

BOOK 2 OF
THE YELLOW HOODS
BREADCRUMB TRAIL

3 CHAPTER SAMPLE



AN EMERGENT STEAMPUNK SERIES
BY ADAM DREECE

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DEDICATION

To my daughter, who is my muse,

To my sons, who remind me what raw,
simple, awesome imagination is about,

To my wife, whose support continues
to make these books possible,

and

To the fans of Book 1 and Twitter
supporters of @AdamDreece,
who make me
smile, laugh and feel appreciated.

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CHAPTER ONE

CRUMBLED PLANS

The Hound stood back up and rubbed his head as a dark April rainstorm beat down. He'd landed hard on the slick stone rampart, yet had managed not to slip off or black out. Rain poured off his brown and beige leather long-coat.

For a moment, he looked concerned. He glanced at the control boxes on his forearms and the connections to his oversized, metallic, gear-covered gloves. He hoped rain wasn't getting in. Satisfied, he turned up the dial on each forearm's control box. Electricity started to jump and crackle between his fingers. He then turned his attention back to the Yellow Hood at his feet.

The yellow-hooded Tee dangled below the half-built rampart, desperately clutching her slingshot. When she'd slipped, its leather strap had caught between two of the moss-covered stones. She could feel her hands slipping as the rain wormed its way between her fingers to moisten the slingshot's wooden handle. She looked down and

swallowed hard.

The plan sounded bad from the start, but they had trusted the leader of the Tub. It was bad enough to be asked to go deep into the Red Forest, to an open area with an unfinished, crumbling castle tower and half-built rampart wall—never mind the leader’s unwillingness to tell them why they were going there in the first place. Once the opposing secret society’s coach had arrived and the representative for the Fare had stepped out, the plan fell apart.

Tee shot a glance around to look for her fellow Yellow Hoods. Elly, with her gray metal shock-sticks in hand, was dodging and blocking a red-hooded swordsman’s thin blade. Richy couldn’t be seen.

“Lights out, kid,” said the Hound. His gloves crackled and electricity danced from finger to finger.

Tee took a deep breath. She could only think of one option, and it was risky. She freed one hand to delve into her yellow cloak’s hidden pockets. Pulling out a shock-stick, she pressed its activation button while staring into the Hound’s eyes. He hesitated.

“You’ve *enjoyed* this before, haven’t you? Care to do so again?” Tee said menacingly. She wasn’t sure if she was willing to risk the fall to the cobblestone below.

Suddenly, Tee’s pinky finger slipped off the end of her

slingshot. She could feel the other fingers slipping, too. Then, a glint of steel from an arrow aimed at her from less than twenty feet away caught her eye.

The red-hooded archer smiled and said, "Goodbye, little yellow birdy!"

CHAPTER TWO

THE MAN IN THE CRIMSON COAT

Four months earlier, Nikolas Klaus buried his hands in the comfortable pockets of his crimson, full-length coat. Enjoying a deep breath of crisp air, he looked around at the newly fallen snow. He loved December. There was something honest, something innocent about December. Perhaps it was the Solstice celebration, just hours away, that made the month so special to him.

Once again, he checked the skids on his sleigh, and the reins that awaited the horses. Everything was ready.

“I already checked everything, twice, Monsieur Klaus,” said Bakon, coming up behind Nikolas and laying a friendly hand on his shoulder. Bakon’s brothers, Squeals and Bore, both smiled.

Bakon sported a well-worn brown leather and fur coat, and a fur winter hat. His brown hair peeked out from under his poorly stitched hat, just below his ears. His soft, brown eyes were in contrast to his rough, yet

good-looking face.

His brothers were similarly dressed, but rather had blond hair poking out from under their fur hats. Whereas Bakon was five feet and ten inches, Squeals was six feet tall, and Bore, a massive six-foot-five.

Bore remained, as ever, a gentle giant, but Squeals and Bakon had changed in recent months. Egelina-Marie's presence had softened the edges of Bakon's personality, and Bakon gave Squeals more room to prove himself. Squeals, having helped save the lives of the Yellow Hoods months ago, had seemed to finally be finding his adult footing, at the tender age of twenty-four.

