
The Boy and the Big Fat Kettles
American Nuclear Age
OLD LETTER & CURIO
quark

The Boy and the

Big Fat Kettles

American Nuclear Age

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Illustrated Edition

For every kid
who asks how things work.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Book in the Attic



You've always been the kind of kid who wants to know how things work. Engines, bridges, pulleys, gears — the grand machinery of human thought. You already understand the basics of an internal combustion engine: fire becomes heat, heat becomes motion, motion becomes a car rolling down the street.

You're beginning to grasp how a suspension bridge holds itself up — how all that weight somehow flows into cables stretched tight as violin strings. But those things, impressive as they are, feel… understandable. Human-sized.

What you don't understand are the giant concrete kettles on the horizon. They sit there like enormous gray teapots, too big for any kitchen, too calm for anything dangerous. Imposing, but harmless. Peaceful, and silent, too.

And yet — somehow — they make the electricity that lets you watch the next installment of Zootopia.

How?

What could possibly be happening inside something that looks like a fat, sleepy kettle?

You ask grown-ups, but they just say, "That's the power plant." …as if that explains anything!

So the question stays with you. It hums in the back of your mind like a quiet engine.

Then one day, everything changes.

You're playing in Nana's attic — the place where old things go to

nap. Dusty trunks. Forgotten toys. Stacks of books that smell like time itself. Your cat, Nukie, pads along beside you, black as a shadow with a mind of its own, tail swishing at every new smell.
You're rummaging through a wooden chest when your hand brushes something rough and weathered.
A book.
Its cover is faded, its corners soft, its spine cracked from years of being opened by hands long gone.
You love books. You and Mamo read every night, slipping into imaginary worlds like they're secret doorways.
So you set your other toys aside and take a good look at this one.
Nukie hops onto the chest and settles on his haunches, supervising.
The title, stamped in worn gold letters, reads: American Nuclear Age.
You blink. Nuclear Age? Like the Stone Age? The Iron Age? Was there really a whole age of… nuclear?
Judging by how old the book looks, this must have been a long time ago. Long before you were born. Long before your parents were born. Maybe even before Nana was born.
Your heart thumps. You flip the first page.
And in that moment — before you've even read a single sentence — you feel it. A doorway opening. A mystery unfolding. A sense that whatever is inside this book will finally explain the silent kettles on the horizon… and maybe something even bigger.

Nukie leans against your elbow, as if to say: read it aloud.
You lean closer. You turn the page. And the story of the Nuclear Age begins…

CHAPTER TWO

The Origins



The pages of the old book flutter again — fwip-fwip-fwip — as if a tiny breeze lives inside them. They stop on a chapter called “The Origins.”

You lean closer. Nukie hops up, tail swishing with curiosity.

“The kettles got our attention,” you whisper, thinking of the giant round buildings near the river — quiet, peaceful, and full of mystery.

“But what’s actually happening inside them?”

Nukie gives a soft mrrrp, which you interpret as: Let’s find out.

A World Growing Brighter

The chapter begins with a picture of Earth glowing at night — cities sparkling like constellations.

The words explain that as people built bigger towns, taller buildings, and farms that could feed millions, they needed more and more electricity. Lights, trains, hospitals, computers, clean water — everything needed power.

But the old ways of making electricity — burning wood or coal — were smoky, slow, and couldn’t keep up forever.

Humanity needed something cleaner, stronger, and almost unbelievably powerful.

Something hidden inside the tiniest pieces of matter.

Something… nuclear.

Your eyes widen. Nukie’s whiskers twitch.

Energy in the Smallest Places

“Inside every atom is more energy than a whole mountain of coal.”

Nukie’s tail shoots straight up.

If you could unlock the energy inside just a handful of atoms, you could power a whole neighborhood. If you unlocked the energy inside a cupful, you could power a city.

No smoke. No soot. Just clean, steady power.

