same flicker of hope and longing that had briefly surfaced when Jeremy had tried to draw his Dad into their home. She dearly wanted to help Teresa fill the hole in her heart and hoped that whatever she and Jeremy believed these words meant was true.

Jeremy, of course, remained a puzzle and a frustration to Natalie. After that moment in the bedroom where he had saved her from that awful man, he had finally gotten up the courage to ask her to be his girlfriend, but their first kiss was interrupted by concern over his Mom. Natalie couldn't be upset over that. It was one of Jeremy's more attractive traits. Now he seemed to be pulling back into his shy habits again, using the search for his Dad as an excuse to avoid talking about their relationship. Maybe she needed to have a conversation with Teresa about him.

"But what do you think it means?" Natalie asked, breaking the momentary silence.

Teresa looked at Natalie, glanced at her son and looked back, with an expression both hopeful and uncertain.

"I don't know," she said. Softly, she repeated, "I don't know."

Jeremy couldn't contain himself any longer.

"I think it was a message!" he exclaimed excitedly.

Teresa continued to stare down at the sketchbook, so Natalie spoke.

"You think it's a message...from your Dad?" Natalie spoke carefully. She knew how much the two of them had invested in the hope these words had given them and she heard that in Teresa's voice and the look of excitement on Jeremy's face. She wondered

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whether they weren't allowing their hope to blind them to the dangers they might be facing. She didn't want her naturally cautious nature to dash that hope prematurely. If the sketchbook had convinced her of anything, it was that there were amazing forces that existed she had never been aware of before.

Jeremy looked at her sharply, but seeing her face and hearing her tone, did not become defensive. His face softened and he smiled gratefully at her to show he appreciated her indulgence. She bit back her own smile and kept her face carefully neutral.

"Yeah. I think Dad is trying to tell us that he's ok and that we need to figure out where he is. He's the 'what we're looking for' and we need to figure out the 'where to look' part!"

Natalie decided not to challenge Jeremy's belief that his Dad was in no danger. One other thing her experiences with the sketchbook had demonstrated was that trouble always followed when trying to use the book, even for good purposes.

"Where do you think we need to look, then?" Natalie asked.

"I think we should start in France," Jeremy declared confidently.

This time, Teresa did look up, and her face showed conflicting emotions. Still, both she and Natalie could see why France might be the logical place to start. That was where William went missing, years ago. The shopkeeper had hinted that Jeremy and Teresa should go there and Jeremy's own adventures had taken him there already.

Teresa suddenly stood up, closing the sketchbook. In a clear voice, she said simply, "I agree. School is out in a few weeks, I'll make the preparations."

Natalie saw in their faces a mirror of determination and anticipation. She once again fretted over the dangers that seemed to revolve around the sketchbook. As the episode with Carl proved, more people knew about the sketchbook than they were aware. Natalie felt the Shuttles would need someone else with them who could see beyond their hopes.

I'm going with them. They just don't know that yet.

Chapter 4

“I’m a little scared, too”

“I don’t want you using this anymore until we learn more about it.”

Teresa looked intently at her son, holding his eyes in her steely gaze.

Jeremy managed not to flinch under his Mom’s stare, but it wasn’t easy. It was his own fault, he knew, for bringing up the subject, but he had felt it important enough, especially with their trip only a couple of weeks away.

“Believe me, Mom,” Jeremy said. “I was thinking the exact same thing since my last attempt went...uh...a little sideways.” Teresa snorted. “But,” he hurried on, “what if the sketchbook is the only way to bring Dad back? We still don’t know if I can bring anything back with me.”

“You brought something back just a few weeks ago,” she said ominously and this time Jeremy did flinch.

“Ok, yeah, that didn’t work out so great, but technically, I didn’t bring Carl here, I sketched him.” He ignored her frown and continued, “I tried that with Dad and nothing happened. I think it’s going to work differently with Dad.”

Teresa pursed her lips as she listened to her son. She had seen the results of the “magic” sketchbook twice already. Despite the recently healed injuries she suffered from one of those creations, she still couldn’t fully convince herself that her son could “conjure” up reality by drawing in that sketchbook.

“What makes you think you’re the one who has to bring William...your Dad...back?”

