WHERE THERE'S A WILL

 "Hey, bro...I just heard from Rog Willetts that Grandpa Winston has died...yeah, he made it to ninety-seven...he was quite a unique character, I recall, from the few times I saw him. Anyway, the funeral and the reading of his will are both scheduled for this weekend in Vancouver. Can you make it?"

 Corey Jefferies had phoned both of his older brothers, Oscar and Hyland, with the news as soon as he found out, via a text message from their family lawyer, Roger. Corey was a civil engineer working for the city of Toronto, where he was living for the past five years. He was single and twenty-eight years old. Oscar, age thirty-three, lived in Calgary with his wife and two daughters. Meanwhile, Hyland, age thirty-nine, was divorced, and living over in Edmonton.

 Their bush-pilot parents had died several years ago in a small airplane crash during a sudden storm over the wilds of Alaska. Bob and Charlene Jefferies had run a successful, remote hunting and fishing lodge during the annual tourist season, and had lived the rest of the year in Kamloops, British Columbia.

 Corey's memory of his paternal Grandfather was somewhat sketchy. He knew that Winston was extremely smart yet rather eccentric, an inventor and a credentialed scientist with a very high I.Q. He had lived in Japan for decades, and rarely visited the family back in Canada. When Corey was around ten years old, he remembered a special such visit building model rockets with his Grandpa, and talking -- while taking long walks out in the woods -- about space travel and the possibility of alien life somewhere out in the universe. Winston suggested some further books for Corey to read when he got older, wrote them down on a piece of notepaper, and gave it to the boy. Young Jefferies did indeed read them all later, and still had that original sheet of book suggestions somewhere in his files. Grandpa also liked the fact that Corey enjoyed doing challenging mathematical puzzles as much as he himself did. "You've got a good head on you, Corey. I trust that someday you'll make the best use of it," Winston remarked in his deep baritone, his blue-green eyes twinkling, sweeping his mane of thick white hair casually back with his hand. He playfully ruffled Corey's reddish-brown hair in conclusion to make his point.

 The funeral and burial took place on a stormy late November day in Vancouver. Afterwards, the three brothers accompanied Roger Willetts to his law office for the deposition of Winston's will.

 "Your Grandfather moved back from Japan to an assisted-living facility two years ago here in Vancouver when his health began failing. Your late father, Bob, was his only direct descendent. As a result, you three are each to share in Winston's remaining estate," the avuncular, grey-haired attorney explained, peering over his half-lens eyeglasses. "His will was dated five years ago, and remained unchanged, so he was of sound mind and body when it was legally drawn up while he was still overseas. It was subsequently sent to me, legally signed and already translated into English."

 Willetts then began reading aloud from the concise document. At the end, each brother was given a brown manila envelope with their name on it, written in Winston Jefferies' own hand. One by one, they were encouraged to open it.

 Oscar Jefferies found a cashier's check made out to him in the amount of $300,000 CAD. When Hyland opened his envelope, he found the same cash windfall. Each had unexpectedly been given a little over a quarter of a million dollars in USD! They both gasped, then burst out into gleeful grins. "Holy shit!" they said, in turn, under their breath. Each next kissed their check with a loud smack, then turned their eyes heavenward, and waved the promised money up, and said, "Wow! Thank you, Grandpa!"

 That left only Corey to open his bequest.

 With trembling hands, he tore open the edge of his brown envelope. Would he likewise be granted such a surprisingly generous legacy?

 But all that came out was a single brass key. No note of explanation. Nothing else. The key was about 1.5"x .75", with the numbers 675 stamped on it.

 Everyone else in the room was baffled. "Is that all?" Oscar asked. Hyland went to Corey's side and took the envelope and tore it completely open. "Looks like that's it, bro," he announced. "Gee, I'm really sorry..."

 Roger the lawyer interrupted, saying, "I had no idea about this, Corey, nor do I have any idea what you should do next. I'm sorry for you, too, unless this key leads to something else important. Maybe if you went to a local locksmith, he might know what kind of key this is and what it might open. That's all I can suggest, my friend. Let me know what you come up with. As for our deposition business here today, gentlemen, it is now concluded. I have another appointment coming in shortly, if you'll excuse me. Good luck and good day."