The Man in the White Lab Coat

This is Professor Enrico Fermi.

You read aloud: “He wanted to understand how to use the power inside atoms to help the world.”

But there was a problem.

Inside natural uranium, there are about 140 atoms of U-238 for every one atom of U-235 — the special kind that could start a powerful reaction.

And no chemical trick — no boiling, no mixing, no dissolving — could separate them.

Professor Fermi needed a different idea.

The Puzzle of the Neutrons

He discovered that neutrons move in chaos, zooming around like bumper cars.

When they move too fast, they zip right past the U-235 atoms.

But when they slow down…

They become sticky. They are far more likely to bump into U-235 and start something amazing.

Professor Fermi discovered that when neutrons travel through

materials full of hydrogen — like water — they slow down.
He called this neutron moderation.
You imagine the neutrons like your friends running too fast in a hallway — until they hit a soft rug and slow to a careful walk.
Now they could actually connect with the atoms that mattered.

The First Chain Reaction

When one neutron hits a U-235 atom, it splits and releases more neutrons, which split more atoms, which release even more neutrons…
A growing chain of tiny events, each one releasing a burst of energy.
This was the secret inside the kettles.
This was the beginning of nuclear power.
You feel a warm excitement in your chest. Nukie purrs like a tiny reactor starting up.
You read: “With this discovery, humanity found a way to power growing cities, farms, and industries with a source as small as an atom and as mighty as a star.”
The adventure has only begun…

You turn the page…

CHAPTER THREE

The Treasure Under Our Feet



Join Nukie the cat as you discover uranium — the shy superhero rock hiding deep underground — and how it’s dug up, crushed into yellowcake powder, and turned into powerful fuel for the Big Fat Kettles!

Your fingers turn the page — and Nukie’s tail puffs up like a tiny feather duster. This is the chapter you both have been waiting for. Uranium! The magical mineral that makes the Big Fat Kettles hum with power.

“It’s a rock?” you whisper, surprised.

The book shows a picture of a shiny, dark stone. “Just a rock,” Nukie meows, “but with more energy inside than a whole mountain of coal doing jumping jacks.”

Uranium doesn’t start out looking magical at all — it begins as ordinary-looking rock hiding deep underground, like a shy superhero wearing a very boring disguise. To get it out, people use two main methods.

Giant Machines and Giant Staircases

The first is open-pit mining, where giant digging machines — so huge they look like metal dinosaurs with bucket teeth — scoop away layers of earth to reach the uranium-rich rock. These machines rumble and roar as they work, carving out big steps in the ground that look like a giant’s staircase.

Underground Tea Making

The second method is even gentler, and it has the best name in the

whole book: in situ recovery — which you immediately translate as “underground tea making.” Instead of digging, workers drill deep wells and send a special water down to meet the uranium where it sleeps, washing it out of the rock so softly that the ground above barely notices. The uranium rides the water back up to the surface — like bringing up a pot of tea steeped with energy leaves.

“We shall come back to that tea party,” the book says, and its pages flutter with something very like a wink. “It becomes rather famous later in our story.”

Cookies into Crumbs — Making Yellowcake

Once the uranium comes out of the ground, it still isn’t ready for the Big Fat Kettles. First, the rock is crushed into tiny pieces — almost like turning cookies into crumbs. Then it’s mixed and processed until the uranium is separated from everything else, forming a yellow powder called yellowcake.

You think it looks like something you’d sprinkle on popcorn, but Nukie reminds you (with a very serious whisker twitch) that it is definitely not snack material. From there, the yellowcake is sent to special factories where it’s cleaned, refined, and prepared so its atoms can be split safely and steadily inside the reactors. Only after all these steps — digging, washing, crushing, separating, and refining — does uranium become the quiet, powerful fuel that keeps the Big Fat Kettles humming.

What’s Next?

But then you pause. “Where are these giant machines?” you wonder aloud. “Who has all this uranium? Do we have it here in America? Do other countries have it too?”

