

# BACKPACK ADVENTURES

## Episode 15

### *“Dark Poison”*

#### PROLOGUE

Four friends huddled in the farthest corner of the public library. The angry expressions on their faces concealed the fact they were actually the best of friends, bound by a shared secret: a backpack computer that allowed space and time travel.

Summer, a petite blond sitting in a wheelchair, broke the heavy silence. “Instead of just arguing and wasting time, I think we should try Connie’s suggestion to use the BPC to see *first hand* which topic would be more interesting for the newspaper article assignment. We can check out Jace’s idea on immigration and K.T.’s idea for the Underground Railroad. Connie and I will be happy with either one, right Connie?”

“Sure, Summer, I don’t care which we do as long as we get started and finish this stupid team project on time. We’re two days behind schedule right now.” Connie stretched out her long blue jean covered legs and nudged K.T., her best friend, with the tip of her flip flop sandals. K.T. scooted over on the hard plastic chair and frowned at Connie.

“We can let K.T. tell us what year she wants to go back to,” Connie offered. She opened her backpack and took out a small black keypad and began punching numbers. “I’ve put in New York City like Jace wants,” she said with a glance at the only boy in the group. “Now tell me what year, K.T.”

“1832, I guess,” K.T. mumbled.

“1832 it is, then,” responded Connie with a false smile.

One by one they joined hands and then Connie pressed a button and whispered  
“Go!”

A man sitting at a table behind some bookshelves near the group noticed a flash of light and looked out the window expecting to see a thundercloud. The sky was cloudless blue.

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#### NEW YORK CITY, 1832

Sully carefully placed the rough wooden plank across the opening at the base of the brick-walled tenement building. The pre-dawn darkness was beginning to give way to a humid sunrise that promised another scorching day in the summer of 1832. He knew that the fugitive slaves he had hidden deep in the recesses of the building would suffer during the wait for nightfall, but the young mother with her infant child assured him they could handle the heat. After all, they had made it for the past three months on the back roads from South Carolina to New York in all kinds of weather. Sully marveled that a twenty-year-old woman, barely two years older than he, could have traveled alone so far with a baby. Sully would have taken them to better quarters, but his apartment was the last “safe house” in Five Points. All the other refuges were being watched by the notorious gang leader, The Ferret, a ruthless bounty hunter.

As Sully pushed a large dilapidated wooden shipping crate in front of the board, a brilliant rainbow flash of light illuminated the narrow alleyway. Sully whirled to see who had discovered him. His hand caught on the edge of the crate and a sharp pain made him

wince as a rusty nail gouged his left palm, tearing a deep gash in his work-toughened skin.

“Who’s there?” he cried out, pressing his right hand tightly over the wound to stop the bleeding.

The light disappeared and Sully counted three figures about his size and one shorter figure, all huddled in the shadow of the adjacent building.

Gangs of thugs roamed the crowded streets of New York, anxious to fight, rob or “enforce” for a rich patron. Some served the Southern plantation owners who offered bounties for runaway slaves. Had the Ferret’s gang found his secret entrance?

Sully didn’t want to fight, but he would in order to protect his home and “guests.” At five foot eight, one hundred fifty pounds, he wasn’t a giant Irish fighter like the Plug Uglies, but he’d won his shares of battles.

The four remained in the shadows and Sully took a step forward, looking for something to wield as a weapon. He spotted a discarded metal chamber pot, obviously dropped from the fourth floor and abandoned, and thought he might throw the pot at the quartet and make a run for the street. His hand ached and he needed to look at the cut in the sunlight that was inching its way from the East River to the slums of the Sixth Ward. How had they traveled this far back in the alley without him hearing them? How long had they been watching him? Would it be safe to run from the alley or should he stand and protect the hidden entrance? The pain from the gash in his hand moved up his arm and his head pounded with each questioning thought. Sully could feel the sunlight cresting the buildings, sending color and heat into the alley.

Daybreak had come and, any moment now, chamber pots would be spilling their contents from the windows above him.

