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Opening extract from

Doctor Proctor's Fart Powder: The Great Gold Robbery

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The Not-Quite-So-Great Gold Robbery

IT IS NIGHTTIME in Oslo, and it's raining on the quiet, sleeping city. Or *is* it sleeping? One of the raindrops hits the enormous clock on the side of the Oslo City Hall tower and clings to the tip of the minute hand before letting go and falling twenty stories, striking the asphalt with a soft splat, and starting to

join the other raindrops running down the streetcar tracks. Now, if we were to follow this raindrop as it made its way to a manhole cover during this Oslo night, we would hear a faint sound through the silence. The faint sound would get a little louder when the drop of water fell through the hole in the manhole cover, plunging down into the Oslo sewer system, where the darkness is even thicker. And along with the raindrop we would start sailing in the filthy, reeking sewage water, through the pipes—some small and narrow, some so big you can stand up—that run this way and that, way below ground level in this rather insignificant, big, little city, which is the capital of Norway. And as this intestinal system of pipes carries us deeper into Oslo's innards, the sound gets louder.

It is not a pleasant sound. Actually, it sounds like a dentist's office.

Like the sound of a drill crushing its way through

tooth enamel, gums, and sensitive nerve endings. Sometimes the rumbling is low and sometimes screeching high, depending on what the drill's diamond-hard, whirling bit is digging into.

But, whatever! At least it's not the sound of an anaconda's hissing, yard-long tongue, the creaking of half a ton of constrictor muscles tightening, or the deafening bang of jaws—the size of an inflatable swimming ring—slamming shut on their victim. I only mention that because of the rumor that a snake like that lives down here. And because a pair of yellow, glowing reptilian eyes are just visible in the sewer there in the darkness to the left. So if you are regretting having come already, now's your chance to vamoose. Just quietly close the book and tiptoe out of the room or crawl under the covers. Forget that you ever heard of the Oslo sewer system, that dentist's drill sound, or snakes that eat enormous water voles, average-sized kids, and occasionally

small adult humans—if they're not too hairy and don't have beards.

SO, GOOD-BYE AND have a good life. And close the door behind you.

THERE. NOW IT'S just us.

WE WILL CONTINUE down this filthy river toward the dark heart of the city. By now the noise has grown to a roar and we see a light, but we realize that this is neither paradise nor the dentist from hell, but something totally different.

There is a loud machine in front of us with a wheel on it. A steel arm juts up from the machine and disappears into a large hole that has been drilled in the top of the sewer pipe.

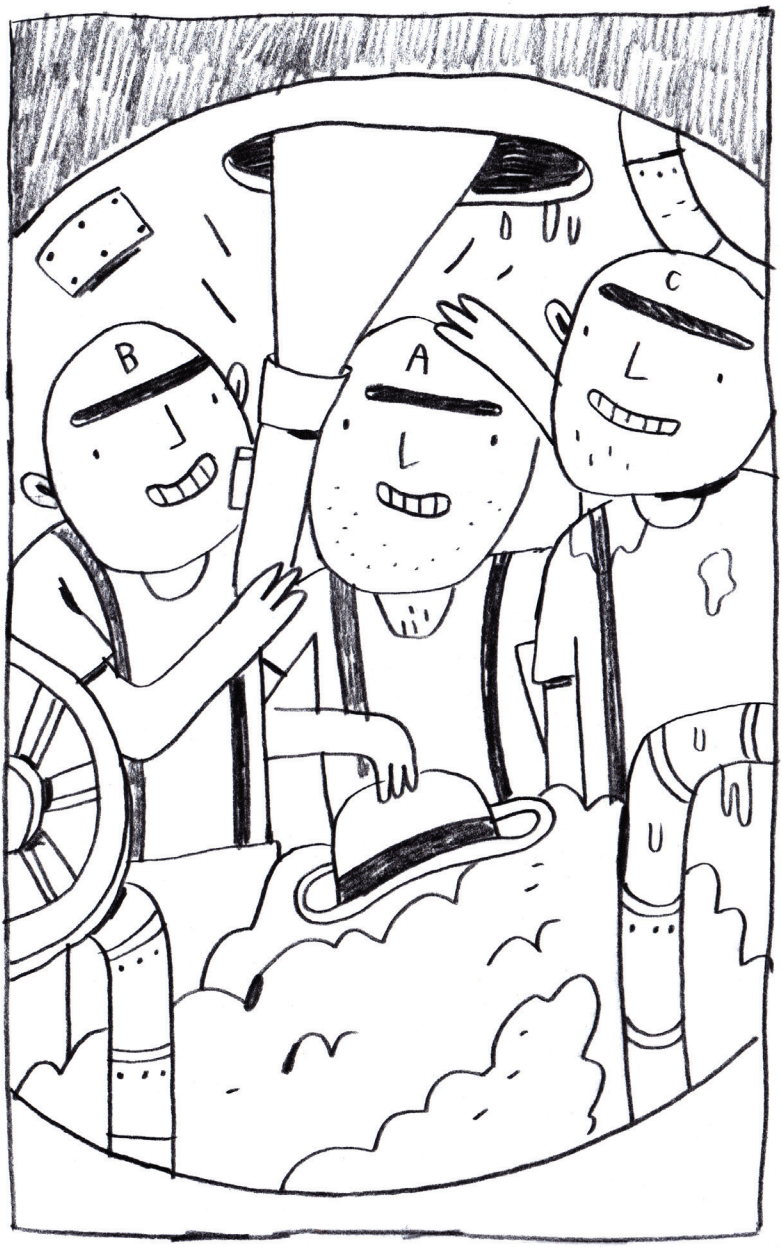
"We're almost there, boys!" says the biggest of the three men standing around the machine, shining

flashlights up into the hole. They're all dressed the same in black leather boots, rolled-up jeans with suspenders, and white T-shirts. The biggest one also had a bowler hat on his head. But he's taken it off right now to wipe the sweat away, allowing us to see that all three of their heads are shaved, and each one has a letter tattooed on his forehead, above his thick unibrow.

