

**CAHILLS vs. VESPERS**

**THE DEAD OF NIGHT**



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# CHAPTER 1

In all his eleven years, Atticus Rosenbloom never imagined he'd die on a bed of fresh rolls and sticky buns.

Of course, he never imagined being tied up, shoved into a sack, thrown into the back of a bakery truck, and taken on a high-speed tour over every pothole in the Czech Republic, either. If he needed any proof that hanging out with Amy and Dan Cahill was trouble, this was it.

“Wohogashamee?” he shouted. It was the best he could manage for “Where are you guys taking me?” with a bandanna pulled across his mouth.

It was no use. They couldn't hear him.

He fought back desperate tears. This had to be a mistake. They must have wanted some other nerdy kid with dreads, a plaid shirt, and beat-up Vans.

He jerked his body left and right, trying to loosen the ropes around his wrists. His head banged against a row of metal shelves. Breads and pastries cascaded to the floor, their sweet, yeasty smell seeming to mock him.



“Careful with the crullers, will you?” came a taunt from the front seat. “We may need them on the flight.”

Atticus froze. He knew the voice.

His brain, which had absorbed eleven languages already, did not forget distinctive sounds. Or near-death experiences. Like yesterday’s, when Dan and Amy lay trapped in a locked, burning library. Atticus and his half brother, Jake, had tried to help, only to be attacked by a woman and a guy dressed in black.

A guy with the same voice as this cruller-loving kidnapper.

*Dan said they were killers. Twins. Vespers.*

Suddenly, the whole thing was making some awful sense.

He knew Dan and Amy were Madrigals, the elite branch of the world’s most powerful family, the Cahills. The Vespers were bad guys who had kidnapped seven Cahills. As ransom, Dan and Amy had to perform nasty tasks—breaking into museums, stealing ancient artifacts, solving impossible codes. Which they were capable of doing, because they’d found something equally impossible called the 39 Clues.

*So why did the Vespers gas Dan and Amy in a library?  
And why do they want me?*

Nuts. The whole thing was nuts!

The truck veered abruptly to the right. Atticus slid on a layer of raspberry jam and banged against the rear door.

As he screamed in pain, the truck came to a



sudden stop. The door opened and a pair of hands untied his sack. In a moment, Atticus was squinting against the sudden sunlight. The *whoosh* of a jet engine nearly knocked him over.

“Sorry for the bumpy ride,” his abductor said, yanking the gag out of his mouth. “The next will be smoother.”

Atticus’s eyes quickly adjusted. The guy was maybe in his twenties. He looked like he’d wandered off the set of a magazine shoot for *Travel + Leisure*—blond, blue-eyed, tanned, and buff. Atticus could feel the rope being untied from his hands and replaced with a handcuff on one wrist behind him. A silky female voice added, “How many boys your age can say they’ve been on a private jet—for free?”

“I’m not a boy!” Atticus blurted, the words spilling out of his mouth faster than he could think. “Okay, chronologically, yes, eleven years old fits the definition, but in actuality, I’m a college freshman. So if you’re looking for a boy, you’ve made a mistake!”

The woman came around to his side, her wrist now cuffed to his. “Just because we’re holding hands, college boy, don’t get any ideas.”

Atticus recoiled from her clammy grip. She was unmistakably this guy’s twin, but with the blondness cranked up to eleven. Her baker’s uniform had extra-long sleeves to hide the handcuffs from sight.

“We don’t make mistakes, Atticus,” the guy said. “We know you won the county fifth-grade chess



championship, and the state spelling bee on the word *renaissance*. By the way, I always had trouble with that word—”

“Let me go right now or I’ll scream bloody murder!” Atticus shouted.

The man grabbed Atticus by the shirt collar. “If you scream, little dude, there *will* be bloody murder. And with that one hundred seventy-five IQ, you’re too smart to put your brother and father in danger.”

Atticus tried not to panic. The bits of knowledge—the cruel taunts—were like pricks of a tiny knife blade, keeping him off balance.

The man looked away briefly, checking his reflection in the window of a tan-brick building nearby. He ran his fingers carefully through his hair. “You babysit, Cheyenne. I’ll run ahead to see that the jet’s ready.”

“Make it quick, Casper,” his sister said, pushing Atticus forward. “And be sure there are enough mirrors on board for you.”

“Your names are *Casper* and *Cheyenne*?” Atticus managed.

“And our last name is Wyoming. Want to make something of it?” Cheyenne yanked his wrist, picking up the pace. “We’d planned on giving you a meal, a parachute, and a safe landing. We could always forget the parachute.”