 The men shook hands and exited the office. Both Oscar and Hyland offered some of their cash windfall to their younger brother, if he ever had the need for any emergency funds in the future. Corey promised to keep in touch as he attempted solve the mystery of the strange key. Hyland then returned to Edmonton and Oscar went home to his family in Calgary.

 Once Corey flew home to the snowy and colder environs of Toronto, he went a well-respected master locksmith that his civil engineering coworkers recommended. Jeffries found the man's shop in the rougher blue collar outskirts of town. The burly and bearded locksmith's name was Henri DuChamps. He was wearing a worn red and black plaid flannel lumberjack shirt, and was busily wolfing down the remains of a warm bowl of poutine -- French fries with cheese curds, covered in brown gravy. Corey explained his situation and offered his find. The man wiped his hands from his meal and carefully examined the key.

 "Well, *mon ami,* your key is not for a padlock, or a desk drawer, or for any kind of luggage, or for a file cabinet. Nor is it a house, office, car, or truck key. My best guess is that it would fit some kind of bank safety deposit box."

 "Which bank?" Corey wanted to know. "Can you tell?"

 "Couldn't say, because the key is not marked, other than with the numbers 675," Henri replied. "Probably indicates the box number."

 Jefferies was stymied. His quest seemed to fizzle out before it even got started. He turned and started to leave.

 "But wait...I have a big locksmith Key Identification Catalogue that you can look through. It's over one-thousand pages, but it probably has a small picture of every known key type in the world. Hold on, let me grab it." DuChamps went and retrieved the massive volume from another room. "Here you go," he offered, a minute later.

 Corey spent about an hour pouring over the catalogue pictures of bank safety deposit keys while Henri attended to his other business tasks. Finally, he called the master locksmith over and asked his opinion. "Is this it?" he inquired. Jefferies thought he found a match.

 Henri carefully studied the key against the photo. "Yes, I believe you have found it, *mon ami.* But the bank that matches this key is very far away... *Sacre merde!* We're talking about the main ANZ Bank branch in Wellington, New Zealand."

 Why the hell would my Grandfather give me a key to a safety deposit box in a remote New Zealand bank? Jefferies wondered. He thanked DuChamps for his help, and offered him a modest cash tip for his trouble.

 *"Non, merci, mon ami...*I was happy to offer you my assistance. *Bon chance!* Maybe there is a pot of gold waiting for you there, eh? If so, you can buy me a case or two of Labatt's the next time we meet, O.K.? *Au Revoir."*

 Corey thought about his predicament over the next several days. He consulted with both his brothers as well. They urged him to ask for some time off of work so he could travel to New Zealand. Something important had to be waiting there, everyone seemed to agree. But what?

 Fortunately, Jefferies' City of Toronto work supervisor, Andrea Coburn, agreed to Corey's time off request, but he was informed that he would have to wait until the last two weeks in December -- a slow time for new construction projects, due both to the bitter winter weather and the Christmas holidays. Thus, the fortnight break was arranged.

 Although he had once traveled to Europe for six weeks after graduating from college, Corey had never traveled across the Pacific before, so he read up on New Zealand, hoping to get in some worthwhile sightseeing along with his bank visit. Soon, the time for him to leave arrived. At least he would be basking in sunny summer temperatures once he flew and landed south of the Equator! He happily packed some lightweight clothes to offset his hooded, goose-down winter parka outfit. His Air Canada flight took him from Toronto to Los Angeles, then he changed planes and continued on to Auckland -- New Zealand's largest city -- and finally, caught a connection to Wellington, the nation's capitol. The ordeal proved to be more than twenty-four hours stuck on various airplanes!

 Once in Wellington, on the southern tip of the North Island, Jefferies was struck with how windy it was there -- the attractive city being right off the narrow Cook Strait, which separated the North and South Islands of New Zealand. Thankfully, though, it was much warmer here (17 degrees C., or 63 F.) than at home, plus the local 'Kiwis' were friendly and helpful. After checking into his hotel, he found that he needed to rest for a full day to help combat his ruinous jet-lag.