Nikolas nodded his approval and appreciation for the brothers' help. It was great to have them back. Since he and his late wife, Isabella, had taken in the abandoned Cochon children, the boys had been there, along with the rest of the Klaus children, to help prepare for the winter Solstice celebrations, until Isabella's death ten years ago. She'd always said that Solstice was the best way to chase away winter and make way for spring. Nikolas missed her deeply.

"Bore gave the sleigh a good shake, and nothing moved," said Squeals.

"I've got the last bag of toys here, Monsieur Klaus," said Egelina-Marie, arriving on the scene to heave the bag on top of others already in the sleigh. Her blue eyes were filled with the joy of feeling like a kid again. Her

shoulder-length, dark brown hair framed her heart-shaped face. She had fond memories of seeing Monsieur Klaus come into town in his red coat, followed by screaming children. The adults would follow with food and drink to share with friends and neighbors.

Nikolas looked sternly at Bakon, his old-fashioned values showing themselves.

“Hey—! Eg insisted she carry that last bag,” said Bakon, defending himself, hands up.

Egelina-Marie chuckled and Bore started to laugh, covering his face with his enormous hand. Until a couple of months ago, Bore had almost never seen Bakon smile. Now, he saw it on occasion. He liked that. He liked Egelina-Marie very much, too.

“Mister Nik, we all done?” asked Bore, his voice deep and simple-sounding.

“Almost, Boris, almost. You did good, very good,” Nikolas said. His eastern kingdoms heritage was evident in his heavy accent. He reached over and gave Bore an affectionate slap on the arm. “Now, where are my granddaughter and her friends? They are a bit late. We need to get down to Mineau for six o’clock. Squeals, will you fetch the horses, please?”

Squeals nodded and pulled Bore along. “Come on, big guy, let’s go see the horses.” Bore loved horses.

Nikolas snapped his fingers, remembering the brass tube with design plans that he wanted to bring. “I’ll be

back in a moment.”

“Oh, Monsieur Klaus, my father wanted me to tell you that he’ll meet you at the gift-giving ceremony. He has a couple of things to attend to before that,” said Egelina-Marie.

Nikolas’ eyes went wide as he realized he hadn’t taken care of something important. He rubbed his short, salt-and-pepper beard. To avoid his usual clumsiness with words, he’d typically take his time to smooth out thoughts before speaking—but right now he didn’t want to miss another opportunity to say what had been on his mind. “Ah ... Egelina-Marie, there is a thing I must say.”

Bakon’s eyebrows went up. He hadn’t heard this tone from Nikolas before.

Nikolas took hold of Eg’s hands and smiled at her, looking up slightly. She was an inch taller than his humble five-foot-eight. “No more *Monsieur Klaus*, please. You must call me *Nikolas*. Will you do that for me?”

“Um,” said Egelina-Marie, her cheeks reddening. “Um, sure. If you’re sure?”

Bakon couldn’t believe what was happening. He’d heard about when Nikolas had asked William to call him by his first name. Bakon had never imagined it would happen with him and Eg; after all, Jennifer was Nikolas’ own daughter, and William his prospective son-in-law. Bakon had always doubted how Nikolas really felt deep down, until now.

Nikolas smiled warmly at Egelina-Marie. "Quite, yes? You've earned your place. Your influence is wholesome and good. I allowed the formalities to continue until I could extrapolate a likely trajectory, and I am content with what I have now projected. So, I am formally asking for a reduction in the state of formality. Yes?" He could tell by the look on her face that his initial simplicity had been lost.

Egelina-Marie choked up. It had taken a moment to figure out what Nikolas meant, and she could barely believe it. With a sweet smile, she managed to say, "Okay," and then kissed Nikolas on the cheek.

Nikolas turned to the surprised Bakon. "Same for you, Bakon. No more *Monsieur Klaus*. Yes? Good." Nikolas turned and started to head away. "I'll be back in a moment. We can't keep all the children waiting, now can we? So much to do!" His muscular body bounced along and he sang to himself.

Bakon gave Eg an affectionate shove. "Look at you, Sergeant. I think you've been attacked on the cheeks by sentiment. Are your eyes misting up?"

