

CHAPTER ONE

THE ZIFF TWINS DEPART

Great-Uncle Thorne smiled at Maisie and Felix, his blue eyes twinkling in a way they had never seen before. He actually looked, Maisie realized with surprise, happy.

“My only regret,” Great-Uncle Thorne said, “is that I cannot go with you.”

“Go?” Felix asked, immediately anxious. “Go where?”

Great-Uncle Thorne’s smile widened.

“Why, to Imperial Russia,” he said, surprising Maisie once again. Ordinarily, he would have called Felix a dolt for not figuring out what always seemed so obvious to Great-Uncle Thorne, and so *not* obvious to Maisie and her brother.



“Is that different from regular Russia?” Hadley asked.

The Ziff twins, having delivered the message from Amy Pickworth, still sat together on the love seat, waiting for further instructions.

Great-Uncle Thorne shook his head sadly.

“What has happened to education?” he asked, his gaze sweeping up to the ceiling as if he might find an answer there. “My sister and I were taught right here at Elm Medona by brilliant tutors. Latin. French. The classics. And, of course, history.”

He chuckled, still staring at the ceiling and its twinkling white lights.

“Our history teacher was a Yale man, Mr. Franklin Smith. Of course, he let Maisie and me call him Smitty. Got a kick out of that, actually. Smitty appeared every morning at eleven, vaguely disheveled but always with his Yale tie and a straw boater.”

“A straw boat?” Maisie asked, but Great-Uncle Thorne ignored her.

“Up to the Map Room he’d march us—”

“The Map Room?” Maisie interrupted.

She had poked in every corner of Elm Medona. She’d opened closets and stepped inside. She’d stood



in many of the rooms that never got used and whose names no one seemed to know. Of course she'd been surprised by the Fairy Room, but it was secret, hidden.

"There's no Map Room in Elm Medona," Maisie said certainly.

Now Great-Uncle Thorne frowned at her.

"Of course there's a Map Room. And you and your coterie should obviously spend some time in it. If you did, you would know that Imperial Russia was so enormous that when it was night in the west, it was dawn on the Pacific. And that the land that stretched between made up one-sixth of all the land in the world. And that land was ruled by one man. The Tsar of Imperial Russia."

"Show us," Felix said, his mind already trying to conjure such an immense country. "Take us to the Map Room and show us."

Great-Uncle Thorne considered Felix's request. The children, their eyes on him, waited hopefully.

"I suppose if you're going there, you should understand a bit about what you're getting into," he said thoughtfully.

"Getting into?" Felix repeated. "You mean it's dangerous there?"



Great-Uncle Thorne shrugged.

“Actually, Maisie and I never had the pleasure of visiting Imperial Russia. It is the one place that our father warned us against. Of course, I’m sure that was because of what happened there in 1918 . . .”

He paused.

“If we couldn’t get back here and got stuck with the family . . .”

He paused again.

Maisie and Felix sneaked a glance at each other.

“Not to worry!” Great-Uncle Thorne said finally, with too much bravado. “You’ll get back without a hitch. Why wouldn’t you?”

“Why wouldn’t we?” Maisie asked. “Why did Phinneas Pickworth fear you and Great-Aunt Maisie wouldn’t be able to return?”

Great-Uncle Thorne’s face softened. “I believe it was just the love of a father for his children,” he said softly.

Before Maisie could question Great-Uncle Thorne further, her mother’s voice interrupted.

“What is this?” she said, stepping into the Fairy Room, awestruck.

She bent and touched the grass that covered the floor.



“Why, this grass is *real!*” she declared.

Her eyes tried to take it all in: the walls covered with ivy and pink and blue morning glories, the angel hair and twinkling lights on the ceiling.

“Jennifer,” Great-Uncle Thorne said firmly, “this was my mother’s most private place. It’s not for . . . general consumption.”

“But who tends all these flowers and grass?”

“There’s a special employee of Elm Medona whose sole purpose is to maintain this room,” Great-Uncle Thorne answered. “But you have to leave it, I’m afraid. As I said, it’s—”

“Yes,” their mother replied, “not for general consumption. But then why are the children in here? And the Ziff twins?”

No one had an answer.

Quiet fell over the Fairy Room.

Maisie and Felix’s mother let out a big sigh. “Sometimes,” she said, “I feel like something strange is going on around here.”

“It is,” Great-Uncle Thorne said. “Your children frequently time travel and meet famous people when those people were children.”