 The following morning, he took a taxi to the large ANZ Bank in the heart of downtown Wellington. Jefferies had wisely brought along a notarized copy of his Grandfather's will, an officially certified copy of Winston Jefferies' death certificate, and, of course, the special brass key. Hopefully, these proofs would allow him access to his goal of seeing what exactly was inside safety deposit box #675.

 Corey explained his need once inside the stately ANZ building, and was politely directed to the private office of bank manager Celine Grant.

 "Well, Mr. Jefferies, your request is not unusual, although we haven't dealt with one like yours from overseas in quite awhile," she explained, after offering Corey some coffee. "Of course, I'll need to see the copies of your Grandfather's will and his death certificate. Next, we'll have to match the signatures on the will with the one on his safety deposit box application, back when he first applied for it. Then we'll need to fingerprint you, take your photograph, make a copy of your Canadian passport, and then have you return, at your convenience, tomorrow morning. We need to run the standard police background check, to see if you're some kind of criminal fugitive -- or worse. I'm sure you'll check out fine, Mr. Jefferies. It's just a legal formality. I'm sure you understand."

 Corey came back the next day, found out that he was all checked out and approved, and was thus ushered into a vault containing rows of steel safety deposit boxes. His 675 key was matched with the bank's dual key, the proper box was unlocked, and he was then escorted to a private room with the 18"x 6"x 4"metal box and left alone. "Ring the buzzer by the desk when you are finished, and I'll return," Ms. Grant politely smiled."Take all the time you need."

 Corey sat down, the suspense naturally ramping up his pulse. When he opened the box's lid, however, he was surprised -- and somewhat disappointed -- to simply see yet another brown envelope with his name on it, just like the one he was given at the will deposition in Vancouver a month earlier. Beneath his name, however, were added these cryptic words: *"Now that you have solved the first riddle, open this envelope, and take the new key to the main Commonwealth Bank of Australia in downtown Sydney."* He recognized his Grandfather Winston's handwriting. Mystified, Corey nevertheless followed the prompt, and opened the brown envelope. Inside was a dull silver key, inscribed with the numbers 668.

 Two days later, having no real alternative, Jefferies was in the lobby of the CBA in downtown Sydney. He had found a modest, boutique hotel not too far from Sydney's iconic Opera House and Harbour Bridge, under sunny -- and continued pleasant -- summer weather. He went through the same explanation and bank procedures as he did in New Zealand. There, however, he met the same surprise when opening box #668 as he did before. The brown envelope with his name on it this time said: *"So far, so good, Corey. I knew you wouldn't give up. You are closer now to the puzzle's solution, so trust me. Take the next key to the Development Bank of Singapore in downtown Singapore."* Inside, the young Canadian found a grey metal key marked 721.

 Jefferies sighed, but dutifully followed the latest mysterious instructions of his eccentric late Grandfather. When would this end, and how much more was all of this travel and hotels and meals going to cost him? he worried, visualizing a growing stack of credit card bills. And would he ever achieve something tangible from this quest before his fortnight vacation timed out?

 In bustling and ultra-modern Singapore thirty-six hours later, with its very warm and humid tropical weather, Jefferies was at the impressive DBS building. After opening box #721, Corey was no longer surprised to find yet another key. This one was dull gold in color, and numbered 417. On the key's envelope were the next hand-written instructions: *"Perseverance furthers, as the ancient I-Ching 'Book of Changes' predicts. You have proven your true worth, my honored grandson! All will finally be revealed to you at your final stop -- the Mitsubishi UFG Bank in Sapporo, Japan."*

 Corey felt sorry that he could spend no extra time in Singapore for any sightseeing, just as he had to forgo any tourist pleasures in either Wellington or Sydney. Not for the first time did he wish he had simply gotten a hefty cashier's check from his Grandfather, as had Oscar and Hyland, instead of racing around the globe. But "in for a penny, in for a pound," as the old saying went...so he simply headed back to Changi Airport.