"You're no better. I can see it. That dark, rough exterior doesn't know how to handle one old man who truly has always thought of you as one of his own. And by the way, *don't* make me hurt you," she said, smiling, and poking back at him. "I *am* a trained professional."

"I'm a professional ruffian. I—" countered Bakon.

“No, you’re not really—you just *pretend*,” said Eg, grabbing him by the fur collar of his coat. “But you can always be *my* tough guy. Come here—”

Just as they started to lean toward each other, three sail-carts came sliding up the path to the house, each piloted by a yellow-hooded driver.

“Careful! Here comes a little girl with a slingshot. Need a helmet?” joked Egelina-Marie. She could see she’d teased Bakon enough, and gave him an innocent smile.

The sailing Yellow Hoods engaged their handbrakes and pulled down their sails. Turning their steering wheels gently, each brought their sail-cart to a complete stop, with a spray of snow. Tee, Elly, and Richy climbed out. The winter afternoon sun danced off their yellow hooded cloaks.

“Hey guys,” said Tee, pulling back her hood and allowing her long, dark brown hair to pour out. “Are you ready to go? I can’t believe we’re officially doing it in Mineau this year!”

Thirty years ago, there was only the city of Mineau at the foot of the mountain. As Mineau grew into a trading hub, some freethinkers decided to establish a more secluded town up on the mountain’s plateau. They’d kept to themselves and were careful, at least at first, about whom they would let feel comfortable enough to stay in town. They decided to use an old nickname of Mineau as the new town’s name, not only because they liked the

name, but also knowing the political headaches it would cause and how much more likely it would make the outside world just want to leave them alone. Thus, Minette was founded.

This was the first year the city of Mineau would officially celebrate Solstice with Minette. Both town magistrates had decided it was a great opportunity to bring the towns together—something attempted every now and then, and in different ways. The Solstice celebration wasn't unique to Minette, but the *way* they did it was—the presents, and bringing everyone together to feast, sing, and dance outside.

“Woo!” said Elly, looking at the sleigh. “Are those sacks *all* full of presents? That’s even more than last year.” Her dark blond hair was almost the same length as Tee’s.

“We started preparation a week earlier this year! Four weeks, we worked,” said Nikolas as he returned, brass tube in hand. He jammed it into the sleigh in a secure spot.

Turning to Elly, Nikolas continued, “Egelina-Marie offered to help, which made us a small army! Each of us had our roles and we worked at our specialties. The Cochon brothers carved all the wood parts. Tee and her parents assembled the pieces. Egelina-Marie and I painted. When all the toys were dry, I went over each to make sure they were perfect.” Nikolas looked back at all the dull-colored sacks and did some calculations in his

head to make sure he had enough.

“You always worry you didn’t make enough, Grandpapa,” said Tee, interrupting his thoughts.

Nikolas was content that he had everything he needed. He looked around at the smiling faces and noticed the sail-carts had skied in. “You have made another improvement, Richy, yes? Mind if I have a look? I was wondering, at the back of my mind, how you were using the sail-carts in this snow.” He twiddled his fingers in anticipation.

“Sure!” said Richy, with pride. Ever since Nikolas had built the sail-carts for them last fall, Richy had spent countless hours with his. He’d become the daredevil of the trio, and consequently found himself spending almost as much time repairing or tinkering with his sail-cart as actually using it. He didn’t have to tell Nikolas there had been changes—it was obvious.

Richy flipped his sail-cart onto its side. “I removed the wheels and put these skids on. I got stuck a couple of times in the snow when they fell off, so I put in this cross-brace—Tee’s idea. I also nailed this little box on the back, for tools. I had to put a buckle and strap on after I littered tools around the forest. I still owe my dad chores as payment to replace them.”

Nikolas bent down and gently ran his hand over the snowy skids. “Now what inspired you to use this wood?”

Richy glanced over to Elly. “I tried some others—they

didn't work so well, but then Elly found this type of tree in the forest that bends well. She said it's used for bows, so we used that for the skids. The problem is we can't go very far—the snow ends up stuck to the wood a lot. We have to keep scraping it off. Maybe I'm using the wrong wood."