Sully watched the four bodies huddle together and could hear soft, whispering voices. Slowly, two figures emerged. Sully's jaw dropped at the sight of two strangely dressed young girls.

Both wore blue pants and cotton shirts that barely covered their stomachs, much less their arms. Neither had a head covering, and both had shoes that showed their feet and toes. They must have been robbed of their clothes, Sully thought, and were embarrassed to be seen in their undergarments.

The taller girl had dark hair that reached all the way down her back like a velvet coat. She carried a bag on her shoulder and her skin was brown like the Algonquin Indian maiden he'd seen at a free Castle Garden concert when he was nine years old. The shorter girl was black like the woman he'd just hidden. Her dark eyes flashed with courage. She stood defensively with one leg extended in front of her and leaned back on the other. Her fists were clenched and her elbows bent so that one hand was near her ear and the other in front of her. Sully's own defensiveness gave way to relief when he saw the pair and he peered past them to see their companions.

Behind the two girls was an even more perplexing sight: a slim Oriental boy and a slightly-built girl with short blond hair who sat in a Merlin Chair. The boy held his hands like the black girl and Sully surmised this was a fighting stance. They looked harmless, but it was best to be sure. Certainly, they weren't bounty hunters.

"Can I help you?"

Before they could answer, a loud splash sounded against the bricks behind them and all four screamed. A chamber pot had been dumped into the alleyway directly behind the group. The muck was apparent in the growing daylight and by the smell. With no sewers, the alleyways and streets served as disposals for buildings housing hundreds.

Sully needed a plan to get the interlopers out of the alley and hidden where he could question them without interruption. Perhaps they were fugitives or immigrants like him, and fallen on hard luck. Don't be fooled by these strangers, Sully's reason told him, just because *they* were acting foolish.

If only he could sneak them down Pearl Street to Broadway, he knew his friend Liberius would help them. After all, it was Liberius who had saved him five years ago from gang retribution. At ten, while working as a supernumerary at various fire stations for meals and a place to sleep, he had been recruited by the Dead Rabbits gang to be a tenement runner, a courier for the landlords. After three years, he was sick of gang life and ready to leave.

Liberius had literally plucked him off the docks of New York's Harbor and secreted him aboard an Erie Canal barge headed for Canada. He likely saved Sully's life. The next five years had been spent commanding barges owned by Liberius up and down the heavily traveled Canal. Liberius was now known as one of the wealthiest of the freedmen.

Liberius would know what to do with these newcomers. They didn't stand a chance on the street dressed as they were. Sully motioned for them to follow him.

"Follow me quickly or you'll be covered with the morning muck."

"We're not going anywhere with you!" the black girl spoke decisively.

“We can take care of ourselves!” added the tall girl. In her hand she held a small black object. Was it a weapon? Sully wondered. It looked more like a large snuff box.

“You’re not, eh? Well, you’ll be wishin’ you was safe and dry soon enough...I was only offering you the hospitality of the finest home in the Sixth Ward. You won’t stand a chance on the street standing there half-naked!” Sully began to jog off towards the street.

Alarm broke out amongst the youths.

“Wait! We’ll go with you!”

Sully turned to see it was the blond girl who had called out to him. She was rolling toward him as the others reluctantly followed. No one pushed her chair and she did not turn the third small wheel of the chair. Most paralyzed people who used a Merlin Chair turned a small third wheel to roll the two large wheels beneath the chair. How did she move?

“How?...No... Never mind. Enough time for questions when you’re well-hidden.” Sully’s pragmatic nature took over.

“Let’s see,” Sully mused aloud, “How to get you down a few blocks without anyone seeing you on the street?” He paused. “H-m-m...”

“I know! I’ll borrow the fire engine from the station captain across the street and you can ride the few blocks we need to go. There’ll be fewer questions if you’re out of sight. Wait here.”

The foursome dutifully followed his direction and he thought how gullible children could be. He would have never trusted a stranger that quickly. He paused at the water pump in front of his row house and washed the now-dried blood from his palms.