“It’s just the way these things always seem to work, Mom,” he said in a helpless voice, realizing how stupid it sounded. As expected, his Mom’s expression remained unconvinced.

“You have a lot of experience in ‘these things’?” she asked.

“Actually, yes,” Jeremy boasted and then hurried past his Mom’s immediate sniff of disbelief. “Maybe not personally, but that’s always the way these tales go.”

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Teresa struggled to get her face under control. In a calmer voice, she asked, "You're basing your whole argument on stories you've read? In what, science fiction? Comic books?"

"Partly, yes," Jeremy declared. "But not only that. I mean, the shopkeeper gave me the sketchbook. My talent makes it work. I'm the only one who travels because of it."

"You've never drawn anyone else. You could try drawing me going somewhere."

"Forget it!" Jeremy said, horrified.

"Oh?" Teresa replied in an irritated tone. "And where do you get the only say in how you use the book. You're still my son!"

"That's not it, Mom!" Jeremy said, sounding hurt. "I don't want to risk putting you in danger."

Teresa's eyes softened and she motioned for her son. She clutched him in a tight hug and she could feel the fierceness of his love for her in his own grip. She felt bad for misreading Jeremy's intentions, but truthfully, the book scared her. Teresa began to see how Natalie could be so set against Jeremy using the sketchbook.

"Even so," she continued in a milder tone. "I feel the same about you. Every time you use this sketchbook, you get into something dangerous."

Jeremy couldn't argue that point. It seemed that each time he used the book, the danger became increasingly threatening. Still, Jeremy could think of no other way to test his theory...and he had a strong feeling that he needed to test it soon.

"I know, Mom," he said quietly. "I'm a little scared, too."

He paused, gathering his certainty around him like stone columns supporting a building and let all that come through as he spoke again.

"I'm willing to risk anything to bring Dad back to us."

Teresa sucked her lower lip between her teeth, using the brief pain to hold back more tears. In the last few months, her son had seemed to mature so much. There were times she could swear she heard William's voice when Jeremy spoke. That only increased her long-buried ache for her missing husband.

Releasing her lip, she took a slow, deep breath. Her eyes tightened with thoughts of potential dangers, but she forced a trembling smile to her face.

"Alright. You win." Her eyes held Jeremy, preventing him from celebrating. "How do you plan to test your idea?"

What Next?

Jeremy had indeed grown over the past few months. Getting closer to his Mom and Natalie had made him more sensitive to others' feelings, especially women. He understood how much his Mom's permission cost her. It was this understanding that allowed him to prevent a smile from reaching his face as he replied.

"I'll go to Washington D.C. and bring back a souvenir."

His Mom looked at him curiously. "Why Washington? Why not somewhere close by or even inside the house?"

This time Jeremy couldn't restrain a chuckle.

"I always wanted to visit the Lincoln Memorial and I figured why waste an opportunity?"

Teresa didn't allow herself to be swayed so quickly.

"That's nice, but I still think it would be safer if you tried this out closer to home."

"Honestly, Mom," Jeremy answered, understanding his Mom's nervousness. "I don't think it makes any difference with the sketchbook whether I'm next door or in France, 30,000 years ago. I would feel better if something is going to go wrong, that it happen far from you or Natalie." He watched his Mom go through her mixed emotions over his last statement and added, "Besides, I really, really would love to see the Lincoln Memorial!"

Teresa couldn't help but be affected by her son's enthusiasm and a real smile brightened her face. Thoughts of what might go wrong crept back swiftly and the smile faded almost as quickly as it had appeared.

"Fine," she eventually said. "Just tell me you're planning on visiting this year?"

Jeremy grinned at her question and he opened the sketchbook to get started on his drawing.

"Well, yeah. First, it would have to be after the Memorial was built, which was only in 1922, so it's not like I'm going back to see Lincoln himself." He paused and added playfully, "Although, now that you mention it..."

"Don't get cute, buster," Teresa said in a menacing tone and they both laughed. "Since when did you become an expert on our capital city?"

"Not so much Washington D.C., just Abraham Lincoln. It's your fault, really."

"Oh?" Teresa said, arching an eyebrow. "Do tell?"