Maisie and Felix both gasped.



But their mother laughed. Hard. “That’s a good one,” she said.

She wiped the corners of her eyes, shaking her head. “Maybe I’ll go along with you next time,” she added.

“Sorry,” Great-Uncle Thorne said. “You have to be a twin.”

“Oh! I see!” Her eyes settled on the Ziff twins. “Well, then, take Hadley and Rayne along with you!”

The children all forced a laugh.

If she only knew, Felix thought as his mother told them breakfast was ready and they needed to get ready for school. *If she only knew*.



Maisie had thought that landing the lead in *The Crucible* would skyrocket her into popularity. But nothing seemed to change. Instead, Hadley remained her only friend. Unless she counted Jim Duncan, who was really Felix’s friend but at least seemed to like her, too.

But today, even Hadley seemed to be ignoring her. Maybe Great-Uncle Thorne and Imperial Russia had upset her. Maybe Hadley didn’t want anything



to do with The Treasure Chest and fancy Fabergé eggs made by the Imperial jeweler for the Tsar. Or, Maisie thought as she unsuccessfully tried to get Hadley's attention during social studies, maybe Hadley didn't want anything more to do with her.

"Entire countries have vanished," Mrs. Witherspoon was saying. "Through war or independence or colonization or crumbling governments, borders shift. Names change. Rulers get deposed."

She pulled down one of the maps that hung over the blackboard.

"Abyssinia, for example," Mrs. Witherspoon said, pointing to somewhere in Africa. "Abyssinia was an empire for more than eight hundred years, an empire that spanned present-day Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, parts of northern Somalia, southern Egypt, eastern Sudan . . ."

Her long pointer tapped each area on the map as she spoke. *Tap. Tap. Tap.*

Maisie willed Hadley to turn around so she could roll her eyes and make her laugh. But Hadley appeared to be completely engrossed in Abyssinia.

"In 1974, the monarchy was overthrown in a



coup d'état," Mrs. Witherspoon continued, "and Abyssinia ceased to exist."

Mrs. Witherspoon went on talking about Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo. She pulled down another map, this one of Europe, and tapped and pointed and talked about Austria-Hungary and East Germany, but all Maisie could think about was why Hadley Ziff was ignoring her.

More maps, more pointing. Ceylon and Persia and Siam.

Maisie ripped a piece of notebook paper from her social studies notebook and rolled it into a tight ball.

She narrowed her eyes for better aim and lobbed the ball at the back of Hadley's head.

A direct hit!

Hadley's hand shot up and retrieved the paper from where it landed between her back and her chair. But she did not turn around.

Mrs. Witherspoon kept talking about overthrown monarchies and revolutions.

Maisie tore another sheet of paper from her notebook. This time she wrote a note on it: *A be sinny ya at lunch!*

A clever pun, Maisie decided. Taking the word



Abyssinia and making it sound like *I'll be seeing ya!* Surely Hadley would appreciate that.

Maisie folded the note into a little paper airplane and sent it flying so that it would land somewhere near Hadley's feet.

Bull's-eye!

Instead of picking it up, Hadley twisted her head around and glared at Maisie.

Maisie began reviewing the morning in the Fairy Room. What had she done to make Hadley angry with her? Hadley and Rayne had not taken her mother's invitation to stay for breakfast. Was that another clue? They'd given a good reason, telling everyone that their parents were waiting for them at the Kozy Kitchen for a family breakfast. Had that just been an excuse?

"Do tell us all where you are, Miss Robbins," Mrs. Witherspoon said, her voice interrupting Maisie's thoughts.

"Um," Maisie said, squinting at the map. What had she missed? What was Mrs. Witherspoon talking about now?

"Can someone tell Maisie what our reports are on?" Mrs. Witherspoon asked the class. "Hadley?"



Reluctantly, Hadley stood. Even though she turned toward Maisie, her eyes stayed on the scratched linoleum floor.

“A country that’s disappeared?” she said.

“And?” Mrs. Witherspoon prompted.

“And what it was like before and what happened and what country it is now,” Hadley finished and sat right back down.

“Did you get all that, Maisie?” Mrs. Witherspoon asked.

Maisie stared hard at Hadley’s back, at her tangle of dark hair.

“Maisie!” Mrs. Witherspoon said.

Maisie looked at Mrs. Witherspoon, and then at the map hanging in front of the blackboard.

“I already know what I’m doing my report on,” she said.

