CHAPTER 4



Claudia and Jamie awoke very early the next morning. It was still dark. Their stomachs felt like tubes of toothpaste that had been all squeezed out. Giant economy-sized tubes. They had to be out of bed and out of sight before the museum staff came on duty. Neither was accustomed to getting up so early, to feeling so unwashed, or feeling so hungry.

They dressed in silence. Each felt that peculiar chill that comes from getting up in the early morning. The chill that must come from one's own bloodstream, for it comes in summer as well as winter, from some inside part of you that knows it is early morning. Claudia always dreaded that brief moment when her pajamas were shed and her underwear was not yet on. Even before she began undressing, she always had her underwear laid out on the bed in the right direction, right for getting into as quickly as possible. She did this now, too. But she hurried less pulling her petticoat down over her head. She took good long whiffs of the wonderful essence of detergent and clean dacron-cotton which floated down with the petticoat. Next to any kind of elegance, Claudia loved good clean smells.

After they were dressed, Claudia whispered to Jamie, "Let's stash our book bags and instrument cases before we man our stations."

They agreed to scatter their belongings. Thus, if the museum officials found one thing, they wouldn't necessarily find all. While still at home they had removed all identification on their cases as well as their clothing. Any child who has watched only one month's worth of television knows to do that much.

Claudia hid her violin case in a sarcophagus that had no lid. It was well above eye level, and Jamie helped hoist her up so that she could reach it. It was a beautifully carved Roman marble sarcophagus. She hid her book bag behind a tapestry screen in the rooms of French furniture. Jamie wanted to hide his things in a mummy case, but Claudia said that that would be unnecessarily complicated. The Egyptian wing of the Metropolitan was too far away from their bedroom; for the number of risks involved, it might as well be in Egypt. So the trumpet case was hidden inside a huge urn and Jamie's book bag was neatly tucked behind a drape that was behind a statue from the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, the museum people had fastened all the drawers of their furniture so that they couldn't be opened. They had never given a thought to the convenience of Jamie Kincaid.

"Manning their stations" meant climbing back into the booths and waiting during the perilous time when the museum was open to the staff but not to visitors. They washed up, combed their hair, and even brushed their teeth. Then began those long moments. That first morning they weren't quite sure when the staff would arrive, so they hid good and early. While Claudia stood crouched down waiting, the emptiness and the hollowness of all the museum corridors filled her stomach. She was starved. She spent her time trying not to remember delicious things to eat.

Jamie made one slight error that morning. It was almost enough to be caught. When he heard the sound of running water, he assumed that some male visitor was using the men's room to wash up. He checked his watch and saw that it was five past ten; he knew that the museum officially opened at ten o'clock, so he stepped down to walk out of his booth. It was not, however, a museum visitor who had turned on the water tap. It was a janitor filling his bucket. He was leaning down in the act of wringing out his mop when he saw Jamie's legs appear from nowhere and then saw Jamie emerge.

"Where did you come from?" he asked.

Jamie smiled and nodded. "Mother always says that I came from Heaven." He bowed politely and walked out, delighted with his brush with danger. He could hardly wait to tell Claudia. Claudia chose not to be amused on so empty a stomach.

The museum restaurant wouldn't open until eleven thirty and the snack bar wouldn't open until after that, so they left the museum to get breakfast. They went to the automat and used up a dollar's worth of Bruce 's nickels. Jamie allotted ten nickels to Claudia and kept ten for himself. Jamie bought a cheese sandwich and coffee. After eating these he still felt hungry and told Claudia she could have twenty-five cents more for pie if she wished. Claudia, who had eaten cereal and drunk pineapple juice, scolded him about the need to eat properly. Breakfast food for breakfast, and lunch food for lunch. Jamie countered with complaints about Claudia's narrow-mindedness.

They were better organized that second day. Knowing that they could not afford more than two meals a day, they stopped at a grocery and bought small packages of peanut butter crackers for the night; they hid them in various pockets in their clothing. They decided to join a school group for lunch at the snack bar. There were certainly enough to choose from. That way their faces would always be just part of the crowd.