Jeremy laughed at her expression.

Jeffrey M. Daniels

“Remember when you went on your classic movie “mission” with me, making me watch all those old movies?”

“I didn’t realize you were suffering so,” she replied, with a sly smile. “You seemed to enjoy them.”

“I did!” Jeremy hurriedly said. “Okay, bad word, ‘making’. How about ‘sharing’?”

“Better.”

“Okay. Sheesh,” Jeremy said in mock exasperation. “Everyone’s so picky.”

“Picky enough to know when you’re taking too long to answer a simple question,” she retorted.

“Fine, fine. Can’t a boy have a nice leisurely talk with his beloved Mom?”

Teresa snorted back a laugh but didn’t take the bait. She simply folded her arms across her chest and resumed her arched-eyebrow gaze.

“Right,” Jeremy said, wasting no more time. “So anyway, after I watched ‘Mr. Smith Goes to Washington’, I promised myself I would go to D.C. one day and talk with Mr. Lincoln, too.”

Teresa smiled again. She had guessed the reason as soon as Jeremy had mentioned their classic movie nights. She was thrilled the movies had made such an impact on him.

Jeremy began sketching in earnest, using a picture he had found on a website. Once again, he allowed some of the pure amazement flow through as he thought of how wondrous it was to own this incredible sketchbook. Already he had transformed into an ant, had lunch with cavemen and even created a monster out of nothing. *Two monsters, if you count Carl.*

Within a surprisingly short time, he had completed the drawing. Even he was amazed how quickly he was able to realize his art and wondered if the sketchbook was helping him somehow. He lowered the book so his Mom could see.

Teresa let out an involuntary gasp and her face shone with admiration and love. Jeremy flushed with pride.

“Oh Jeremy!” his Mom said, wrapping an arm around his shoulders. “You always take my breath away with your talent.” Jeremy swallowed back his pleasure and squeezed his Mom’s arm as they both gazed at the sketch.

What Next?

The drawing was set a distance away from the Memorial, but you could still clearly see the Lincoln statue seated in his stone chair. The lower right side of the drawing showed a curly-haired boy holding a sketchbook near a small tree. Despite the scale, there was no mistaking Jeremy.

“Why so far away?” his Mom asked.

“I figured even as busy as D.C. is, a boy popping out of nowhere in the middle of the Memorial would probably get noticed by someone.”

“Probably,” Teresa chuckled. “Why did you draw the sketchbook with you?”

“I’ve wanted to see if the sketchbook would work from the “other side”, so to speak.”

“Didn’t you say you already tried that back in your adventures with the cavemen?”

“Yeah, but I thought there might have been things that prevented it from working.”

“Does it really matter?”

“To tell the truth, I don’t really know.” Jeremy pulled at his lower lip. “Maybe that’s as good a reason as any to try it.” He added carefully, “Maybe if I did get into trouble, I could draw myself out of it.” He hurried on as he saw his Mom frown, “Besides, what could it hurt to try it again?”

Teresa left the frown on her face but didn’t pursue the issue. “Is it done?” was all she asked.

“Yep! All that’s left is for me to sign it.”

Teresa heard the barely concealed excitement in Jeremy’s voice. Now, with the moment here, she felt her misgivings flood back.

“Jeremy...” she began.

“I’ll be fine, Mom,” Jeremy interrupted, recognizing her concern and flashing a confident smile at her. “I’ll keep my head down and not do anything other than buy a small souvenir and then get out of the way.”

Teresa stared at him for a few moments and whether she shrugged or shuddered, Jeremy couldn’t tell. Eventually, she made a curt nod.

“I’ll give you one hour,” she said in a tone that suggested negotiation was futile.

Jeffrey M. Daniels

Jeremy picked up the pencil once more and put his stylish “JS” in the lower right portion of the page. As before, he was gone. There was no sound or flash of light. One moment he was holding the pencil to the page and the next his pencil was falling onto the sketchbook.

Teresa reached quickly for the sketchbook to ensure the book didn't close, since she knew from experience the drawing would disappear once the book closed on it. Jeremy was getting better at the process now, having placed the book on the seat of the chair before signing.

