Rossmoor's Gold

By Diane Rush

Clank!

"What was *that*?"

"A ring bolt! There's a door here." Connor tugged at the bolt as his classmate used a nearby branch as a crowbar. The heavy hatch groaned as it surrendered its hold. The checkerplate steel door fell to the ground with a thud.

Connor and Mason stood in mute amazement that this often traversed path behind the Rossmoor wall promised such a discovery.

"Uh oh, this grating is dead-bolted."

Mason sighed.

Examining the old lever lock, the fourth grader made a determination, "I've got an idea; my uncle gave me a ring of his old skeleton keys. This keyhole looks like a fit for some of them."

Stars of twilight were coming out one by one, as the boys sat on the low cinderblock wall between neighboring driveways. Silence prevailed as barbeque smoke mingled with the scent of star jasmine on a Rossmoor evening in late spring. "Look, the *belt of Orion*," Connor pointed to the constellation.

"Doesn't look like a belt to me. See that triangle? It's a martini glass; there's the base, those three stars are the toothpick…and *there's* the olive."

They laughed.

"We need to have a name for our urbex[1] mission, how about *The Urb Expedition*?"

"Works for me. We better keep this quiet; no Twitter or YouTube media…*yet*."

"Right! Can you have your stuff together tomorrow after practice? I'll bring extra batteries and miner's lamps. Do you still have glow sticks?"

"Yep."

The following afternoon, Mason jumped the Rossmoor wall in time to see an elated Connor levering up the grating.

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[1] **Urbex** combines the words *urban* and *exploration*, a trend among young adventurers.

“Are you kidding? *Dude!*”

“My uncle was a locksmith and made these to open old vaults and safes. If the bit is filed down enough in the right places, it will spring most levers.”

“Awesome! Let’s see what’s down there.”

Crude-hewn wooden steps led to Stygian darkness. Flashlights illuminated a long tunnel leading to a paneled chamber with wood beam ceiling. One of the timbers was embellished with scrollwork, a surname and family crest.

“What does that say?” Connor inspected the letters carved into the wood, “C-o-r-t-e-s. No way, it says *CORTÉS*! What are the odds of that?” He marveled.

“Cortés never got north of Baja, dude,” Mason interjected.

“Listen, he’s not going to leave a record where he hid his gold,” Connor reasoned. “Here’s the Coat of Arms,” the beam of light fell upon a heraldic image of a lion rampant.

“Cool!”

That night, in the nerve-center of a remodeled Plymouth, the phone rang, “Hello,” Connor’s dad answered, “LA Seismic? Yes, I remember your *vibrating convoy* — there’s *what* on my property; an anomaly? Where did you —? *Under my house?!* What kind of anomaly, like, like *sinkhole* anomaly?

Connor stood in the hall listening to his dad’s agitated voice. On one hand it was funny but clearly the jig was up. LA Seismic was on to Cortés’ treasure.

“You’re saying there’s a man-made structure under my house? Yeah, yeah you can send the video. Okay, I’ll take a look at it and call you Monday.”

Connor waited to be called to the computer.

“Little dude, I need your help a minute.” Mr. Marr logged on to his account and found the LA Seismic message with the video link. “Check this out — what the heck could it be?”

Connor looked so reluctant his dad sensed he knew something about it.

“There’s something we need to discuss, dad.”

“Oh, Jeeze! Tell me you and Mason didn’t dig a tunnel…”

“No, we *found* it. You know the Cortés report I’m working on? I’m pretty sure it’s going to be epic, we found his hide-out.”

“You’re telling me you found the hide-out of *Hernando Cortés*, the Spanish explorer?”

“I can prove it if you have time to watch the video.”

Connor's dad gave him a smirk, looking over the top of his reading glasses, a sign he was up for adventure.

Daybreak found the father-son team approaching the tunnel. "I'm not sure just what you found but it's significant. This is the entrance? It looks like a power vault."

Descending into the depths, the older Marr looked around for clues of its former use.

"There's the Cortés carving, dad."

"Let me have a look." He touched the coat-of-arms panel next to the name and it shifted to reveal another 'e'. "I think the mystery is solved. The name here is *Cortese*, the guy who built Rossmoor, *Ross Cortese*."

Connor looked utterly deflated.

"Not to worry, this is an extraordinary find!" Jerry Marr was ferreting around like a teenager. "Look at this desk, there're even drawers on the sides."

"I *thought* it was from a galleon."

"This desk is more *Googie* than *Gothic*; I'd say early '60s." He slid out the center drawer and turned it over.

"What are you looking for, dad?"

"You can tell a lot about a person from looking under a desk drawer. Sometimes they tape letters, money or…what is this? GE1-3281 Gertrude, GE1-4465 Donnie Ann; yep, that's Ross!"

"What are those funny numbers next to street names?"

"Phone numbers in this area used to start with the call letters for "GEneva" followed by the numeral one and four other digits. Some of the street names were inspired by Cortese's girlfriends. You might say this is his private phonebook."

"No chance of finding gold now."

"I don't know, what about this 1957 vintage *Chianti*?"

Connor frowned, "we still have to decide something."

"What's that?"

"What are we going to tell LA Seismic?"