Nikolas stroked his beard. "No, no ... the wood is fine. It is exactly the right wood to use. I know what you are missing. I must fetch something for you, yes?" He went into his large shed, still filled to the rafters. Few dared to enter for fear of being buried. It seemed to have a Klaus-shaped tunnel carved through. Soon he emerged, triumphant.

Klaus held a few bars of hardened yellow wax. "This is a special wax from a friend, an expert—very talented. Rub this on the skid bottoms until they are slick, and keep some with you."

Hearing Nikolas mention wax took Bakon back. When he and his brothers had first met Nikolas, he'd put wax dust on a makeshift tent to make it rain-resistant. He marveled at how Nikolas helped people.

"Wow, that's awesome," said Richy. He took a bar and started applying it to his sail-cart's skids. "Like this?"

"Keep going!" said Nikolas enthusiastically. He handed a stick each to Elly and Tee. They started copying Richy.

"Your parents must be proud of your innovations,

yes?" asked Nikolas.

Richy paused. "Um, to be honest, they didn't really notice." He looked at the snow-covered ground. "Sometimes I feel they don't know what to make of me."

Nikolas put a reassuring hand on Richy's shoulder. "I am sure there is something distracting them. You keep doing this. You were born to do these things, so do them! I am sure whatever it is your parents are struggling with, they both want the best for you."

Bakon caught Richy's eye. "I still hear tales in the taverns of how some Yellow Hood flipped his sail-cart into that villain, Andre LeLoup, sending him flying. The maniac who, after Egelina-Marie took him down, comes back and nearly has his revenge—except *you* stop him. You're a *legend*, kid," he said, offering his handsome, roguish smile.

"Thanks, Bakon," Richy said, with half a smile.

"Anytime, kid," said Bakon, walking past him and messing his hair. "We misfits, we stick together."

Richy flashed a full smile, and got back to waxing his sail-cart's skids.

"I've got the horses!" said Bore excitedly, walking the four horses forward.

"And here's the rest of the gear for attaching them to the sleigh," said Squeals, dropping the gear into the snow. "Feels heavier than last year."

Bakon was about to give his brother his disapproving,

disappointed face when he stopped himself. After a moment, he punched him in the shoulder instead. “Feel heavier, *now?*”

Squeals glared back at Bakon with a cheeky smile.

Nikolas thought about how this would likely be the last year when all this would be necessary. His secret invention, the horseless cart, would soon change everything. But first, he needed to give a copy of its plans to the Tub, to make sure his friends and allies had the advantage he suspected they needed.

The Tub was a secret society, led these days by a butcher, a baker, and a candle and stick maker. Founded upon noble principles, the Tub’s influence grew, over time spreading to all of the kingdoms, but eventually coming into conflict with another such society, the Fare. After centuries of a cut-throat, cloak-and-dagger war, the Tub finally achieved the upper hand. They used that opportunity to bankrupt the Fare, and shackle its members with a crippling peace agreement that would see certain actions taken by any Fare-man as grounds for execution. In the decades since that agreement was put in place, the kingdoms had enjoyed relative peace.

Nikolas had been involved in the Tub for a long time. He’d never completely bought into their ways or principles, but he had his own reasons for supporting them. He’d always been on the outside, often thinking that their struggles weren’t necessarily his. The recent events with LeLoup and Simon St. Malo had made him

rethink that.

“Elly, what’s poking out of your cloak pocket there?” asked Egelina-Marie. “Something is trying to escape.”

“Oh,” said Elly, securing the forearm-length metal rod. Its small handle was visible and had caught on the secret pocket’s edge. Elly collapsed the handle back into the base, and placed the rod back into the pocket. “Just one of my shock-sticks. At least the other is behaving,” she joked.

Elly had grown a bit quicker than Tee in recent months, making them now the same height. The two best friends had birthdays only a month apart and seemed to inch slightly ahead of the other every couple of months. While Tee was the daring one always jumping into adventure, Elly was the loyal friend who always jumped in after, knowing that together they’d get out of whatever it was. “Since we tangled with LeLoup, I think it’s always best to be prepared. We’ve helped more than a dozen people since, by being prepared. Although, my shock-sticks seem to need more winding and don’t give off as big a shock these days. We got these new ones—”

Elly caught herself, not wanting to reveal to everyone the secret treehouse at the top of the mountain, and how new equipment just seemed to appear, though it had been a while since any had. “—about two months ago. We stopped using our old ones since they aren’t as effective ... maybe because of the weather.”