Fighting back her natural urge to close the book anyway, she sat down on the couch and gazed at the drawing. Holding the book open upon her lap, she tried to relax and not count each second adding up to an hour.

Chapter 5

“Looking for lost treasure?”

Jeremy was getting used to the effect of the sketchbook. Granted he wasn't appearing in a non-human body or in the middle of the Stone Age, but the disorientation was becoming tolerable.

So, it was with reckless speed he turned and stepped forward, followed immediately by a muffled cry as he collided with a large pole. He fell to the ground with a soft thud and managed to silence his moan quickly. He didn't know if anyone had seen him “pop” in, but he sure didn't need to bring any attention to himself. He hunkered down behind a nearby hedge as he overheard some voices.

Peeking around the bushes, he noticed the “pole” he had bumped into was really the tree he had drawn in his sketch. It was much larger than in the picture he had used for reference. Guess the website had an old photo. The tree had clearly grown taller and, much to his skull's regret, wider. *Wait a minute. Since when does the time change between my drawing and my arrival?* He grunted quietly. Yet another mystery about the sketchbook to solve. Jeremy wondered if the cause was the book itself or in Jeremy's continued use.

He was distracted by an uncomfortable feeling and reached his hand up to his forehead. Jeremy grimaced as he felt wetness there. A sad smile twisted his lips as he realized he was once again going to come back injured from one of his trips. *As if Mom needed another reason to stop me from using the sketchbook!*

He ducked back behind the hedge again as the voices he heard earlier drew closer. Furtively, he reached for the sketchbook that had fallen when he struck the tree and he dragged it as quietly as he could under the bush with him.

Jeremy could hear the voices clearly now, it was two men conversing. One voice was a reedy, whiny sound; giving the impression its owner spent much time complaining. The other voice was deeper and quieter. Even in Jeremy's young experience, the voice carried the quality of someone familiar with being in charge.

“So, where is he supposed to be?” the reedy voice asked.

Jeffrey M. Daniels

"Close to here," replied the deep voice.

"Do you buy this story? The kid's just going to show up?" Reedy voice asked. Without waiting for a reply, he continued, "All this for some stupid sketchbook?"

"Shut up, Leo," Deep Voice commanded.

"I'm just saying," the reedy voice of Leo said. "I don't like doing this all out in the open. And there are cops everywhere."

"Shut up!" Deep Voice put a threatening emphasis on the second word and few moments passed before Leo spoke again.

"I'm sorry, Manny," he said softly. "It's just this whole thing seems a little weird to me."

Manny grunted. He had to agree, this was a weird assignment. Not that he'd tell Leo that. He had been involved with his share of snatch and grabs for DaHurst before, so the request wasn't that odd. Even his strange insistence of the sketchbook wasn't out of the ordinary; they'd taken possession of plenty of rare items for him.

It was the seriousness in his tone when he told Manny not to let the boy draw anything in the book. That was definitely weird...that and the look in his eyes when Leo asked. Manny grunted again. Leo always had to ask. He was handy on the jobs, but he never knew when to shut up.

"What's so important about the book, Mr. DaHurst?" he had whined in his reedy voice. Even Manny's nerves could only take that sound for so long.

DaHurst never showed any reaction to Leo. *Or to me*, Manny thought dryly. In fact, he almost never answered any questions, especially from Leo.

That time, though, he looked intently at Leo, who moved back a step, and then DaHurst swept his gaze toward Manny. A scary smile crossed his lips and his eyes flashed. It took all of Manny's will not to follow Leo away from that look.

"It's everything I dream of!" he said directly to Manny, as if it were he, not Leo, who had asked the question. Then DaHurst let out a cackle. *Swear on my soul! Like in an old horror movie!*

Thinking back to that look in DaHurst's eyes, Manny thought it was the only time he had been afraid in the old man's presence. Manny unconsciously shook his head. *That was the look of a man insane.*

What Next?

Of course, they had taken the job. DaHurst always paid well and you don't want to risk being cut out of future work by turning down what appeared to be a simple enough job. Even with the security in D.C., the focus would be mostly on the buildings and politicians, not the visitors.

"DaHurst was pretty weird, wasn't he?" Leo's whine interrupted Manny's thoughts.

