

Prologue

THAT WRETCHED LIST

One

I WISH THAT I didn't sometimes, but I remember everything about that cursed, unspeakably unhappy night twelve years ago, when I was just three years old and both my parents were murdered.

I was taking an ordinary can of Play-Doh down from the playroom shelf when my mom called from the top of the basement stairs.

"Daniel? Dinner will be ready in five minutes. Time to start wrapping things up, honey."

Finish? Already? I made a face. *But my latest masterpiece isn't done yet!*

"Yes, Mom," I called. "One minute. I'm making Play-Doh history down here."

"Of course you are, dear. I would expect nothing less. Love you. Always."

"Love you back, Mom. Always."

In case you've already noticed that I didn't speak like a typical three-year-old, well, you should have seen what I was building.

I stared at the museum-quality replica of the Lighthouse of Alexandria I was trying to finish.

Behind it, all the way to the edge of my worktable, stood matchless reproductions I'd made of the remaining Seven Wonders of the Ancient World:

The Great Pyramid of Giza
The Hanging Gardens of Babylon
The Statue of Zeus at Olympia
The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus
The Mausoleum of Mausolus
The Colossus of Rhodes

I would have liked to do the Cathedral of Notre Dame and the Chrysler Building as well, but I was only allowed one hour of playtime a day.

I squinted suddenly as I spotted what looked like a tiny, flat black seed climbing up the side of my miniature lighthouse, and really moving too.

Whoa there, little guy! Where do you think you're motoring to?

It was an Arthropoda Arachnida Acari Metastigmata, I thought, recalling the phylum, class, order, and suborder of the tiny creature at a glance. A tick. A young male dog tick, to be exact.

"Hey, little fella," I whispered to the tick. "You on a sightseeing tour?"

Two things happened next, almost simultaneously. Two very odd and unforgettable things.

There was a strange shimmering at the back of my bright, turquoise-blue eyes.

And the tick slowly rose onto its hind legs and said, "Hey, Daniel, my brother, you do real nice work. *Cool lighthouse!*"