**CHAPTER 10**

I kept the children up late getting the details . Jamie and I played war while Claudia talked into the tape recorder. Jamie ended up with two aces and twelve cards more than I; the game cost me thirty- four cents. I still don't know how he does it. It was my deck of cards; but I was somewhat preoccupied listening to Claudia and interrupting her with questions. And then there was that telephone call from the children's parents. I knew you'd tell them, Saxonberg. I knew it! What a combination you are: soft heart and hard head. It was all I could do to persuade them to stay home and let me deliver the children in the morning. Mrs. Kincaid kept asking if they were bruised or maimed. I think she has read too many accounts of lost children in the newspapers. You realize now why I insisted that they stay overnight. I wanted all sides of the bargain kept, and I had to get my information. Besides I had promised them a ride home in the Rolls Royce, and I never cheat when the stakes are high.

When it came to be Jamie's turn to talk into the tape recorder, I thought that I would never get him to quit fussing with the switches. He enjoyed saying something and then erasing it. Finally, I scolded him, "You're not Sir Lawrence Olivier playing Hamlet, you know. All I want are the facts and how you felt. Not a theatrical production."

"You want me to be accurate, don't you?"

"Yes, but I also want you to finish."

Claudia asked for a tour of the house while Jamie told his story. She asked about everything. We rode the elevator up to the third floor, and she went from one room to the next. I hadn't been through the entire house for a long time, so I enjoyed the tour, too. We talked; we both enjoyed that also. Claudia told me about her routine at home. When we came back to the black marble bathroom, she told me how she came to take a bath there earlier. I allowed her to pick the bedroom where she would sleep that night .

Very early the next morning I had Sheldon drive them to Greenwich. I'm enclosing a copy of his report for your amusement, Saxonberg; you ought to be in a mood to laugh now.

The boy, madam, spent the first five minutes of the trip pushing every button in the back seat. I transported them in the Rolls Royce as you requested. He pushed some buttons at least twelve times; others I stopped counting at five. He seemed to regard the button panel, madam, as some sort of typewriter or piano or I.B.M. computer. Without realizing it he pushed the button to the intercom on and neglected to push it off. In this way I overheard all their conversation; they thought they were privately sealed behind the glass screen that divides the front seat from the back. The girl was quiet while the other tested things. Everything, I might add.

Finally, the girl remarked to the other, "Why do you suppose she sold Angel in the first place? Why didn't she just donate it to the museum?"

"Because she's tight. That's why. She said so," the boy answered.

"That's not the reason. If she were tight, and she knew it was worth so much, she would never have sold it for $225."

Thank goodness the girl interested him in conversation. He stopped pushing buttons . Besides neglecting to turn off the intercom, he also neglected to turn off the windshield wipers on the rear window. I might add, madam, that it was not raining.

"Well, she sold it at auction, silly. At an auction you have to sell it to the highest bidder. No one bid higher than $225. It's that simple."

The girl replied, "She didn't sell it for the money. She would have shown her evidence if she really wanted a big price. She sold it for the fun of it. For excitement."

"Maybe she didn't have room for it anymore."

"In that museum of a house? There're rooms upstairs that . . . oh! Jamie, the statue is only two feet tall. She could have tucked it into any corner . "

"Why do you think she sold it?"

The girl thought a minute. (I was hoping she would answer soon, madam. Before the boy got interested in the buttons again.) "Because after a time having a secret and nobody knowing you have a secret is no fun. And although you don't want others to know what the secret is, you want them to at least know you have one."

I observed from the rear view mirror, madam, that the little boy grew quiet. He looked at the girl and said, "You know, Claude, I'm going to save my money and my winnings, and I'm going to visit Mrs. Frankweiler again." A long pause, then, "There's something about our running away that I forgot to say into the tape recorder."

The girl said nothing.

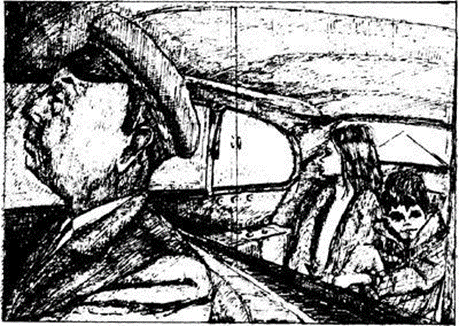
"Wanna come, Claude? We won't tell anyone."

"How much did you win last night?" the girl asked.

"Only thirty-four cents. She's a lot sharper than Bruce."

"Maybe my twenty-five cents from the cornflakes came already. That would make fifty-nine." The girl was silent for a few minutes before she asked, "Do you think she meant that stuff about motherhood?"

The boy shrugged his shoulders. "Let's visit her every time we save enough money. We won't tell anyone. We won't stay overnight. We'll just tell Mom and Dad that we're going bowling or something, and we'll take a train up instead."

"We'll adopt her," the girl suggested. "We'll become her kids, sort of. " 

"She's too old to be a mother. She said so herself. Besides, we already have one . "

"She'll become our grandmother, then, since ours are deceased."

"And that will be our secret that we won't even share with her. She'll be the only woman in the world to become a grandmother with never becoming a mother first."

I drove the car to the address they gave me, madam. The shades were up, and I could see a quite handsome man and a young matron watching by the window. I also thought I saw our own Mr. Saxonberg. The boy had opened the doors even before I had completely stopped. That is a very dangerous thing to do . A much younger creature, also a boy, came running out of the house immediately ahead of the others. As I drove away, this younger one was saying, "Boy! what a car. Hey, Claude, I'll be your sponsibility the rest of . . ."

The children, madam, neglected to say thank you.

Well, Saxonberg, that's why I'm leaving the drawing of Angel to Claudia and Jamie Kincaid, your two lost grandchildren that you were so worried about. Since they intend to make me their grandmother, and you already are their grandfather, that makes us ?oh, well, I won't even think about that. You're not that good a poker player.

Rewrite my will with a clause about my bequeathing the drawing to them. Also put in a clause about that bed I mentioned, too. I guess I ought to donate it to the Metropolitan Museum. I haven't really begun to like donating things. You'll notice that everyone is getting these things after I'm dead. I should say passed away. After you have all those things written into my will, I'll sign the new version. Sheldon and Parks can be witnesses. The signing of the will will take place in the restaurant of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. You'll come there with me, dear Saxonberg, or lose me, your best client.

I wonder if Claudia and Jamie will come visit me again. I wouldn't mind if they did. You see, I still have an edge; I know one bit more of a secret than they do. They don't know that their grandfather has been my lawyer for forty-one years . (And I recommend that for your own good, you not tell them, Saxonberg.)

By the way I heard a radio interview by the new Commissioner of Parks in New York City. He said that his budget had been cut. When asked by a reporter where the money that should have been spent for the parks was going, the commissioner replied that most of it was going towards increased security for the Metropolitan Museum. Suspecting that something special had prompted this move, I asked Sheldon to call his friend, Morris the guard, to find out if anything unusual had been discovered lately.

Morris reported that a violin case was found in a sarcophagus last week. A trumpet case was found two days later. Morris says that guards who have worked at the museum for a year have seen everything; those who have worked there for six months have seen half of everything. They once discovered a set of false teeth on the seat of an Etruscan chariot. They sent the children's cases to Lost and Found. They are still there. Full of gray-washed underwear and a cheap transistor radio. No one has claimed them yet.