"Don't say that name!" Manny growled.

"Sorry, Manny," Leo said quickly, a note of real fear creeping into his voice. "There's no one around, anyway," he added hopefully.

"That's where you're lucky, then," Manny said ominously.

Jeremy didn't catch the "or else" part of Manny's reply as the voices passed outside his hearing. He had heard enough to freeze him behind the hedge. He struggled to make sense of the conversation he had just overheard.

How can they be talking about me? How could they know I was coming here...I just thought about it myself yesterday and only told Mom about it, like thirty minutes ago!

Another thought hit him right after that.

They know about the sketchbook!

Then another. *But how?*

His thoughts began flashing faster, carrying his pulse and heart along with them. Sweat formed on his forehead and dripped into his cut, stinging him. He bit back a cry as he struggled to bring himself under control.

Breathe, Jeremy. Breathe.

As his heart slowed, he tried to organize his thoughts. Beyond Nat and Mom, he knew of only three other people who had knowledge of the sketchbook, his Dad, the shopkeeper and Carl. One was missing, one gave him the book in the first place and one he had sent back to wherever he was originally trapped.

Some "secret" sketchbook. Now there's some other guy who's sicced two goons to kidnap me!

Jeremy knew he needed time to get away and think about what he had just learned. He could feel shadows gathering, a near-certain sense of danger. *The book strikes again.*

He now was grateful his Mom was only allowing him an hour before closing the sketchbook and bringing him home. Surely, he could avoid the two men for that long.

Jeffrey M. Daniels

He threw out his plan to visit the Lincoln Memorial; they were obviously expecting him to show up there. He paused, holding his breath and listening intently. Nothing. Slowly, ever so slowly, he rose up to peer over the bushes.

Not a hundred feet away, two men stood facing the Memorial building. One was of burly build, squat but wide, with thick black hair edging towards gray. He had a loose-fitting collared short-sleeve shirt and gray slacks and a pair of tan loafers. The other man was taller, also wide, but more towards fat, with scraggly reddish hair. He wore a colorful shirt that Jeremy likened to Hawaiian and had faded green shorts that came to his knees, exposing pale, plump legs and bare feet inside brown sandals.

Jeremy ducked down and began to crawl behind the line of bushes in the opposite direction of the two men.

“Looking for lost treasure?” a jovial voice said, followed by laughter.

A friendly looking man, in a group of what Jeremy assumed were tourists, greeted him. The man had a wide brimmed canvas hat, as Jeremy had seen on some golfers. His hair that showed below the brim was white, as was the beard that adorned his round cheeks and below his large nose. For a brief instant, Jeremy imagined Santa Claus as a tourist. The man’s eyes were clear and brown and he extended a thick, hairy arm to help Jeremy stand.

Jeremy hesitated, darting a glance back to the two men. His heart sank as he saw them turn, first curiously and then intently eyeing him.

“Oh!” said a woman from the group, a plump, brown-haired lady Jeremy guessed was in her 50’s. “You’ve cut yourself!”

The other tourists all gathered around Jeremy, smothering him in concern. If he weren’t so worried about the two men now swiftly approaching, he would have found it funny to gain so many new “grandparents”.

Two thoughts kept him serious. First, Jeremy knew that the two men were bad people who did bad things. Second, he knew that the danger the sketchbook always seemed to get him into was not exclusive on who else got hurt. Images of the dead warrior ant, his Mom’s head as it cracked against the wall and Natalie’s screams as Carl tried to pull her to some awful fate were vivid in his mind.

I have to get away from these people before they get hurt, too!

What Next?

In a flash of inspiration, he put a hand to his head and said, "Ow!" You're right! I need to get back to my Mom and she'll fix me up."

"We'll go with you," the man with the hat said. The others eagerly seconded his suggestion.

"Oh no, that's okay," Jeremy said swiftly, seeing the two men side closer. "She's waiting for me. Thanks!"

With that, he broke into a run, leaving the group with a mixture of concerned and puzzled looks on their faces. Jeremy angled to a large street bordering the gardens, where he slowed to a brisk walk. He glanced at a sign that read "Constitution Avenue" and knew from his research that this could lead him to the Smithsonian Museums. Not that he planned on going inside the Museum, but the street was busy with tourists and locals alike and he hoped it would be too public for the two men. A quick glance back dashed that hope.