“Wh-what are you going to do with me?” Atticus asked.

“We’re taking you to a more secure place,” Cheyenne



replied. "For a few questions. A simple transfer of . . . guardianship."

The blade twisted.

Atticus had always taken pride in being different. In being one of a kind. But there was one aspect he'd trade in a nanosecond.

He could still hear his mother's words on her death-bed: *I am passing along Guardianship to you. . . . You must continue. Tradition. So much at stake.*

All he knew was that Guardians fought the Vespers. And that he was the only one left.

"I—I don't know anything about Guardians!" Atticus said.

"Maybe you'll change your mind when we're through with you," Cheyenne said.

Atticus's legs wobbled. "What if my mom died before she could tell me anything?"

"I'd say that was pretty bad parenting," Cheyenne said with a shrug.

Atticus's panicked eyes scanned the airport. In minutes they would be on a plane, speeding away from Prague. He would be Hostage Number Eight. Caught by two Vespers who had already tried to gas Dan and Amy.

The Wyomings would think nothing of whacking Atticus Rosenbloom.

*Think, Atticus. It's the one thing you're good at.*

Casper was barking orders to a gray-haired airport worker at a hangar fifty yards beyond the tan-brick



building. Cheyenne was pulling hard, trying to walk faster.

Atticus hated holding hands with this creep. The last female he had ever held hands with was his mom.

Mom, who was the kindest, smartest woman he ever knew.

Mom, who was a Guardian. Who told him in her last breath to *stay friends with Dan Cahill*. Who knew trouble was ahead.

Guardians were mixed up with the Cahills. Mom must have known something like this would happen. She had been taking precautions for years. She had secret papers. A weird tech guru on retainer.

*Beezer.*

The name popped like a flash of neon out of an inky mental cloud—Max Beezer, Mom’s tech guy. Atticus and Jake had found tons of his little gadgets after Mom had died. Max had turned most of them over to Mom’s assistant, Dave Speminer, but he had saved some of the cool ones for Atticus. Like the miniature tracker that he and Jake had been tinkering with yesterday. Neither of them was sure how it worked. It was nanotech. Weird design, way too tiny.

But worth a try.

He needed a moment alone. With his key chain.

Frantically he felt in his left pocket, but the chain was gone. He slowed down and moaned deeply, doubling over.

Cheyenne glared at him. “What?”



"Nothing. I'm okay. Really." Atticus convulsed again. "All those pastries on the truck . . . plus motion sickness. Bad combo. But I'll be f-f-fine."

"Oh, great—" Cheyenne stopped.

Casper's voice bellowed from within: "What do you mean, the plane isn't ready? Hello? Earth to old guy? We paid you in advance."

Cheyenne rolled her eyes. "Don't ever treat your elders like that if you grow up." Glancing toward the battered men's room door, she said, "This isn't a stupid trick, is it?"

Atticus gulped down some air. "I'll just" — breath — "sit next to you on the plane" — breath — "and hold it in."

"No, you won't." She pushed him toward the men's room door, kicked it open, and immediately blanched. "Ucch. That is the grossest thing I've seen in my life."

"I don't mind." Atticus pulled her inside, but she yanked back.

Reaching into her pocket, she took out a set of cuff keys and unlocked him. "You have two minutes. And don't try anything funny, or you will be so sorry."

Atticus peered into the bathroom and grimaced. "I need my key chain. So I can use my disinfectant."

"Your *what*?" Cheyenne said.

"My Germ Away," Atticus replied.

"What kind of eleven-year-old boy takes disinfectant into a men's room?" Cheyenne snapped.

"A clean one?" Atticus offered with a shrug. "It's just that . . . well, *you* see the sink and the toilet. . . . I mean,



we'll be handcuffed together and all. . . ."

Cheyenne's face was turning green. She reached into her pocket and pulled out Atticus's enormous key ring. It contained seven keys, five plastic store rewards cards, a screwdriver, a flash drive, and a tiny but festive-looking can of Germ Away. She carefully examined the ring, item by item.

Atticus held his breath.

A slow smile crept across his captor's face as she held up the flash drive. "Ooh, clever boy. A transmitter!" She unhooked the drive, dropped it to the ground, and crushed it beneath her boot. With a triumphant, malevolent grin, she handed the key ring to Atticus. "Welcome to the big leagues, where IQ runs a distant second to street smarts. You have two minutes."

Atticus's jaw dropped. He cast a forlorn glance at the shattered pile of plastic and steel on the ground. As he turned to the men's room, he fought back a sob.

Slamming the door behind him, he flicked on the light.