The gash was deep. Sully tore a strip from his shirttail and cursed the fact that it was his last good piece of clothing. He wound the remnant around his hand and deftly tied it into a bandage. Now he'd have a scar on the bottom of his hand to match those on his knuckles.

He was thirsty. He held his head under the water spigot as he pumped the handle up and down. Though the water was cool, it smelled foul. Sully decided to wait for a drink from the pump in front of his friend's house. Perhaps the water was fresher on Broadway. Sully didn't always trust the water in Five Points. Rumors had circulated of rival gangs poisoning the water supply of the Sixth Ward. Broadway was on the border of the Sixth Ward and afforded less opportunity for tampering or so the street wisdom taught.

Sully returned with draft horses pulling a wagon with ladders and hoses. Without a word, he lifted the small blond girl out of the chair and settled her gently between the coils of the fire hose. She had a shy smile, but her eyes sparkled. Though she was light as a feather, Sully could feel the strength of her arm muscles as she placed her arms around his neck.

"Pardon me, miss, for having to cover you with the horse's blanket, but it's for your protection."

"I understand," she replied as she scooted down under the coarse red cloth. The others followed, scrunching below the hoses and ladders as Sully wedged the surprisingly lightweight chair between them.

Sully whistled to the team and the massive Percherons cantered down the cobblestone pavement of Pearl Street toward Broadway and the home of Sully's friend, a freed slave named Liberius Chapman.

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As Sully expected. Liberius opened his home at once to the four strangers. Liberius provided cloaks for the three young ladies and closeted all four of them in a secure room high atop his two and a half story wood frame town home. Here they could survey the city without being seen.

Their gracious host had offered fine English tea in Adams china teacups with crumpets and jam. Liberius was only twenty-five, but he had already made a fortune as a merchant with a good head for business.

Sully watched the faces of the youths as they introduced themselves. The blond with the bright smile was aptly named "Summer," thought Sully. The brave warrior was K.T. and her tall friend was named Consuela, though they called her Connie. Jace was the athletic boy whom Sully could see was very protective of Summer. Jace had never left her side since Sully had lifted her from the wagon into her chair.

Sully listened as his friend, Liberius, began to question the four strangers.

"Tell me, now that thou art comfortable and free to speak, how thou came to be in Five Points in such a state of disarray." Liberius' Quaker language and mannerisms seemed especially suited to his tall dark frame and calm face, but he sounded more like a man in his fifties than one in his twenties.



“Sir, we’re dressed like we *always* dress,” K.T. answered without trying to hide her exasperation. “But if *thou* want us to wear these cloaks, we will. We just need to get some information for a report we’re...”

Summer interrupted K.T. “We’re students and we were given an assignment to research immigration or the Underground Railroad and write newspaper articles about the topic.” K.T. and Jace began to argue.

Neither one could be understood as they talked over each other. Summer rolled her chair to position herself between her two friends.

Summer gave K.T. and Jace long looks. They clamped their mouths shut and glared at each other. “We are *supposed* to work as a team.” She glanced at K.T. and Jace. “But we kept getting into arguments about which topic would make better newspaper articles.”

Both Jace and K.T. started to protest, but snapped their mouths shut when Summer frowned at them sternly. She continued, “So Connie suggested we observe evidence of both topics in New York City. We are in New York, aren’t we?”

Sully shot a glance at Liberius, but remained quiet. Summer’s answer raised alarms in Sully’s mind. What school allowed girls and boys to work together as a team or even be in the same course of study?

“This is Manhattan, the southern tip of the island named New York. There are four other boroughs surrounding us. New York is a huge city of over 180,000 people, many of whom are immigrants or first- generation Americans like Sully,” Liberius spoke softly.

“We *all* come from immigrant stock,” Summer rejoined evenly.

“Yes, but not all came willingly to this great nation. I was born a slave on a sugar cane plantation near New Orleans. During the War of 1812, I was orphaned and my owners went bankrupt. A childless Quaker couple found me and bought me in order to give me freedom. We moved to Philadelphia where I was-” he paused, “more or less accepted.”