The two men had picked up the pace of their walking, but did not run. In the open space, two men running after a young boy would have been as obvious as walking around with a rifle. Fortunately, the kid was heading towards the buildings. Manny smiled grimly. *Thinks he can lose himself by mixing in with the people.* He shook his head. *That doesn't even work in the movies.*

Leo, thankfully, was silent. Manny glanced over and saw Leo's "professional" face. No one who saw that face would match it with the whiny voice from earlier. Manny snorted. *Annoying, but capable.*

The two men followed Jeremy as he ran across Washington, D.C.

Chapter 6

“You’re nothing but a cheap copy”

Jeremy coughed and swallowed. He could talk a long time, sure, but he couldn’t ever recall telling a tale this long.

“Boy I’m parched!” he said to Will.

“Why don’t you take a drink of water?” Will replied.

“Is that stuff dripping from the stones safe to drink?” Jeremy asked, looking dubiously at the wall. “I don’t suppose you have a cup or saucer or something handy? Or am I supposed to lick the water off the wall?”

“You could do that, of course, but you might tear up your tongue,” Will offered affably.

“Thanks for that image,” Jeremy said with poor humor. “Any other bright ideas?”

“Well, I was going to suggest you drink from the water bottle over there.”

Jeremy head turned in the direction of Will’s outstretched arm. Upon the small table with the candle, there now stood a plastic bottle. Jeremy’s eyes bulged and he looked at Will.

“How did that get there?” he demanded.

Will actually laughed aloud.

“How do you think it got there?” he asked.

“Do you have to answer every question with another question? Why do I feel like I’m talking to a psychiatrist when I talk to you?” Jeremy groused, bringing forth another laugh.

“Considering where we are, you might be more correct than you know,” said Will, still smiling. His tone grew more serious when he asked, “Do you remember what I told you about the primal thoughts driving the collective unconscious?”

Jeremy rolled his eyes and slapped his forehead. “Duh. Survival. Food.” He looked at Will. “So, you’re saying I made that water appear?” Will nodded.

What Next?

“But,” Jeremy said, still struggling with the concept. “I didn’t draw anything.”

Will nodded again. “Why don’t you get yourself a drink and we can talk a little more about where you are right now.”

Jeremy was happy to be getting some answers, but he was happier to get a drink. He got up from his seat and picked up the bottle of water. It was cool to the touch and the clear plastic bottle was just beginning to cloud over with condensation. He even recognized the brand as the kind his Mom kept in the house.

Taking a long gulp to start and then a couple of smaller ones, he returned to his big chair and placed the bottle on the table next to him. Dabbing a little moisture from his lips, he sat back down and asked the question that had been burning ever since he found out Will was not his Dad.

“Can you tell me about the sketchbook and how to find my Dad, or not?”

“Yes,” Will replied and they both chuckled.

“Well, it’s a straight answer, at least,” Jeremy said sarcastically. “As usual, it’s not very helpful.”

“Perhaps you should consider the way you word your questions,” Will replied, still chuckling. “You’ll understand more once we get traveling.”

“What are we waiting for?” Jeremy shouted. He jumped up and headed back to the door. He started to tug on it and managed to pull it open a few inches when Will yanked him back.

“Don’t do that!” he commanded and Jeremy took a step back, suddenly afraid. Will looked abashed and held both hands up in front of his chest.

“I’m sorry, but you mustn’t leave the room just yet,” he said in calmer tone.

“Why?” Jeremy asked, his fear abating.

Will sighed. “Two reasons. First, while we’re in this room, we’re essentially timeless. We could stay here for days without any time passing in the real world.”

“So that’s why you have me telling my life story,” Jeremy mused. “Must be why there’s a bed here, too...for extended stays. Couldn’t I have drawn something better furnished?”

Jeffrey M. Daniels

Will shook his head. "The less that's here, the harder it is to locate."

"Locate?" Jeremy's nervousness returned. "Is someone trying to locate this place? How could they?"

"That's the other reason for staying inside. There are dangers outside the door."