“Hmm,” said Nikolas to himself, making a mental note.

After checking the horses were hitched correctly, Nikolas turned to everyone. “It’s wonderful to have your help. Now let’s go have a wonderful Solstice! I’m sure it’ll be the best yet.”

Tee, Elly, and Richy hopped into their sail-carts and pulled up the telescoping masts. Within moments, the wind filled their sails and they started heading off.

“Okay, we’ll see you down there,” yelled Tee as she started to pick up speed.

Bore and Squeals climbed into the sleigh with Nikolas.

Bakon pulled out some cross-country skis and eyed them uneasily. “See you guys down there in a couple of hours—I hope.”

Squeals leaned over the edge of the sleigh. “Bakon, if you think you’re about to humiliate yourself, find a larger tree this time. It wasn’t very sporting of you to take out that little one last time. Mind you, it did do a number on you. Try not to damage the family name,” he said, laughing.

Bakon took a swipe at his brother’s head. “Get out of here.”

“See you in Mineau!” yelled Nikolas. He gave the reins a flick and followed the departing Yellow Hoods.

Egelina-Marie and Bakon watched as the convoy left.

Gradually, everything fell silent.

“Are you sure this is a good idea? Do we even have enough daylight left?” said Bakon.

“We’ll be fine. Are you as scared as you sound?” said Egelina-Marie, putting her skis on.

Bakon had skied before, just not very successfully, unlike his younger brothers. He would have never considered trying again after the tree fiasco three years ago, but Egelina-Marie had a way of talking him into things.

“Follow my lead, watch what I do, and try to glide,” said Egelina-Marie. “And if you get lost or go missing, I’ll find you.”

“Promise?” asked Bakon, sarcastically.

“Can I get back to you on that?” replied Egelina-Marie with a wink.

CHAPTER THREE

A LETTER OF WARNING

Maxwell Watt slammed his notebook down on the side table, whipped off his glasses, and looked at the fire snapping and popping away in the fireplace. The fire seemed to mirror his frustration at being interrupted again.

“Keep your blooming trousers on!” he bellowed as he got up and stomped over to the front door. After a second to close his robe before facing the winter weather, he angrily opened the door. “What do you want?”

A man stood there, holding a letter. “Special delivery, sir.”

“Oh, sorry,” said Maxwell. “A lot of people have been caroling this evening. A man can’t be left alone with his thoughts, it seems.”

“Don’t appreciate the singing, sir?” asked the man drily, still holding the letter.

Maxwell looked around, in case friends or neighbors

were about to approach who might take offense. “Singing I don’t mind, but packs of wild people howling at each doorstep like out-of-key wolves baying at the moon? I *do* mind. How can a man change the world with such horrible distractions?”

The man stared blankly at Maxwell and gently offered the letter again.

Realizing it was late at night, and devilishly cold, Maxwell quickly found a silver coin to give to the man. The man smiled respectfully, gave Maxwell a tip of his hat, and left.

Maxwell hurried back to the warmth of the fire and his comfortable chair.

“Who was that, father?” asked a teenage male voice from upstairs.

“Just a messenger,” said Maxwell, putting his spectacles back on. “Go back to sleep.”

Hearing the thump, thump, thump of feet coming down the stairs, Maxwell put the letter in his lap and waited.

“Franklin Charles David, I told you to go back to bed,” he said sternly, though not convincingly. Maxwell wasn’t a strong parent—instead he thought of his son more like a special friend.

The messy, dark blond-haired fifteen-year-old plunked himself down on the ottoman and warmed his hands by the fire. “Actually, father, you told me to go

back to *sleep*. I wasn't asleep yet. So given that your directive was invalid, I thought I'd come see what the bother was about."

Maxwell tried to hide his smile. Franklin was certainly his son, much to the disdain of his ex-wife.

Franklin turned, peeking over his shoulder at the letter in his father's lap. "Who's it from? Costs extra to have it delivered at night, on a Saturday so close to Solstice. Must be important."