Nukie taps the page with his paw. The next chapter title shimmers like a secret map: “Where in the World Is Uranium?”

Your eyes widen. You are about to discover which countries hold this powerful mineral, who digs it up, and how it travels from deep underground to the heart of the Big Fat Kettles. With a deep breath and a shared grin, you flip the page…

CHAPTER FOUR

Where in the World Is Uranium?



A swirl of golden dust sparkles out of the book. Nukie’s whiskers quiver.

“Is that… glitter?” he asks.

“Not glitter,” you whisper. “Uranium dust!”

Nukie’s eyes go wide. “The sparkly treasure that makes the Big Fat Kettles hum?”

“Exactly,” you say. “And this chapter tells the story of how America found it.”

A Country Ready for Something New

After World War II, America was busy, noisy, and hopeful. Soldiers were coming home, hugging their families tight. Factories were buzzing again. Scientists were racing around chalkboards, dreaming up inventions faster than they could write them down.

“It was like the whole country had pressed the GO! button at the same time,” you exclaim.

“And everyone needed more energy,” Nukie adds, “to build, to grow, to dream!”

The book nods — well, it feels like it nods — and shows the glowing labs of Los Alamos, Oak Ridge, and the Manhattan Project. These were the places where scientists first learned how to unlock the tiny lightning inside atoms.

Soon, those ideas leapt out of the secret labs and into the real world. The Era of Nuclear Energy had begun.

America’s Hidden Treasure Map

The next page shows a giant map of the United States, covered in little yellow stars.

“Were those all uranium mines?”

“Seven hundred and fifty at the peak!” Nukie reads, his tail shooting straight up. “That’s more mines than I have naps in a week!”

In the early years, America’s uranium was abundant, easy to reach, and perfect for open-pit mining. Most of it was found in sandstone — soft, crumbly rock that was easy to scoop up with the giant machines that looked like metal dinosaurs.

The book zooms in on Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, and the Colorado Plateau. From 1948 to 1970, miners dug, hauled, and processed uranium for the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, which needed it for national defense and the growing nuclear industry.

At first, uranium was so important that the government kept tight control over it. It was mysterious, secretive, and powerful — like a treasure locked in a vault.

But by the 1950s, mining companies realized something: uranium wasn’t just for the military anymore. It was becoming a booming business.

The Boom… and the Slow Fade

The book flips to a new picture — this one a little quieter.

By the mid-1970s, something had changed.

America had dug up its easiest uranium. The shallow deposits were gone. What remained was deeper, harder to reach, and much more

expensive to mine.
“Like when you eat all the marshmallows out of the cereal,” Nukie says sadly. “The rest is… fine. But not the same.”
You laugh. “Exactly! The easy stuff was gone.”
The government decided it had enough uranium in reserve. Purchases slowed. Mines closed. The once-bright stars on the map dimmed, one by one.

Passing the Baton

But the story didn’t end there.
The book shows a relay race — scientists and miners passing a glowing baton labeled Uranium Leadership.
“Look,” you point. “Other countries picked up the baton.”
The next pages show Canada, with its deep, rich deposits; Australia, with vast open landscapes full of ore; Kazakhstan, rising to become the world’s top producer; and African nations, with growing mining regions and new discoveries.
“These places now carry much of the world’s uranium supply,” you explain.
Nukie nods thoughtfully. “So America started the race… but others are helping finish it.”
“Exactly,” you say. “And that’s how the world keeps the Big Fat Kettles running.”

A New Kind of Adventure

The chapter closes with you and Nukie standing on a hill, looking

out at a glowing horizon.

America’s early uranium story was one of discovery, excitement, and enormous possibility. It helped launch the peaceful atom, power cities, and inspire generations of scientists.

But the world had changed. The treasure was deeper now — harder to reach — and the global team was bigger.

“Looks like the next chapter is going to be about where uranium comes from today,” you say.