 Jefferies took a ten-hour, non-stop JAL flight from Sydney to Tokyo's Narita Airport, then caught a two-hour connecting flight to Sapporo. Summery shorts and sandals would have to be replaced with his arctic parka, warm mittens, and trusty wool toque again!

 In freezing and snowy, Toronto-like winter weather, on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido, Corey found a budget hotel and went directly the next day to the MUFG, and underwent the same procedures to access the necessary safety deposit box. This time, however, inside Box 417 were two numbered brown manila envelopes, instead of just one. Corey Jefferies opened the large, thick one marked #1 first. Thankfully, no more keys! he was relieved to find. But instead, he saw a smart stack of illustrated, detailed, and apparently new invention patents, along with a typed explanation. This is what it said:

 *"Thank you, first of all, for your time and trouble these past several days, Corey. I had to make absolutely sure that you had the proper attitude and determination to follow my puzzle clues to their natural conclusion -- the mystery of which I will now reveal.*

 *With some secret help from the Japanese Government and, lately, with covert funding from the enlightened billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, whom I met with at length several years ago at a scientific conference in Mumbia, I constructed an underground scientific facility on a small, remote, uninhabited island off the northern coast of Hokkaido, the nearest town on the mainland being Wakkanai. There, over the past twenty years, I ceaselessly experimented, and eventually made two incredible discoveries.*

 *The first is an environmentally-safe and sustainable method of cleanly producing unlimited amounts of fresh water through the ionized fusion of hydrogen and oxygen atoms. You probably know that hydrogen is the most abundant element in the universe (ranking third on Earth, after oxygen and silicon), and I have discovered that oxygen can actually be extracted from the excess CO2 greenhouse gases currently contributing to our global climate crisis. Using large, sophisticated drones powered by solar energy, my process can create the natural formation of rain clouds anywhere in the world -- particularly to serve areas of drought and desert. Food crops can hence be soon grown using my devices in places currently deemed unsuitable for farming. This will potentially help end world hunger as we now know it. Enough CO2 will remain for plants to synthesize into the continued crucial oxygen production for our planet, as photosynthesis has done since life first appeared. Nor will the global water cycle be wrongly disturbed. Although controlling other aspects of the world's weather is beyond human capability at this time, I hope that someday, we can help mitigate yearly monsoon cycles and prevent their related catastrophic annual floods.*

 *My second amazing discovery is a potential cure for all forms of cancer -- the dream of medical science for centuries. I have discovered a new light ray band existing in the invisible spectrum, just below the harmful gamma rays band. This perfectly pure and safe invisible light, when replicated and infused -- at five times the normal oxygen level -- inside a hyperbaric oxygen chamber (like those used by scuba divers to assist in nitrogen decompression of the blood) has been proven without a doubt to alter the stem cells in the human body, and later eradicate all known cancer cells.* *My exhaustive and methodical experiments have worked perfectly on many human volunteers over the years, and I even tried the process on myself. It stopped my own prostate cancer completely and even reversed the damage!*

 *Now, Corey, your extremely important task is to take these enclosed formal invention patents, and register them at the International Patent Office in Geneva, Switzerland. Both the Japanese Government, Elon Musk, and myself want absolutely no monetary rewards or flashy publicity for this work. Rather, it is our combined wish to offer these exciting, new scientific advancements immediately to every nation for free as our selfless gift to humanity. The secret underground island laboratory where I diligently worked these past twenty years will be donated to the Japanese Government upon my death. There, new medical and scientific research projects will continue with the next generation of our world's brightest minds.*

 *Lastly, Corey, I trust that you will live your life in the same spirit as I have tried to live mine. God bless you, my grandson! I wish we could have spent more time together when you were growing up, but now you know why I couldn't. You may now open the second envelope I have left you. I hope it will ease your mind and help smooth your path forward...Farewell, and good luck!"*

 *(signed, Winston R. Jeffries)*

 Corey took a deep breath after reading this stunning missive twice, then he carefully opened the second envelope. The shock to the young man almost triggered a faint.

 Inside was a crisp cashier's check made out to him in the amount of $1,000,000 CAD...

 THE END

 by Jack Karolewski

 December 20, 2022