Liberius took a sip of tea. “At fifteen, I convinced my adopted parents to allow me to apprentice as a deck hand on the barges traveling the newly opened canals in New York. At eighteen, I was captain of one of the first barges on the Erie Canal. At twenty, I formed my own shipping company.”

Sully could see on the faces of K.T., Connie, Jace and Summer the same look of incredulity and admiration that he had felt when he had first heard Liberius’ story.

“The last five years have allowed me to further my prosperity and share it with others. I believe everyone should have the freedom to make a life of their choosing in America. Now, what is this below-ground railway thou mentioned?” Liberius smoothly changed the subject.

Sully watched the faces of the four friends. He knew Liberius was leading the intruders into divulging information. He’d seen Liberius “play dumb” in order to learn facts about possible obstacles before transporting runaway slaves to Canada. For the past five years, he’d been part of the safe house network in New York. He’d never lost a “pilgrim.”

“It’s the Underground Railroad,” interjected Jace, “At first, I thought it meant the subterranean railroads built below the streets of New York. You know, the subway.”

“But I told him about Harriet Tubman and how runaway slaves were helped to freedom by a network of safe houses,” added K.T.

“Sub-what? Harriet who?” Sully interjected with a puzzled look on his face. He was beginning to think the four were certain to be sent to Blackwell’s Island if they continued to speak such lunacy. “What kind of fool would put a steam locomotive beneath the earth?”

Liberius laughed out loud. “Railroads under the streets! We’re trying to convince the city officials to build sewers and waterworks that give clean water, not the filth from the former swamp upon which our fine borough sits. All they approve is more brick tenement houses, five, six stories high where greedy landlords cram as many poor immigrants as possible the moment they disembark at Whitehall Slip.” Liberius’ voice rose ever so slightly as he spoke. He took a deep breath and turned to Sully. “That’s where I met Sully, down at the docks, preying on innocent immigrants just as someone had preyed upon his own parents.”

Sully’s face flushed as he felt all eyes on him.

“My days as a runner for the tenement gang lords were numbered, Liberius, for I had not the stomach for cheating poor folk of the little they owned. If you’d not found me and knocked some sense into this Irish head o’ mine, I’d ‘ave ended up on the wrong side of a knifepoint.”

“But here thou are, my good friend, bringing me four destitute students whom thou supposed were cheated out of clothing *they* say they were not wearing. Tell me, what dost thou make of the scholars’ tale?”

“M’thinks it strangely coincidental they arrived in my alley, just *appeared* in all honesty--today of all days--and say they want to learn about a railroad under the ground.”

“Actually, *I* chose 1832 because of the New England Anti-Slavery Association,” offered Connie.

Sully stood up quickly. “Who are you? Who’s paying you to spy on us?” The fear he had first felt when he realized he was not alone in the alley returned. “I shouldn’t have left the alley unguarded! How could I have been so stupid as to trust these juvenile traitors?” Sully berated himself aloud.

“Calm down, Sully. I don’t think these children have told us everything, but I doubt they are spies.” Liberius turned to face all four youths who had huddled together at Sully’s outburst. “Am I wrong?”

“You are quite correct, Mr. Chapman,” answered Summer. Sully could see her hands gently holding K.T. and Jace’s arms, one at each side as Connie stood behind her. “It’s time for us to give honest answers.”

Summer’s blue eyes met Liberius’ piercing black gaze without wavering. Sully thought to himself that even if she was lying to them, it wasn’t done with intent to harm.

“We want simply to learn about the Underground Railroad. We know the abolition movement is growing and we want to support the movement in our school newspaper. Nothing more. We would never want to endanger lives, if that is what you fear.”

Summer continued, “If we learn about immigration as well, that’ll be great. That was Jace’s first choice for a newspaper report. He emigrated from China several years ago.”

“Yeah, I always wanted to see the Statue of Liberty,” Jace said, moving toward the window. “Can you see her from here?”

“Thou wilt find no statues in the house of a Quaker,” Liberius answered with a shake of his head. “That would be idolatry.”