Nukie’s tail curls with excitement. “Then let’s turn the page.”

CHAPTER FIVE

The Hum and the Baton



America’s golden uranium decades, the day the easy ore ran dry — and the nations that carry the treasure today: Canada, Kazakhstan, and Australia.

The book had promised to show you where uranium comes from today. But first, it says, one chapter has to be told a little quieter — like Nana telling how things used to be.

The page turns slowly. The chapter is called “The Hum.”

The Decades of the Hum

From the late 1940s to the early 1980s, America’s uranium country hummed. In the West, the hills were dotted with mine headframes and open pits; in Texas, the wells whispered. At the very peak there were some seven hundred and fifty mines working at once — and whole towns that had not existed a season before.

Towns grew so fast that folks joked the church and the saloon shared a wall — and got along fine. Mud streets turned to movie theaters. Boots carried yellow dust home on payday, and paychecks were good enough for pianos.

“The treasure was everywhere and shallow,” the book says. “It practically waved at you from the roadside.”

In 1980 came the greatest hum of all: America dug forty-three million pounds of uranium in a single year. You try to imagine that many pounds and give up — it is like trying to imagine the ocean by drinking it.

The Day the Hum Grew Quiet

But ore, like ice cream, does not last forever. The shallow treasure ran dry. What remained was deeper, harder, and more expensive to reach, and the prices the mines needed to keep humming did not come. One by one, the mines dimmed, like porch lights at the end of a summer evening.

The book shows a photograph of a town with empty sidewalks. “The people did not fail,” it says. “The easy ore simply moved on. What America kept was bigger than what it lost: the know-how. A whole country’s worth of people who understood the treasure — how to find it, wash it, weigh it, and treat it with respect.”

The Baton

And then the page turns bright again, and there is the relay race — the glowing baton labeled URANIUM LEADERSHIP — and this time you get to watch the runners up close.

Saskatchewan: The Province the Atom Built

First runner: Canada. And one province above all — Saskatchewan, out on the wide northern prairie.

Up in the cold north of Saskatchewan lies the Athabasca Basin, the richest uranium ground ever found anywhere on earth — rock so astonishingly rich that people don’t dig it by hand at all. Remote-controlled machines do the digging, while people stay safe above, steering gently. The most powerful treasure on the planet, and it is gathered the way you’d carry a sleeping baby.

In the city of Saskatoon, generations have grown up around it:

mining families, chemists, engineers, university labs. Whole neighborhoods, schools, and trades exist because the atom came to stay. A generation of talent grew up thinking about atoms the way coastal kids think about the sea — as a neighbor, a livelihood, and a promise.

Kazakhstan: The Family of Nations

Second runner: Kazakhstan, out on the endless steppe — and this, the book says, is your favorite part, and Nukie's too.

Kazakhstan leads the whole world in uranium today. And it got there as a true family of nations: Kazakh scientists and engineers working side by side with companies and colleagues from Canada, France, Japan, China, Russia, and beyond — one long table on the steppe, sharing the work and the lessons.

Together, that family perfected the gentlest way ever invented to take uranium from the ground — the underground tea party you will meet in the very next chapter — and they shared its rules for keeping the water clean, so the whole industry, and the planet, got better at once.

"When someone at that table says 'pass the salt,'" says Nukie, dreamily, "it arrives in three languages."

Australia: The Keeper of the Biggest Pantry

Third runner: Australia, which keeps more uranium in its ground than almost any nation on earth — a pantry the size of a continent. Out in the red outback, uranium is gathered alongside copper and

gold, as if the earth packed three treasures in one lunchbox on purpose.

The Map Glows Again

The last picture shows the world map at night, and the uranium stars glow now in new places — northern Canada, the Kazakh steppe, the Australian red heart. The hum continues. It simply sings with new accents.

“So the treasure didn’t end,” you say slowly. “It just learned new languages.”