*One minute and fifty-four seconds.*

He turned the sink taps all the way. Brown water gushed out loudly into a stained basin. He moaned. He could hear Cheyenne calling out to her brother.

Atticus held up his key ring, separating out the small can of Germ Away. Carefully he twisted open the cap. It beeped.

Fingers shaking, he tapped an app on the tiny screen. And he began typing a code into the keypad.



## CHAPTER 2

“Honestly, you *stood* there while they took the boy away?” asked Ian Kabra.

Amy shrank into the hotel room sofa. She felt numb. On Dan’s lap, Ian’s features were exaggerated, his eyes wide and accusing. Behind him was the gleaming high-tech Cahill headquarters in Attleboro, Massachusetts, which Amy had designed. Once upon a time, Ian’s dark, dreamy eyes had made her melt inside. The angle of his head, the wrinkle in the left corner of his lip—they’d obsessed her. And he’d been obsessed right back.

Now all Amy wanted to do was throw her shoe at the screen. She hated him. She hated his tone of voice.

She hated that he was right.

Reagan Holt, Ted Starling, Natalie Kabra, Phoenix Wizard, Alistair Oh, Fiske Cahill, and Nellie Gomez—seven people she cared about were festering in a jail cell. And now Atticus was gone.

*What kind of family leader lets those kinds of things happen?*

"Yeah, that's exactly what they did," Jake Rosenbloom blurted out, pacing the floor. "Nothing!"

"It's my fault." Amy glanced at her brother, who was curled up on the sofa in the fetal position. "Just me. Not Dan. I should have seen this coming."

On the screen, Sinead Starling elbowed Ian aside. Her red hair was pulled back with a rubber band, her delicate features taut with urgency. "I've alerted every Cahill in the area, our contacts at the Prague police, the Czech embassy, airports, limo services, every bakery from Pilsen to Hradec Králové. Nothing yet. I'm thinking the Wyomings used a private jet. Short flight, no conspicuous-looking fuel drain."

"They told me not to call the police!" Jake fumed, as if Sinead hadn't said a word. "Then they shoved me into a cab and took me here! Some family you have—thieves *and* cowards."

Amy bit her lip. She wished she *could* have called the authorities. But she and Dan were wanted for stealing a world-famous Caravaggio painting called the "Medusa," at the demand of Vesper One. Jake himself had turned them in to Interpol. Police were the last people they could afford to see now.

"Coming to us was the right thing to do," Sinead said. "We'll find him. We have the resources."

"*What if you can't find him?*" Dan's outburst startled them all. He looked up from his smartphone, his eyes streaked with tears. On his screen was an image of a skinny kid with dreads and a goofball smile. Atticus.



Amy ached for her brother. It hadn't been easy for Dan to make friends after the Clue hunt. He'd survived a collapsing cave, been helicoptered to the top of Mount Everest, become trapped in an Egyptian tomb, watched a man die in Jamaican quicksand, and been entrusted with a complex five-hundred-year-old formula. What other kid could relate to that?

Atticus could. He was the only one who really "got" Dan.

"I jinxed him . . ." Dan murmured. "It is my fault."

Jake's breath caught in his throat. He let out an explosive moan, more animal than human. A sound impossible to hear without becoming physically ill.

Amy knew what it felt like to fear for your own brother's life. She had been lucky. Dan was alive.

And she felt guilty she hadn't shown Jake the text message Dan had received from Vesper One:

You had Il Milione all this time. You really shouldn't keep secrets from me. Your punishment this time: A Guardian goes down.

Despite all her training, she'd been caught totally unaware. Because she and Dan had been making a drop, and drops were always safe.

*I should have been watching Atticus like a hawk. How could I have been so stupid?*

As much as she'd wanted to tell Jake about the



note, she couldn't. Jake was a powder keg. He hated the Cahills and he'd betrayed Dan and Amy once. If he did it again, it meant jail time. Which meant death to the hostages.

And no hope for Atticus.

"This is about that Guardian nonsense, isn't it?" Jake said, nearly spitting his words. "Atticus's grandmother guarded some ancient map, which you guys stole from the library. My stepmother must have guarded something, too. Tell me, what was it? And what was Att supposed to be guarding?"

Amy replied with the truth. "We d-d-don't know," she said, fighting back the stammer that kicked in whenever she was bottoming out.

"And neither does he," Jake said. "So whatever this secret unknown thing is, it must be . . . unguarded. Am I right?"

Amy shook her head helplessly. "M-maybe."