"I haven't yet had a second to look. Shall we?" said Maxwell, waving his son in. He hated to think that he played favorites with his kids, but he did, and he knew it. Franklin Charles David was the eldest by five years, and had shown signs of scientific genius at an early age. His daughter, Emily, was a wonderful girl, but Maxwell just thought of her as a pleasant child. Emily seemed to be very much his ex-wife's child, and Franklin his.

Maxwell leaned forward and held up the envelope. "It's from my friend, Mister Nikolas Klaus." He paused. "Hmm, that's odd."

Franklin yawned. "You get letters from him all the time, father. Why's that odd?"

Maxwell hesitated before opening the letter. "It's just that Nikolas replies to my letters, but he doesn't initiate—at least, that's been the pattern since we started corresponding two years ago. I send him one, and then he responds, without fail. Now ... this. It's out of pattern.

Why do you think he'd do that?"

Franklin rubbed his tired face. "I don't know, father. Just open it." He hated it when his dad needlessly tried to solve a puzzle when the answer was right there.

"Come on! Let's have a guess," said Maxwell, insisting they try to figure it out.

"I'm only doing this to speed up to the part where we actually open the letter, okay?" said Franklin, tired and now annoyed. "Maybe he wrote to tell you he invented something to make your steam engine look archaic? That he was just patting you on the head like a child?"

Maxwell seemed a bit hurt and glanced at the letter, now half expecting it to say exactly that.

"Maybe he has a new recipe for cookies that he just had to share? I don't know. Just *open the letter*. The answer is right in front of you. Look at it."

Maxwell made strange lip movements as he thought about what could be in the letter. "He rushed this the entire way. That costs a small fortune, like you said. What's so important to warrant that, I wonder?"

"Maybe he's daft like you and figured out a simplified solution to an equation that no one cares about," Franklin said, stretching. "Okay, that's it. I'm not waiting anymore. I'm off to bed."

Franklin made his way toward the stairs. He heard his dad tear open the letter, and when he got to the first step his father said, "*Stop*. Franklin Charles David, come here,

please.”

Sighing heavily and a bit more annoyed at having to turn back, Franklin returned to the ottoman and glared at his dad. “What could your letter possibly have to do with me?” He then noticed his dad had turned a shade of gray. “What’s wrong, father?”

With a slightly trembling hand, Maxwell removed his spectacles. “It seems that we’ve been betrayed. Mister Klaus was attacked by someone named Andre LeLoup, sent by Simon St. Malo.”

Franklin tried to place where he’d heard the name *Simon St. Malo* before. He remembered enough to know St. Malo wasn’t a good person.

Maxwell continued, “He was attacked for the steam engine plans. *My* steam engine plans. That means—”

Standing up, Franklin scratched his head and continued his father’s thought. “That means that someone knows you two are corresponding, but doesn’t know who is helping whom. Or, at least, they didn’t. Maybe they do now.”

Maxwell stood up and threw the letter into the fire. He wiped his sweaty forehead with his robe’s sleeve. After a deep breath, he smoothed his already flat, thin, light brown hair with both hands.

“Did you read the whole letter?” asked Franklin, watching it curl up into ash in the fire. Evidently, there were several pages, and he hadn’t seen his father leaf

through more than two.

"I have to get rid of everything. They'll come for me next," said Maxwell as he started pacing.

"Did you finish reading it? It looked thick. Maybe he knew who the traitor was?"

Maxwell nervously rubbed his cheeks with his hands. "I skimmed what I needed. I'm pretty sure I know what he was going to say. It's ... it's obvious, really. I need to think."

Franklin glared at his father. "It's *not* obvious. You didn't know when you started reading it that there was a traitor! You have to stop doing *this* whenever you get scared. You always jump to conclusions! You really—"

"Franklin Charles David, please! I'm trying to *think*." Maxwell paced about the room, drumming his fingers on his pointy chin, and then said to himself, "Yes, I see it now. There's only one thing we can do. I need to send him in the morning." He sighed deeply. "Well, that's sorted then."

Franklin knew his father was a genius, as was he, but he'd seen his father in panic situations and knew how terribly his brain seemed to work at those times. His mother's announcement that she was leaving his father had been one such occasion. His father had been so distracted that he'd accidentally put the laundry on the fire, and put his sister outside instead of the cat.