Nukie’s tail curls with the next question already in it. “And the tea? Who teaches the family’s famous tea?”

The book winks. You did not know books could wink. This one can.

You turn the page…

CHAPTER SIX

The Underground Tea Party



The underground tea party — how uranium is gathered gently, safely, and politely today, through nothing more than straws and patience.

The next chapter is called “How the Family Makes Its Tea,” and the first picture makes you frown.

It is a ranch. Cows. Grass. A windmill turning slowly, like it has nowhere to be. No metal dinosaurs. No giant’s staircase. You check the corners of the picture twice, the way you check under the bed for your other sock.

“Where are the giant machines?” you ask.

Nukie taps the page with one paw. “Tea time,” he says. “The famous kind.”

The Straws That Ask Politely

Workers drill slim wells, deep and neat, like drinking straws pushed down into a sandwich. Through some straws they send ordinary water with two small additions: a whisper of oxygen, and a pinch of a powder very much like the one that makes Nana’s cookies rise.

Down in the dark sandstone, the water goes to work. It washes the uranium out of the rock, atom by atom, the way warm water melts sugar in tea. Nothing is blown up. Nothing is turned inside out. The rock simply sips, and shares.

“In the old days,” the book says, “folks turned a whole mountain upside-down for this treasure. Nowadays they ask for it politely through a straw, and the mountain barely says excuse me.”

This is the tea the Kazakh family perfected on the steppe, and today most of the world’s uranium arrives exactly this way.

Fishing the Treasure Out of the Tea

The uranium-water comes back up the other straws, polite and loaded. It doesn’t look like treasure — it looks like tea, because that’s what it is. At a small, tidy plant above ground, the tea pours through a special sponge called resin, and the sponge catches every uranium atom like a magnet catching iron filings. When the sponge is full, it is rinsed, and the uranium is dried into yellowcake — the same yellow powder you met before, still definitely not popcorn topping.

“It’s a proper tea party,” says Nukie, tail curled like a question mark. “Invite the whole aquifer. Nobody has to move out of their house.”

The Watchful Wells

And here is the part that makes the grown-ups sleep well at night. All around the tea field, in a big ring, sit more wells — the watchful kind. Scientists draw samples from them every single day, checking the water the way a mother checks on a sleeping baby. If even a drop wanders where it shouldn’t, the ring of wells tells on it at once. And when the tea party is finished, the workers rinse the underground water clean again, and the ranch stays a ranch. The cows graze right on top of the whole operation and never say a word about it.

“That’s because they’re keeping it to themselves,” says Nukie.
“Cows know more than they admit.”
The book ruffles its pages, pleased. “The fuel is ready,” it whispers.
“Now — who keeps the kettle humming?”
You turn the page…

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Quietest Loud Room in the World



Inside the Big Fat Kettle lives a room where nothing ever shouts — because everyone who works there is too busy being exact.

The chapter is called “The People Who Never Guess,” and the picture shows a door — a thick, serious door, like the door to a bank where dragons keep their gold.

“That,” says the book, “is the control room.”

You expect thunder. You get a library.

A Small City at Night

The control room glows softly, like a small city seen from an airplane window. Rows of panels. Thousands of little lights, each one a fact. Numbers on screens — temperatures, pressures, flows — all holding still, the way a sleeping cat holds still but is ready to move.

In front of the panels sit the operators. They do not wear capes, which you find a little disappointing, until the book explains what they wear instead: licenses.

The Hardest Exam You Never Heard Of

To sit at that desk, an operator trains for years — first the classroom, then the plant, then a pretend control room called a simulator, which is exactly like the real one, down to the last switch. The exam at the end is so hard that grown engineers have nightmares about it for fun.

And even after they pass — every few weeks, back they go to the simulator, to practice emergencies that will hopefully never happen. That is the secret, the book says: the real room stays boring on

purpose. In a power plant, boring is a medal.