"Dangers? Like what?"

"Like me," a deep voice said.

Jeremy snapped his head around in the direction of that eerily familiar voice.

"No way!" he said in dismay.

"Miss me, punk?" Carl said, grinning his irritating, arrogant grin. He was a giant of a man, with broad shoulders and thick forearms. He had movie star looks: square jaw, tanned skin, blue eyes and a mass of wavy blond hair. He was also rotten to the core.

"No way!" Jeremy repeated. "I thought you were gone forever. Back to wherever you...oh."

"Still smart as ever," Carl sneered. "Only this time, I've got my own exit out and all I need is that book you're holding."

"Still dumb as ever, then," Jeremy retorted. "This isn't even the real sketchbook, genius."

Carl laughed; a rich and handsome sound that Jeremy had nonetheless learned to detest.

"You don't get it, huh?" Carl chuckled. He looked at Will. "You're just as useless as the real William. Didn't you tell him anything?"

Will looked at Carl in confusion. He could sense Jeremy's anger and fear for the man that had been his Dad's best friend, but Carl's attitude puzzled Will. As far as he knew, there was no reason for Carl to talk this way. He looked inquisitively at Jeremy.

"Oh, you don't know, do you?" Jeremy said acidly. "Since you seemed to know everything else that happened to me, I...whatever." His face took on a look of disgust. "Seems your old pal here not only was a phony, but he wanted to take Mom from you."

Will's head snapped around to look at Carl. The leer on Carl's face told the truth of Jeremy's words. Will looked at Jeremy again.

"How?" he asked.

"When I tried to bring you...Dad...back, I got Carl by mistake. He turned out to be a real...jerk." Jeremy had to fight the urge to use more colorful language. "When Mom told him to get lost, he threw her

What Next?

against the wall and made a grab for the sketchbook.” Jeremy’s face knotted with memory. “He hurt Natalie!” he exclaimed, as if those last words were the greatest crime.

Carl laughed again. “Say, that’s right. How is the porkins? Put on any more weight?”

Jeremy turned purple.

“You really are a scumbag, aren’t you?”

Carl laughed again and began to move forward. Will, whose face had darkened when Jeremy had mentioned Teresa being hurt, stepped between them.

“Jeremy,” he said quietly. “Take the sketchbook, go out the door and wait for me.”

Jeremy hesitated, looking at Carl, bulky and fit, no matter where he had been for the last 13 years.

“But you said not to go...” he began.

“We’re past that now,” Will cut him off. “Go. Just don’t wander. I’ll be out in a moment.” He saw Jeremy continue to hesitate. “I’ll handle this.”

Carl’s face broke into a huge grin.

“You?” he guffawed. “The real William was a weakling. You’re nothing but a cheap copy.” He ambled forward.

“Go. Now!” Will ordered and stepped into Carl’s path without looking to see if Jeremy had obeyed him.

Jeremy did exit the room, pausing only a second or two before entering the dark hallway. He couldn’t tell how long it was because the only illumination came from the meager light spilling from the open door. As sounds of scuffling echoed from the room, Jeremy used all his will to resist rushing back in. He had come to trust Will’s capability, but Carl was so much bigger...

Within the room, Carl moved to push past Will, disdainfully swiping away the hand that had grabbed his arm. He grunted in surprise, more than pain, when the hand locked on his arm and pulled him back.

“Get off me, ghost,” Carl growled. “I don’t have time for this.”

Will grinned a thin lip smile, bearing his teeth. “Oh, I think you’ll find plenty of time on your hands soon enough.”

Carl yanked his muscled arm and his surprise turned to confusion when he couldn’t shake Will’s grip.

Jeffrey M. Daniels

“What?” he bellowed. “William isn’t this strong.” His eyes bulged and his neck corded with strain. “You’re not William!”

The chill grin remained on Will’s face, causing a prickle of something in Carl, something that seemed to drain the confidence from his voice and his muscles.

“I am Jeremy’s Dad, well enough. Created in his image...a boy’s image of his Dad. And in a boy’s mind, what Dad isn’t invincible?” He locked eyes with Carl. “Perhaps you’re the one who doesn’t understand what’s going on.”