“Sorry, Jace, that’s 1885,” Summer said with a chuckle. She noticed Sully’s quizzical look and added, “It’s a game we play. We call it ‘What will the future hold?’ Like the subway idea. We thought it would be nice to greet immigrants with a welcoming statue symbolizing freedom.”

“Surely, that would be fine, but ships dock all over: Fulton Slip by the new fish market, Whitehall, James, Coffeehouse, Castle. There’s many thinks we have enough folks as is, no need to encourage ‘em.”

“There are more practical ways to welcome the immigrants,” interjected Liberius. “For instance, with decent housing and food.” Liberius checked the time on a simple gold watch and replaced the timepiece in his vest pocket. “But that’s another cause. It would be ironic to use ‘freedom’ as our motto until all are truly free.”

Liberius stood. “I must leave for Boston now, but thou art welcome to stay. Sully, I know you leave on the evening barge. If thou trust these street urchins, perhaps a lesson could be arranged.”

Sully nodded.

“They could see the city for themselves, meet immigrants and émigrés, as well-- for their writing exercises,” Liberius said with a smile.

“Aye, that I could do,” Sully said with a wink of his eye. He turned to the four youths. “It’ll be hot with those cloaks outside, but better than being mugged as the ‘Odd

Rags' gang. You can travel without the cloaks--after dark. And just to set my mind at ease, I'll be taking that bag o' yours." Sully turned to Connie and extended his left hand.

"What happened to thy hand?" questioned Liberius.

"Just a cut."

"Keep it covered," Liberius advised concernedly. "Last week in Boston, there was rumor of a new miasma and I'd hate for my best friend to succumb to poisons in the air."

"Godspeed on your journey to Boston, Liberius," Sully said as he shook Liberius' hand.

"Safe and quick be thine to Buffalo. Tell the pilgrims to hope for the future." Liberius turned to Summer and added with a smile, "We have our games as well." He bowed slightly and left the room.

Sully turned back to Connie. "Your bag, now, Miss Connie, and the little box you hold in your palm as well. I'd hate for you to miss the tour that'll obtain for you the stories you need for your schoolmaster."

Connie reluctantly handed both to him when Summer gave her a nod of approval. Sully examined the bag and could find no opening, only a narrow strip of broken metal.

"How do you open the confounded thing?" he muttered. Sully slipped the small black box with numbered and lettered buttons into his pocket and slung the bag on his left shoulder. A dull throbbing pain extended from his hand to his elbow and he winced.

"Don't worry. I'll give your personal effects back to you when we part ways."

“Stay close now. We’ll visit the new fish market on Fulton first and take lunch to some newfound friends o’mine back at Pearl and Cross. Mind you, keep up, Miss Summer, with that magical chair o’yours or street hooligans will cart you off.”

“I’ll be right behind her and K.T. and Connie on each side,” answered Jace.

“Right-o, Master Jace. Be sure to watch for the potholes and keep to the middle of the street. Less offal there.” Sully led the way out of the quiet sanctuary of the Chapman home and into the sweltering midday rush of Broadway and Pearl.

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Sully’s young wards shed the heavy cloaks the moment they entered Sully’s basement-level room. The wild jog through the crowded streets to the fish market and the docks seemed to have drained them of all energy. Connie had actually vomited when she entered the building and Summer had explained to Sully that none of them were accustomed to the strong odors emanating from the poorly ventilated hallways. Sully shrugged, for the smells of cooking fish and unbathed bodies, stale spittoons and empty gin bottles, rotting refuse and human waste were unavoidable in the overpopulated brick boardinghouses that stretched for block after block in lower Manhattan. This was a good “safe house” because the police would never be found near here. They preferred to avoid the smells and filth of the poorest neighborhood.

Sully tapped gently on the false wall he had built at the back of his tiny apartment. A low moan answered the tap and Sully hurriedly pulled back the boards that disguised the small cell which hid the young mother and her infant. He lit a candle that smoked badly in the sour air. The young mother held her infant tightly to her chest and struggled

to stand after being cramped in the tiny space for so long. Tears streamed down her face and Jace rushed to help Sully lift her to her feet.