"So whoever wants it wouldn't want the Guardian to find out about it," Jake barreled on, his voice rising in fury. "Because then he would go and guard it. So these Vespers . . . it would be in their interest to . . . to kill . . ."

*Logic. Stupid, cold, awful, cruel logic. Stop it!*

"They're lying!" Dan blurted out, his words sounding hollow and desperate. "That's what they do best. They said they would kill a hostage, too. But they didn't."

"They shot someone in the shoulder," Jake said. "That's close enough!"



Amy winced at the memory of the hideous footage of Nellie Gomez, their onetime au pair and now legal guardian, writhing bloody in the hostages' secret location.

Sinead's voice blared from the laptop. "Our operatives found a suspected Vesper command center in Legnica, Poland. Former Tomas territory. We've got the place under surveillance. Atticus could be there. So could the hostages."

Jake turned and bolted for the door. "I'm out of here. I will find my brother if it kills me. And if it does, I will take you all down with me."

Amy raced after him. "Jake, you can't!"

"'Sup, Attleboro-o-o-o?" came a loud stadium cheer from the monitor. Despite the fact that the image was mostly cap, sunglasses, chains, and radiant smile, there was no mistaking the face of world-famous rap artist Jonah Wizard. "Yo, my homeys, listen up—okay, my boy Hamburger and me? We're waiting here in Roma so long I'm afraid my cover is going to stop working. Do you know how hard it is to hide from fans in a country where my sales are through the roof?"

Jake paused for a moment, startled. He turned briefly to the screen, giving Amy just enough time to dart between him and the door.

On-screen, someone was bumping Jonah from the side.

Despite his muscle-packed, two-hundred-pound physique, Hamilton Holt had a hard time jostling Jonah



for screen time. "Sorry, dude, but it's grub time and I'm wasting away. What Jonah means to say is, we were supposed to meet Erasmus, but he didn't show up."

"You guys are related to Jonah Wizard?" Jake asked, his lip curled disdainfully.

"And the other guy," Dan grumbled. "Vin Diesel's stunt double."

Jonah pushed his way into view again. "Yo, also? My man, Mac and Cheese? He didn't show up, either."

"He means McIntyre," Hamilton clarified. "Is this a lawyer thing, to miss meetings?"

"That's not like him," Sinead replied. "Or Erasmus."

"Did you say *McIntyre*?" Jake said. "As in *William McIntyre*?"

"You know him?" Jonah asked. "Skinny guy, a little dusty, nose like a screwdriver, kind of boring?"

"Yeah, I know him," Jake replied. "He's my dad's lawyer. And he's tough. Anything happens to Atticus, I will get him to sue you blind."

Amy took a deep breath. McIntyre was their confidant and friend, the man who set the hunt for the 39 Clues in motion. He had been there in the background, watching over them, like the eyes and ears of their late grandmother Grace. Painfully formal, he was the last person in the world who'd appreciate being called Mac and Cheese.

He was also the last person who would ever sue Dan and Amy.



“Sit, Jake,” she said firmly. “This is more complicated than you think.”



Dan shut the bedroom door quietly behind him. No more noise.

Enough of Jake’s anger. Enough thinking about what happened to Atticus. One more moment and he would split apart.

He needed hope. Now.

He pulled his phone out of his pocket and checked his most recent text:

Suspend judgment. The whole story is always more complex than its parts. Wait.

AJT

The words made his blood race. The sight of those initials: AJT. The initials of his long-dead father. Arthur Josiah Trent.

Dan had only known him by the stories Amy told. By a blurry face in a tattered photograph he’d lost in the Paris Métro. AJT had died in a fire nine years ago. A fire that consumed his house and both of Dan’s parents.

When this message came in, Amy had scoffed. *It could be anyone.* Which was logical.

But life was not ruled by logic. If the 39 Clues had taught Dan one thing, that was it. Sometimes



good was bad, sometimes dead was alive.

Dan poised his thumbs over the keypad. There were so many questions he could ask to prove the ID.

Then, if AJT did prove to be real, Dan could ask him . . . well, everything. Whether Erasmus's tale was true — that Dad had been recruited by the Vespers as a young man. That Dad had renounced them, married Mom, and become a Cahill. He could find out how Dad had miraculously survived the fire.

But Dan's thumbs were frozen. The truth terrified him. Either way.

If AJT wasn't his dad, hope would be completely lost. Somehow, if you didn't know the truth, the possibility stayed alive.

But if he *was*, how could Dan adjust to his father coming back to life? Could he forgive the lack of contact? What kind of man would let his own son think he was dead for nine years?

And how could Dan deal with a father who was a Vesper?