Incredibly, Carl felt himself being pulled backwards further into the room. A shiver of fear shot through him.

“Not again!” he shrieked. “Never again!”

He rushed forward, using Will’s strength to add to his momentum. Ramming his shoulder into Will’s chest, he threw him against the stone wall. With the wind knocked out of him, Will’s grip loosened and Carl ripped his arm free. Without pause, he swung his other fist dead at Will’s face.

Will braced himself against the wall and brought his left arm up to absorb the impact of the blow. Such was the force of the swing that Will’s left arm went briefly numb. Quickly, before Carl could press the advantage, Will seized Carl’s arm with his right hand and used Carl’s own weight to flip their positions, slamming Carl against the wall.

Carl sagged a moment and Will used the time to massage his left arm back to feeling. He watched Carl roar as he prepared to bull rush Will. Carl kept low, aiming for Will’s legs. Suddenly, he straightened up, planning another crushing blow to Will’s chest.

Will was watching the apparently out-of-control charge by Carl carefully. He had stood lightly balanced on the balls of his feet, knees slightly bent. When Carl changed his lunge, Will ducked under and circled his arms around Carl’s massive waist, burying his own shoulder in Carl’s stomach and using Carl’s momentum to lift and flip him up and over his shoulder.

Carl fell with a crash, stunned. He shook his head groggily and had barely a second to register the huge chair before all went black.

Will dropped the heavy chair, panting. He looked down at the crumpled form of Carl, seeing his chest still rising and falling.

Will straightened up with a gasp and a chuckle. *You would think, not being real, I wouldn’t have to feel real pain.*

What Next?

He moved to the small table to pick up the candle and then stepped into the hallway, only to have his breath knocked out again by a crushing hug from Jeremy.

"I'm so glad you're safe," Jeremy said.

"Easy there, kid," Will said warmly. Real or not, he was coming to love the boy. "Here, hold this."

Jeremy took the candle, blushing a little. Will pretended not to notice.

"How do we light it?" Jeremy asked.

"That's up to you," Will said, with a slight cough. He waved off Jeremy's concerned look. "I'm fine."

"How did you beat him?" Jeremy asked, wide-eyed.

"That was you, too," Will said, smiling as he ruffled Jeremy's hair. "Apparently, you have a high opinion of your Dad."

Jeremy looked confused for a moment, but then began to get a sense of what Will was implying. He looked at the candle and noticed it was lit. Jeremy was surprised only by his lack of surprise.

Will nodded approvingly. "Now that we have some light..." He moved to the heavy door and pulled it shut with a resounding noise that echoed in the hallway.

"Won't he just open it again when he wakes up?" Jeremy asked.

"It won't be easy without the key," Will chuckled, looking at Jeremy.

"I'm guessing that would be me, too?" Jeremy said with a smile. "So, now what? Is there some special door we need to find? How long is this hallway?"

"There are no doors," Will said simply. "The hallway is as long as you need it to be. Until you decide where to go."

"But..." Jeremy started. He stopped, shaking his head. "Never mind. Just more craziness. So, I guess we should start walking?"

Will nodded, the flickering candle playing shadows about his face.

"Are you going to tell me more about the sketchbook?" Jeremy asked as they set off. "And maybe you could explain why Carl keeps popping up?"

"I'll tell you what I know," Will said. "But it's your Dad who will have the answers you want."

Jeremy grunted. "Sounds like you're stalling and believe me, I know stalling." Will laughed. Jeremy squinted at him in the dim light. "You're sure you can find him?"

Jeffrey M. Daniels

Will nodded. "I'm sure *you* can find him. Try to think about your Dad while we travel. Maybe it would help if you continue telling me your story while we walk?"

Jeremy shrugged. *Sure, why not. What else was there to do?*



Once you have the power to make anything you draw become real, what do you do next? In **What Next?**, the second book in the *Jeremy Shuttle Adventures* trilogy, Jeremy, his mom, and (almost) girlfriend Natalie are pursued by others hungry to seize the power of the magic sketchbook. From Washington, D.C., to France to a land where imagination is the greatest danger, the trio seeks to protect the book and find Jeremy's missing Dad.

What Next?

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