

## *Ken finds Mrs. Benson and gets the History of the Area*

Ken knocked at the entrance, and the door was almost immediately opened. A tall, gracious lady met his eyes and gestured him in. Her silver hair, twinkling and blue eyes echoed a benign, grandmotherly expression on her face. He carefully entered the house, somewhat in awe of his surroundings.

“Hello, I’m Mrs. Benson. You must be Ken. Can I get you some coffee or tea?”

“Coffee would be fine.”

She turned to someone Ken could not see.

“George, bring us two coffees in the library.”

She turned back to Ken. Suddenly she seemed somewhat startled by something on Ken’s hand. She recovered quickly, turned to a corridor to the right of the entrance way. Ken followed her down the corridor, turning left, into what appeared to be a huge library. The back and right walls were completely covered by books—thousands of them. The left wall contained video equipment and several built-in cabinets for video storage. A huge antique desk was at the left rear of the room. A couch ran lengthwise to the right wall, but not against it. Ken followed Mrs. Benson and sat on the couch with her.

“And how can I help you? You said you were doing some research? What would be the purpose of your research?”

“Yes, I am doing some research on the history of Anatole for a project. I don’t mean to worry you, but I don’t believe Frank’s death was an accident, and am trying to get information on what really happened.”

Ken paused, looking Mrs. Benson directly in the eyes to discern any reaction to discussion of her husband’s death. Was she open to this? Ken continued.

“I also want more personal insights from you about the beginning of Frank’s vision. Can you remember much of that?”

“Like it was yesterday.” A twinkle appeared in her eyes. “Do you have some specific questions?”

A shuffle in the hall and a tuxedoed gentleman appeared who must have been George. He carried a silver tray with two coffees and the augments for coffee. Ken added a little cream to his. Mrs. Benson took her coffee black, watching Ken intently as he carefully began drinking his. Again, she looked at his hand. George left.

Ken studied the room as the conversation paused. In the right rear there was a television set, probably for the video library. There were no paintings, objects of art, or even a window in the room— just books, books, books and video equipment.

“This is still pretty much as Frank left it. I use the desk occasionally for correspondence. His books are still on the shelf. My son is studying architecture and plans to use the books when he finishes architecture school. He already has some of them; but most of Frank’s are still on the shelf. My son likes to use the room for studying when he’s here.”

Ken sipped his coffee and mentally tried to organize his questions. He opened his laptop and booted it up to take notes.

“Frank’s vision for the city—when did Frank start the planning?”

“Ken, let’s back up a bit. Are you familiar with the larger story of this area? Do you know the spiritual history of what has happened here? Do you know how it relates to the history of America and where we are today? Ken, start by reading Deuteronomy 11. This is one of the few sermons we have from Moses today. Pastors can get an awesome sermon here. Moses starts by describing, in detail, the history of the Israelites showing how God has acted in their history. Read what God, through Moses, tells them about their responsibility. He describes the present situation, how God is honoring them now. Moses describes the future if they honor the commandments God has given them and what will happen if they don’t. Moses draws a picture of the past, present, and future as seen through the eyes of God. We’re at the identical dichotomy today in America and have failed God as a nation. What does that tell you?”

“Ken, this area was once the center of the Cherokee Indian people group in America. Two centuries ago in 1838 legislation was signed that forced all the Cherokee Indians to move west of the Mississippi River into reservations. This was under Andrew Jackson’s Presidency, and some 15,000 Cherokees were forced to leave their home. About 4,000 Cherokees died on the march that eventually came to be known as the Trail of Tears.”

“What is sad is that the Cherokees and other Native Americans do not see property as a thing to be bought or sold. Land to them is sacred, given by God and we are held accountable for the stewardship of the land. Our Capitalistic American worldview is that land is a ‘thing’ to be bought or sold. What happened here next and the resulting copper mining that destroyed the land was a sacred affront to the Cherokees.”

Ken noticed that as she shared, it was as if a great pain and burden fell over her. The brilliant, twinkling eyes began to tear up. Then she quickly pulled herself together. For a brief moment Ken heard another voice. Beautiful. Then that voice was gone.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

“Mrs. Benson, did all the Cherokees move?”