*Suspend judgment. . . .*

Dan's eyes filled with tears. Images raced through his mind — helicopter blades cutting the cable of the gondola in Zermatt. The sight of Nellie, bloody and pale. The boat chase that had nearly killed them on Lake Como, and the halon gas in the library in Prague.

"Suspend judgment for what?" he murmured under his breath. "For nearly allowing your own kids to die?"

No. He couldn't complete this circuit.



He tossed the phone into a corner. It bounced harmlessly on the rug. That was exactly how he felt—harmless. Powerless. Tiny. Confused.

He was tired of being the helpless kid. The victim. The chased. The lackey for a voiceless Vesper. When would it stop? Why could they never be on top—why was it that *he* never scared anyone?

*It doesn't have to be this way. . . .*

Numbers and symbols spilled from his memory—a complex set of ingredients and precise formulas. It was the life's work of their ancestor, Gideon Cahill. A formula thought to have been destroyed in 1507, discovered in a cave in Ireland, and now known only by Dan. It granted superhuman abilities. Strength to overcome any attack. Speed to move great distances. Intelligence to outthink an army.

With it, every decision was clear. Every enemy was doomed.

Every mystery yielded to utter clarity.

Cheyenne and Casper Wyoming wouldn't stand a chance. The mystery of AJT would be resolved.

Dan wouldn't wonder if he had a father. He would know. He would know whether he was the one thing he wanted to be, more than anything else.

A son.

*A son to the most detestable man in the world.*

Twenty-six more ingredients. That's what he needed. He had thirteen of the difficult ones already—myrrh from a Chinese herbalist, iron solute and a solution



containing tungsten ions from a machine shop, amber from a jeweler, iodine from a pharmacy, and a bunch of stuff from various chemical suppliers: mercury, liquid gold, zinc, magnesium, phosphorus, sulfur, calcium carbonate, and soluble silver in the form of silver nitrate. Some of the others, like water, clover, salt, and cocoa, would be easy.

“Dan, what are you doing?” Amy’s voice suddenly called from the doorway.

Dan jumped. “Come on in, the door’s open, thanks for knocking.”

“I wanted to talk about Jake,” she said softly.

“Oh, great,” Dan grumbled. “Mr. Congeniality.”

“He’s so angry all the time. I can’t bring myself to show him the text from . . .” Amy’s eyes locked on the phone, resting on the carpet. Its screen glowed with the text from AJT. She sighed.

Dan scowled. “Here comes the lecture.”

She sat on the floor next to him. “Dan, Dad was a Cahill. Through and through. Even if he wasn’t born one. I wish you could remember his eyes. When you were little, he’d hold you up to everyone and say—”

“‘Moon face,’ yeah, I know, you told me a billion times,” Dan said.

“You both would flash this big, identical grin,” Amy said. “Mom said you were twins separated by a generation. The man wasn’t capable of evil. His life was not a lie. If you really knew him, you’d *never* say the names *Vesper* and *Arthur Trent* in the same breath.”



“People lie, Amy,” Dan protested. “People pretend—”

“Dan, there were two bodies in the fire,” Amy insisted. “No one could have lived through that. Besides, if he were alive, he’d be with us. He wouldn’t have stayed away from the Clue hunt. He would have *led* it.”

Dan spun around. “The bodies were burned beyond recognition. They could have been anybody. Uncle Alistair survived a cave collapse, Amy! Cahills do things like that. And if Dad tried to save Mom, then watched her burn to death—in a fire set *by her own family*? Because Isabel Kabra thought they were hiding one of the thirty-nine clues? You think he’d just be a happy Cahill after that?”

Amy’s face drained of color. “What are you saying, Dan?”

“Remember Grace’s note—the one we found after discovering the secret to the clues?” Dan said. “She said the Cahill family was broken. Untrustworthy. Isabel set the fire, and no one helped out—the Holts, Uncle Alistair, none of them. I’m saying Dad would have seen them for what they are. Murderers.”

Amy’s face darkened. “So you think he went over to the dark side, just like that?”

“He would have seen it the opposite way, Amy,” Dan said. “The dark side was what he left.”

Amy reared back her hand to slap Dan. He reeled in shock.

Before she could move, a beep sounded from Dan’s smartphone.



They both froze.

Dan stooped to pick up the phone and noticed a blinking icon across the top of the screen. A GPS signal. He opened the app and saw a signal moving across a map of western Europe. Its origin was RUZYŇŔ AIRPORT, PRAGUE. It was moving east.

Along the bottom was the name A. ROSENBLOOM.