“Oh, Mister Sully, Little Josiah is sick. He’s bad off, so bad off!”

At the sight of the pitiful woman and her limp child, Summer covered her mouth to stifle a scream. K.T. gathered the cloaks to make a soft place for the woman to lie down while Connie fought to control her nausea and found an old newspaper to use as a fan.

As Connie began to create a slight breeze, the unmistakable odor of diarrhea permeated the space. Sully’s brow wrinkled in concern.

The infant’s clothing was soaked. His eyes were sunken and closed, his skin, an ashen color. Sully knew it was too late for the baby and a mixture of anger, disappointment and failure clouded his thoughts. He’d seen death on the streets. He had watched his parents die slowly from consumption. But he had cradled that baby only hours earlier. The infant had been wiry and tough, alert and happy, as healthy as Sully. Sully braced his shoulders and prepared to do what had to be done.

“Leviah, tell me what happened,” Sully spoke firmly, trying to sound as calm and authoritative as Liberius.

“Mister Sully, we was doing alright. A bit hot, a bit cramped, but alright. We slept a little and I woke up when Josiah started fussin’ and stickin’ his tongue out like he do when he’s thirsty. Well, he drank all the water I had in my goatskin water jug. He kept fussin’ and pullin’ his little legs up like his stomach done cramped... I thought for sure someone would hear him crying.” Leviah sobbed and let out a low groan. “I set



Little Josiah on the floor and moved the boards out the way. I had to find some more water.” She drew a deep breath and struggled to speak.

“I peeked out the door and there was a bucket sitting by the stairs. So I snuck out the hallway and dipped some water into the goatskin and brought it back to him, but he wouldn’t wake up to drink.” She started crying hard now.

Sully turned to look at the four young people. K.T. and Connie were softly crying with their arms around each other. Summer’s hands were folded in prayer. Jace studiously stared at the dirt floor of the basement. No one said a word. Sully doubted Leviah even knew they were in the room.

Leviah looked up at Sully and sobbed. “Mister Sully, you saw Little Josiah this morning. Weren’t nothin’ wrong with that child, nothin’ at all. We traveled three months under the moon and stars, ‘long rivers and roads, through forests filled with beasts. My baby’s strong. He’s gonna be alright, he’s gonna be free after we gets to Canada. Ain’t that the truth of it?”

Sully placed his hand gently on Leviah’s shoulder. “Let me hold him, Leviah, let me see what we can do for him...”

Leviah clutched the child’s limp body more tightly to her breast. “He ain’t gone, he ain’t gone. He been twitching every few minutes, so I know he ain’t gone.” Leviah began to rock her body back and forth, all the time shaking her head from left to right.

“Leviah...” Sully was at a loss as to how to get the baby out of the hysterical mother’s arms.

Just then a knock sounded on the thin wooden door. Everyone jumped but remained dead silent. The sharp rap shook the fragile door again, but this time it was followed by young boy's voice.

"Sully--Ryan Kilpatrick. A word with you about the pilgrims."

Sully rushed to the door and let in a sinewy boy about nine years old with the brightest shock of red hair Sully had ever seen on anyone. He was a runner for Liberius, an orphan picked up off the street and given a job in return for good meals, safe sleep and the chance of an education.

"What is it, Ryan?"

"Liberius says you are to board the next barge leaving for Buffalo. Find a way to get the pilgrims to the Hudson docks in the daylight. Seems he's heard that quarantine will be placed on all shipping up and down the canals from here to Buffalo. There's talk of closing the border as well."

"Did he say why?" Sully asked in a whisper. He didn't want to alarm the others needlessly.

Ryan looked up with honest green eyes, round with fear he could not hide.

"Something about a poison," he whispered. "He called it 'my as may' I think."

"Go back to your post. You've done a fine job, Ryan."

Sully turned to face the occupants of his tiny dwelling. Connie had picked up her bag and was searching frantically through it. He felt for the small black device in his pocket and tossed it to K.T.