A small cracking sound is heard, and suddenly the drill starts squealing like a spoiled brat.

"We're in," the man with a *B* tattooed on his forehead snarls, flipping a switch. The drilling noise slowly fades away. The drill bit comes into view, and it's quite a sight: It glitters in the light from the flashlights like the biggest diamond in the world. And, well, that's probably because it *is* the biggest diamond in the world, newly stolen from a diamond mine in South Africa.

The guy with a *C* tattooed on his forehead angles a ladder up into the hole above them and scampers up its rungs.


B
A
C

The other two guys watch him anxiously.

For five seconds absolutely nothing happens.

"Charlie?" the guy with the bowler hat calls.

Nothing happens for three more seconds.

Then Charlie comes back into view. He is struggling to carry something that looks like a brick, except that it's golden and obviously much heavier. The side is engraved with some words: BANK OF NORWAY.

And below that, in slightly smaller letters: GOLD BAR NUMBER 101.

"Help me, Betty," Charlie says, and the man with the *B* tattoo hurries over and takes the gold bar.

"What about the rest of them?" the guy with the bowler hat asks, blowing dust off it. He has an *A* tattooed on his forehead, but it's a little hard to read right now since a massive wrinkle is curling the whole letter.

"This is all there is, Alfie."

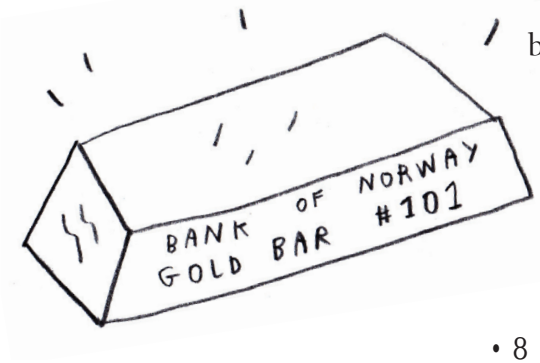
"What?"

Now, I'm sure at this point the most geographically

astute of you are wondering why these three are speaking English. After all, we are in the sewers beneath Oslo, which is the capital of Norway, and don't people speak Norwegian there? Sadly for those of us who don't understand Norwegian, most of the characters in this book will actually be speaking Norwegian. Happily, we will simply pretend we took one of Doctor Proctor's multilingual pills. But in this specific case that wasn't even necessary. For some reason these three are already speaking English.

"This was the only bar in there, Alfie. The rest of the bank vault is completely empty," Charlie says.

"You mean this is it? The entire gold reserve of the whole darned central bank of Norway?" sputters Betty, the medium-sized one, and then drops the gold bar with a thump into the machine's baggage compartment.



"Calm down, Betty," Alfie says. "It looks good, this one. Pure, solid gold all the way through. We'd better be getting home, boys."

"Shh!" Charlie exclaims. "Did you guys hear that sound?"

"What sound?"

"That hissing sound," Charlie says.

"There's no hissing in the sewers, Charlie," Alfie groans. "Rats squeaking and frogs croaking, maybe, but you've got to head farther into the jungle to hear hissing."

"Look!" Charlie says urgently.

"Look at what?" Alfie says.

"Didn't you guys see that? Yellow eyes! They blinked and disappeared," Charlie says.

"Red rat tails and green frog thighs, maybe," says Alfie. "But yellow eyes, you've got to head farther into the jung—"

He is interrupted by a deafening bang.

"Hmm," says Alfie, rubbing his chin. "Maybe we are in the jungle, boys, because that sounded undeniably like snake jaws slamming shut, if you ask me. And I think you'd better ask me. Now!"

"All right, Alfie," Charlie says with a sigh. "Were those snake jaws?"

"Yup. And Mom said she wanted us to bring her something nice from Oslo. How about a boa constrictor?"

"Yippee!" squeals Betty, pulling a heavy, metal F16 out of the baggage compartment. All right, fine. It turns out it isn't an F16 at all. It's an M16. He loads it and starts firing away. The muzzle flash from the machine gun lights up the sewer as the bullets whistle and pop in the sewer pipe.

The other two point their flashlights toward where Charlie saw the yellow eyes. But there's nothing to see, just a trembling rat standing on its hind legs, pressing its back against the wall.

"Rats!" whispers Betty.

"We got what we came for," says Alfie, putting on his bowler hat. "Pack it in. Let's go."

And as we follow the drop of water farther down the sewer pipe toward the treatment plant and the Oslo Fjord, we hear Alfie, Betty, and Charlie packing their equipment back into the machine and starting it up.

But the last thing we hear is . . . ?

You guessed it.

Sssnake hisssssing.