“Oh, do you?” Mrs. Witherspoon said, peering at Maisie over the top of her glasses.

“Imperial Russia,” Maisie said.

At that, Hadley *did* turn around.

Maisie grinned. “Imperial Russia was so enormous,” she said, “that when it was night in the west, it was dawn on the Pacific. And the land that



stretched between made up one-sixth of all the land in the world. And that land was ruled by one man. The Tsar.”

Mrs. Witherspoon looked impressed.

Hadley looked upset.

“Well,” Mrs. Witherspoon said, “I had no idea you were interested in Russian history.”

“Oh yes,” Maisie said. “I’d even like to go there sometime.”

Hadley turned back around and dropped her head.

What is wrong with Hadley? Maisie wondered.

“I look forward to your report,” Mrs. Witherspoon said.

But Maisie wasn’t listening anymore. Instead, she was plotting how to make sure Hadley didn’t get away when the lunch bell rang. Hadley wasn’t angry with her, Maisie realized; she was upset about The Treasure Chest.

The bell rang, and even though Maisie was waiting, ready to leap out of her seat and get to Hadley, she was stopped by Alex Andropov, arguably the smartest kid at Anne Hutchinson Elementary School.



“Maisie,” Alex said, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose. They slid right back down to the tip. “I had no idea.”

How could it be that some kids—like Felix—looked cool in glasses, Maisie wondered, and other kids—like Alex Andropov—looked nerdy? The fact that Alex cut his hair too short for his round face and often wore white shirts with puffy sleeves that he insisted were called poet’s shirts didn’t help. Plus, he was skinny and pale and often was absent for weeks at a time. Although to some kids this made him mysterious and provoked speculation that he was the son of a billionaire and traveled the world with his father, to Maisie his absences just made her forget him until he showed up in class again.

Maisie peered over his head and watched Hadley approach the exit door.

“No idea about what?” Maisie asked impatiently. She wanted to push past him, but he had positioned himself in such a way that he had her trapped.

“Your interest in the Russian Empire!” Alex said.

“Huh? Oh right. Imperial Russia.”

She craned her neck. Hadley was gone.

“I’m Russian,” Alex was saying proudly. “And I’m



a direct descendant of the Romanovs.”

Maisie frowned. “Who?”

She moved forward, even though it meant wedging herself between Alex and her desk.

Alex’s face fell with disappointment. “How can you be a student of Imperial Russia and not know the Romanovs?”

“I’m a new student,” Maisie said. “Alex, can we talk about this later? I have to go.”

With that his face brightened again.

“Today? After school?”

“Sure,” Maisie said, and worked her way free of Alex Andropov.

The classroom had emptied out. Even Mrs. Witherspoon was gone. Maisie picked up her pace and hurried down the corridor to the lunchroom.

As soon as Maisie walked in the noisy, crowded room, the smell of Taco Day hit her. It looked like the entire school was lined up at the taco bar, piling ground beef, bright orange shredded cheese, chopped tomatoes, and ribbons of tired lettuce into taco shells.

Everyone except Felix, Rayne, and Hadley.

They sat at a table, leaning in close to one another.



And Hadley and Rayne were both crying.

“What’s going on?” Maisie said after she pushed her way through the lines at the taco bar to get to them.

She didn’t wait for an answer.

“I’ve been trying to get your attention all morning,” she told Hadley.

“I know,” Hadley said, sniffing. “I couldn’t tell you in class.”

“Tell me what?” Maisie demanded, her frustration growing even more.

“We’re moving,” Rayne said, also sniffing. “To Buenos Aires.”

“But you can’t!” Maisie said. “You’re my best friend,” she said, again to Hadley. She could have added *my only friend* and it would have been true.

“You’re *my* best friend,” Hadley said.

“And now we won’t get to find out what happens in Russia,” Rayne said.

“Of course you can,” Felix jumped in. “We’ll go to The Treasure Chest right after school.”

Hadley and Rayne shook their heads.

“A car is picking us up at three o’clock and taking us directly to the airport,” Rayne said.



“That’s how it works when your father’s in the CIA,” Hadley added. “We never get a heads-up on where or *when* we’re going next.”

Maisie couldn’t do anything to stop it, she realized. She put her arm around Hadley’s shoulders and bent her tangled dirty-blond hair until it touched Hadley’s dark curly hair. They were opposites of each other physically. But inside . . . Inside they were like twins. Maisie got a whiff of her friend’s mint shampoo. Then she started to cry, too.