"Is this what she's looking for?" Sully's face was grim. "It's time we part ways, dearies. I hope you've learned enough to print those articles for your newspaper, but the

lesson's over now. The School of Sully's World is closed for the day due to circumstances beyond his control."

"Maybe we can help you," K.T. began.

"I think not," Sully replied quickly. "The job I have to do, you can be no part of."

He turned to Leviah and firmly took her by the shoulder, lifting her off the cloaks. He pried her arms loose and carefully took the cold body of her child. Even now he could feel a slight twitch in the tiny limbs. Leviah was like a zombie, alive but without sensation. She stood swaying slightly as Sully moved away from her.

K.T. handed him a cloak and he wrapped the baby's body in its dark folds. He placed the body behind the false wall and moved the boards in front of it. He would deal with the burial when he returned from Buffalo and he willed his mind not to think of the vermin that dwelled in the building. Leviah was young and she could have more children, free children, with her husband who waited in Canada. Most of the women he knew had buried at least one infant. Still, the storm of emotions buffeted Sully's mind and he blinked back tears as he pressed the last board into place. He purposefully left Leviah's bag in the cell along with the goatskin water jug.

Connie and Jace silently helped Sully put the second cloak on Leviah who barely managed to stand. Sully's hand ached as he pulled on the third cloak. The bandage would have to be changed soon. He could see a thin line of blood seeping out from the edge of the cloth.

"Sully, if there was a way we could help," Summer offered, "would you trust us?"

"I...I'm not sure I would," Sully replied truthfully.

“If we could...” Summer began, but Connie touched her shoulder and shook her head. Summer’s voice trailed off into a deep sigh.

“Good luck to you if you stay on the streets. I advise waiting till dusk then setting off at a quick pace.” Sully realized he didn’t know where they were headed.

“Sully, we’ll find our own way out,” Summer’s voice was barely a whisper.  
“Godspeed!”

Sully nodded to Summer and turned without a word to lead Leviah out into the bright afternoon.

Just as they reached the stairs, he remembered the candle. Would the youths remember to blow it out when they left? He couldn’t chance it. He’d seen the ravages of fire in the tenement houses and known people who died because of someone’s negligence. He’d better remind them to blow out the candle.

Just as Sully opened the door, a flash of brilliant rainbow light exploded in the tiny room. The four strange scholars had disappeared. Sully blinked and rubbed his eyes. He rushed to check the secret entrance to the back alley. The heavy board was still in place. He glanced at the false wall where the poor dead baby lay. It was as he left it. As his eyes adjusted to the dim room, he saw the faintest thread of gray smoke rising from the stubby candle, the flame extinguished. He backed from the room and slowly shut the door.

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## EPILOGUE

Four teenage students worked diligently at the computer terminals in the Public Library. One, an Asian boy named Jace, was researching immigration in New York City during the early part of the 1800's. Another, K.T., a black girl, was downloading articles about the emergence of the Underground Railroad. A third, Connie, a Hispanic girl who liked math and science, had the search engine finding blueprints of the Erie Canal from New York to Canada.

The fourth, a blond girl named Summer, sat in a wheelchair. She had just found a copy of a Manhattan borough newspaper from 1872 in the archives of the New York City Library website. She scrolled along the faded newsprint till she came across an article that made her gasp.

The others looked up from their screens to check on their friend.

"What is it?" they asked in unison.

"Listen to this article title! 'New York City Philanthropist, Sullivan, Dedicates Memorial to Immigrant and Runaway Slave Children.' Could it be our friend, Sully?" Summer wondered aloud.

"Sounds like he made as big a fortune as Liberius," suggested K.T.

"Yeah, I guess he never forgot his past if he did strike it rich," conjectured Jace.

"He was a team player, that's for sure," added Connie.

Summer scanned the article. "Says here that he never forgot anyone on the team. He even mentions us."

"WHAT!" the other three yelled, forgetting they were in a library.

Summer burst out laughing. "Shhhhh! Just kidding!"