“No, some stayed behind and worked in the mines and building roads after copper ore was discovered in the area in 1843 and it became called the Ducktown Basin. The first copper mine opened in 1850. Transportation was a problem for many years, and the smelting was done right here in the basin.”

Ken entered notes on his laptop as Mrs. Benson continued with the history.

“The copper ore found here was loaded with sulfur. They chopped down trees to get firewood for smelting the ore. They got the copper by smelting the ore here; but the sulfur from the ore drifted up into the atmosphere. There it combined with the moisture to create sulfur dioxide, or sulfuric acid. The acid fell on the ground killing all plant and animal life for a total of 50 square miles. Copper Basin, where Anatole is built now, eventually was so devastated that it was considered the largest man-made biological desert in America. In addition, the area smelled like rotten eggs.”

“Work began in the 1930’s to revegetate the area and the mines closed in 1959 after more than 50 years of operation. In 1995 people realized the extent of the problems caused by the mining and smelting operations. The acid production ended in 2000, but now the land was saturated with the sulfuric acid. You couldn’t grow anything. People will tell you the land was coming back after the recovery work, but it was still a mess here. The area where one of the mines was located collapsed, making a big, big hole. Locals were angry at the capitalists coming in, buying up the land, and making millions of dollars by destroying the land to get the copper.”

“Frank’s friend, Richard Foster, could use his Reclaimer process to get the land clean. They could buy the land inexpensively and start the recovery. The actual construction started in the 2020’s. There were several investors willing to work with Frank and build the city.”

Mrs. Benson paused, put down her coffee cup, and spoke again, “Let’s go to the garden.”

Ken hadn’t finished his coffee, but followed her lead, turning his laptop off and closing it.

Mrs. Benson stood up and quickly led him down the corridor to a side exit unseen before. Outside again the flowers, warm sun, and even the birds singing made the fall day seem like summer. Mrs. Benson led him to a small protected area in the garden, and paused. She moved a few chairs into place and gestured. Ken followed her lead and sat. The stream gurgled nearby.

“There’s a reason I changed to the garden,” she said. “I trust no one. The ring you have. Where did you get it?”

“An elderly gentleman who called himself Gandalf. I know little about it or the person who gave it to me. Why?”

“Frank’s death in 2025 was no accident. He died when his private jet disappeared over the Pacific Ocean on a trip to Japan. Someone was trying to take over the company. I believe it was an international consortium, but have no names. Frank would not sell. After Frank’s accident, my son flew out with the investigators. They found part of the wreckage and evidence of an explosion. After Frank’s death the rest of the investors quickly sold out to the international consortium. They really didn’t have much choice, as they were afraid for the financial viability of the corporation after Frank’s death. Paul Russo, the main architect that worked with Frank on the design of the city, disappeared about that time in fear of his life because of what he knew of the illegal inside manipulations by some of the consortium members. Paul apparently fled to Canada, but his address is unknown. No one has been able to locate him.”

“Before his death, Frank put certain papers about the international consortium in a box that was only to be opened on his death. At one time he showed me the box. There were some symbols on it that are on your ring. The box disappeared after his death, and no one has been able to locate it. Do you know anything about that box?”

“No—afraid not. What happened to the other investors?”

“They eventually left the corporation. Didn’t like the way it was operated. There were many financial irregularities. We all felt we escaped sure ruin when they bought us out. Both my son and I owned shares in the corporation; but the financial difficulties that followed Frank’s death made it impossible for us to hold a controlling interest anymore. The consortium eventually built the city. I’m not sure how they got their money.”

“Ken,” Mrs. Benson continued, “What was done here with the Native Americans, has left a brokenness on the area. A spiritual binding. To restore that and relationships would take a major work of reconciliation. Frank’s plan was to build a major reconciliation center in the area and for both the Native Americans and the others to begin working together to build a spiritual restoration. That hasn’t even begun to happen yet.”

As the evening progressed, the weather became cooler and the setting sun flickered through the trees in the garden. Ken gave Mrs. Benson a note with his hotel address and phone number, stood to leave.

“Thank you so much for your help. I’ll let you know if I have more questions.”

“You’re welcome. Let me know if I can help more. Take care of that ring.”

“I will. Do you know more about it?” Ken asked as he played with the ring on his finger.

“Not that I can share, Ken. But you will probably find out more soon. Study it.”