Three Raindrops in a Swimming Pool

The operators count things you didn’t know could be counted. The chemistry of the water is watched down to parts per billion — which is like counting three specific raindrops in a swimming pool, every day, and knowing exactly which raindrops they are.

A temperature is watched closer than a cat watches a moth. Nukie accepts this as a professional compliment.

The Rule That Never Bends

And here is the one rule of the quiet room, the rule that gives the chapter its name:

No one ever guesses.

If a number looks strange, nobody shrugs and says “probably fine.” Someone walks to the panel and looks with their own eyes. If the eyes need help, a runner goes into the plant and looks again. The book says it the way a riverboat captain would: “In this room, when you don’t know, you find out. Guessing is the only door that is locked from the inside.”

You think about that. A room full of the world’s most powerful tea-kettle, and its first rule is the same one Mamo gave you about homework: never guess, go look.

While You Sleep

The book shows one last picture: the same room, in the middle of the night, snow outside the window. The shift has changed, but the

chairs are never empty. Around the clock, in threes and fours, the operators keep their watch — on Christmas, on school nights, on the night you were born.

Nukie climbs into the warm chair in the picture and curls up, and you ask the question that has been waiting on the tip of your tongue:

“But — who watches the watchers?”

The book goes very still. Then, softly, it begins to shine.

“That,” it says, “is the next chapter’s secret…”

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Family in Vienna



Adam and Nukie visit the biggest family on earth — the one that watches over every peaceful atom on the planet.

The book has never done this before. The page lifts all by itself — not fwip, but whoooosh — and a swirl of golden dust spills out and wraps around you and Nukie like a scarf.

When the dust settles, you are standing on a wide street in a faraway city called Vienna, where the buildings wear curly gold hats and the whole town smells faintly of pastry and violins. Nukie sniffs a lamppost just to be polite.

The Door That Belongs to Everyone

Ahead stands a great glass building, and flying in front of it, a flag you have never seen: an atom drawn in orbits, blue as a deep pond.

“This is the International Atomic Energy Agency,” says the book, who has traveled along inside your backpack. “Almost every country in the world belongs to it — more than one hundred and seventy. You may think of it as the atom’s whole family, meeting under one roof.”

You grin. You remember the long table on the steppe, where the salt arrives in three languages. This, you realize, is where the whole family gathers.

A Promise Called Atoms for Peace

The book tells it plainly. A long time ago, when the world had seen what atoms could do when used for harm, the countries came together and made a promise with a beautiful name: Atoms for

Peace. The atom would be allowed to work — to light cities, to heal the sick, to help farmers grow. And the family would watch over it, everywhere, so that the promise held.

That was in 1957, and the family has met every day since.

The Aunts and Uncles with Clipboards

The family's most famous members are the inspectors. They travel the world like aunts and uncles at the holidays — always arriving somewhere, always with a list. At peaceful laboratories and power plants, they check that everything is exactly what it claims to be.

A kind inspector with kind eyes shows you the tools of the watching trade: seals that lock doors the way jam jars are sealed, so that nothing opens without leaving a story. Cameras with patient eyes. Scales so precise they can tell a single grain of salt from a million of its cousins.

"We write everything down twice," she says, "and the things that matter, three times."

"Do you ever scold?" you ask.

"Scolding is fast," she says. "Helping works."

The Family Shares Its Homework

And the family does something the book calls the best trick of all: it shares its homework. When experts in one country learn a lesson about running a plant safely, they write it down, and experts from other countries come to visit, and look, and ask — so that a lesson learned in one place on Monday is helping someone far away by

Friday. The family does not hover over the kettle because it distrusts the kettle. It hovers because the kettle belongs to everyone.

You stand very still in the big glass hallway and feel it — the hum of a whole world agreeing about something. It is the quietest big sound you have ever heard.

The kind inspector leans down. “Would you like to hear about the family’s very first cousin?” she asks. “A city in Tennessee that wasn’t on any map when the story began.”