Another time, when his father had an inventors'

meeting coming up, he'd refused to listen to Franklin's advice about the amount of pressure a prototype steam engine could take. He nearly blew up the house.

With a scowl on his face, Franklin crossed his arms. "Send *me* in the morning? What are you on about? I'm not going anywhere."

Maxwell walked over to a writing desk in the corner of the room, sat down on the ribbed chair, and pulled out a piece of paper. With a distracted tone, he replied, "Yes, you are. You have to. They can't get their hands on it."

Franklin rubbed his face in frustration. "On *what*, father? On your never-going-to-be-finished steam engine? I haven't had the heart to say it, but it's never going to work. Let them have it. Maybe it can consume their fortune, as it has ours."

Putting his quill down, Maxwell turned and looked at his son. He could see that Franklin was right on the cliff of losing faith in him. He motioned his son closer.

Franklin hesitated, hating being treated like a child, but he could see something in his father's eyes that he hadn't seen in a while. Rolling his eyes and giving in, he dragged his feet to stand beside his seated dad.

Glancing about as if a spy could be hiding in the room, Maxwell whispered, "It *does* work. It's been working for the past month. I didn't want anyone to know, so I kept messing around, purposely blowing things up every now and then. Nikolas' last letter helped

—I had it working within days.”

Franklin folded his arms and curled his face in disbelief. “I don’t believe it. It’s working?”

“Yes,” replied his father, nodding.

“For real?” said Franklin, putting his hands on his hips.

“Yes,” replied his father, smiling.

“Really?” asked Franklin. He was starting to feel that his father had been more devious than he’d thought possible.

Maxwell smiled a rarely seen devilish smile. “Yes, Franklin. This will change the world, but we can’t let St. Malo get his hands on it. I’m sure the only reason he’s still around is that he’s in league with others, and they’d tear the world apart with my invention.” He returned to the letter he’d started writing.

Franklin was stunned. “You got it working,” he repeated several times, quietly. Finally, he came out of that loop and said, “You got it *working* ... and I didn’t even notice. You cheeky monkey.”

His father looked at him quizzically. “Cheeky monkey? Is that any way to talk to your father?” he said, trying to sound firm.

Franklin chuckled. “My father? No. A sneak who has been making me think that he’s only half the genius I hoped he was? A cheat who made me believe that my father was an old codger? That man is one cheeky

monkey indeed.”

Maxwell changed to a serious look, and his eyes locked on those of his son. “You’ll need to take my plans to Mister Klaus himself. He’s the only one I can trust with them.”

Franklin blinked, surprised. “Me? By myself? Why me? Wouldn’t the journey take weeks?”

Maxwell stood up, maintaining his look at his son, who was only an inch or two shorter. “You’re the only one I trust to carry my plans there.”

Worried, Franklin thought about all the people his father knew, hoping to think of someone he could mention that would take the burden, but he couldn’t think of one. “Why can’t you take it, father? I can come with you. We could—”

Maxwell sighed and smoothed his thin hair again. He removed his spectacles in order to clean them on his shirt. “You don’t understand, Franklin. They will be looking for me, whoever they are. They won’t be looking for you, at least not yet. I will try to go north, maybe to Eldeshire where we spent the summer a couple of years ago, but I’m certain they’ll catch me before then. I doubt I will evade their clutches for long.”

“Father, we don’t even know who they are—you said so yourself. Now you’re imagining them as having—”

Ignoring his son, Maxwell continued, “The plans have to get to Nikolas. I need you to put them in his hands. He’ll know how to keep them safe.”

THANK YOU

FOR READING THIS SAMPLE

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After a serious illness, Adam decided to make some changes, including never missing a night of reading stories to his kids again because of work, and starting down that road to being an author that he always wanted.

He spent three years writing a memoir about his life up to and through that event. With that out of the way, he felt free and able to start writing fiction again. With a nudge from his daughter, he wrote *Along Came a Wolf* and created *The Yellow Hoods* series.

He lives in Calgary, Alberta, Canada with his awesome wife and amazing kids.

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