The book in your backpack begins to tremble like a kettle before the whistle.

You grip the golden dust with both hands and turn the page…

CHAPTER NINE

The City That Wasn’t on the Map



The story of Oak Ridge — from a secret town behind a fence, to the valley where America still asks the atom its biggest questions.

Some towns are born with a courthouse and a barber shop. This one was born behind a fence.

The year was 1942, and America needed uranium for a secret so large it couldn’t even be said out loud — only written, in a letter and a number. So the government picked a quiet valley in Tennessee, and workers poured in by the tens of thousands, and the roads turned to mud, and the mud turned to legend. (The book insists the mud was so deep that the mud had mud of its own. Books do like to exaggerate. This book, you have noticed, does not need to.)

The Town Made of Secrets

Seventy-five thousand people lived there, and for a long while the town had no name on any map. Mail was addressed to a number. Children walked to school behind the fence and could not say what their own papas did for a living, because their own papas had promised not to. It was the politest kind of secret — a whole city holding its breath, together.

The Biggest Roof and the Youngest Hands

In that valley rose the largest building in the world under one roof — so long that workers swore it had weather of its own: rain at one end, sunshine at the other, and a brisk walk between. Inside, the uranium for the nation’s work was coaxed, atom by atom, up a staircase of impossible machines.

And who ran those impossible machines? The book shows you, and you grin: mostly young women, fresh out of Tennessee high schools, who watched their dials like hawks and out-did the famous professors at the same task. They called them the Calutron girls. The professors had the ideas. The girls had the hands. The hands won.

Not far away, in a quiet clearing, hummed another first: a reactor that ran and ran and ran, day and night, the very first of its kind to do so — the great-great-grandmother of every Big Fat Kettle on today's horizon.

When the Secret Changed Its Name

The first work of the secret city was for the war the whole world wanted ended. But when the war was over, something remarkable happened, and the book makes you feel it: the secret city did not pack up and disappear. It changed its promise. Instead of secrets, it chose sharing. Instead of hiding the atom's power, it set the atom to work — for medicine, for light, for knowledge.

The fence came down. The town got a name, and a welcome sign, and a place on the map at last.

The Valley That Kept Asking

And that is where the story gets its happy middle — because the valley never stopped. Today, in the same valley, stands a great national laboratory where scientists ask the atom its biggest questions. Computers there are so fast they answer questions

science hasn’t finished asking. A special flashlight there lets researchers peek inside materials without breaking them — a flashlight for atoms. Doctors all over the world receive tiny, precious parcels from that valley, full of medicines that can see inside a person kindly.

And on the old fields, something new is rising again: construction cranes. New buildings, new machines, even a new kind of test reactor, built by a young company that came to the valley on purpose — because when you want to ask the atom something brave, you go where the atom has always answered.

You look at the last picture a long time: the welcome sign, the cranes against the evening sky, the great-grandchildren of the first machines humming under new roofs.

“The town that couldn’t be named,” you say, “now has a name the whole world knows.”

“And a name,” says Nukie, settling on the page like a paperweight with opinions, “is a promise.”

The book grows warm under your hands, the way it did in Nana’s attic, and you both know — without saying it — that one more door is still to open: the one about the people themselves. The ones who dig, and refine, and tend, and guard. The ones who guess never, and check twice.

CHAPTER TEN

The Rest of the Story



This page is different.

Every chapter in this book was written before you were born. But the Nuclear Age isn’t finished. It is being written right now — by engineers and miners and teachers and dreamers, and by kids who ask how things work.

Kids like you.

Someday, someone will look at the kettles on the horizon and wonder how it all turned out. Perhaps they’ll be reading about you.

So here is the last page of the book —

and the first page of the story.



Draw it here.

What happens next is yours to write.

“They’ll fit you.
Go see.”

— Nukie

The adventure continues . . .

Adam and Nukie will return.