Upon their return to the museum, Claudia informed Jamie that they should take advantage of the wonderful opportunity they had to learn and to study. No other children in all the world since the world began had had such an opportunity. So she set forth for herself and for her brother the task of learning everything about the museum. One thing at a time. (Claudia probably didn't realize that the museum has over 365,000 works of art. Even if she had, she could not have been convinced that learning everything about everything was not possible; her ambitions were as enormous and as multi-directional as the museum itself.) Every day they would pick a different gallery about which they would learn everything. He could pick first. She would pick second; he, third; and so on. Just like the television schedule at home. Jamie considered learning something every day outrageous. It was not only outrageous; it was unnecessary. Claudia simply did not know how to escape. He thought he would put a quick end to this part of their runaway career. He chose the galleries of the Italian Renaissance. He didn't even know what the Renaissance was except that it sounded important and there seemed to be an awful lot of it. He figured that Claudia would soon give up in despair.

When she gave Jamie first pick, Claudia had been certain that he would choose Arms and Armor. She herself found these interesting. There was probably two days' worth of learning there. Perhaps, she might even choose the same on the second day.

Claudia was surprised at Jamie's choice. But she thought she knew why he chose the Italian Renaissance. She thought she knew because along with tennis, ballet, and diving lessons at the "Y", she had taken art appreciation lessons last year. Her art teacher had said that the Renaissance was a period of glorification of the human form; as best she could figure out, that meant bare bodies. Many painters of the Italian Renaissance had painted huge billowy, bosomy naked ladies. She was amazed at Jamie; she thought he was too young for that. He was. She never even considered the possibility that he wanted her to be bored. She had given him first choice, and she was stuck with it. So she marched with him toward the long wide stairway straight in from the main entrance, which leads directly to the Hall of the Italian Renaissance.

If you think of doing something in New York City, you can be certain that at least two thousand other people have that same thought. And of the two thousand who do, about one thousand will be standing in line waiting to do it. That day was no exception. There were at least a thousand people waiting in line to see things in the Hall of the Italian Renaissance.

Claudia and Jamie did not think that there was anything unusual about the size of the crowd. This was New York. Crowded was part of the definition of New York. (To many art experts, Saxonberg, crowded is part of the definition of the Italian Renaissance, too. It was a time much like this: artistic activity was everywhere. Keeping track of the artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Italy is as difficult as keeping track of the tax laws in the nineteen fifties and sixties in the United States. And almost as complicated.)

As they reached the top of the stairs, a guard said, "Line forms to the right. Single file, please." They did as they were told, partly because they didn't want to offend any guard or even attract his attention and partly because the crowd made them. Ladies' arms draped with pocketbooks and men's arms draped with coats formed a barrier as difficult to get through as barbed wire. Claudia and Jamie stood in the manner of all children who are standing in line. They stood leaning back with their necks stretched and their heads tilted away, way back, making a vain effort to see over the shoulders of the tall adult who always appears in front of them. Jamie could see nothing but the coat of the man in front of him. Claudia could see nothing but a piece of Jamie's head plus the coat of the man in front of Jamie.

They realized that they were approaching something out of the ordinary when they saw a newspaper cameraman walking along the edge of the crowd. The newsman carried a large, black, flash camera which had TIMES stenciled in white on its case. Jamie tried to slow down to the pace of the photographer. He didn't know what he was having his picture taken for, but he liked getting his picture taken-especially for a newspaper. Once when his class had visited the fire department, his picture had been in the paper at home. He had bought seven copies of the paper and used that page for bookcovers. When the bookcovers began to tear, he covered the covers with Saran wrap. They were still in his bookcase at home.

Claudia sensed danger. At least she remembered that they had run away from home, and she didn't want any New York paper advertising her whereabouts. Or Jamie's either. Especially if her parents happened to be looking for her. Someone in Greenwich was bound to read the New York Times and tell her folks. It would be more than a clue; it would be like booking anyone looking for them on a chartered bus ride straight to the hideaway. Wouldn't her brother ever learn inconspicuous? She shoved him.

He almost fell into the man in the coat. Jamie turned to Claudia and gave her an awful look. Claudia paid no attention, for now they reached what everyone was standing in line to see. A statue of an angel; her arms were folded, and she was looking holy. As Claudia passed by, she thought that that angel was the most beautiful, most graceful little statue she had ever seen; she wanted to stop and stare; she almost did, but the crowd wouldn't let her. As Jamie passed by, he thought that he would get even with Claudia for shoving him.

They followed the line to the end of the Renaissance Hall. When the velvet ropes that had guided the crowd by creating a narrow street within the room ended, they found themselves going down a staircase to the main floor. Claudia was lost in remembrance of the beautiful angel she had seen. Why did she seem so important; and why was she so special? Of course, she was beautiful. Graceful. polished. But so were many other things at the museum. Her sarcophagus, for example: the one in which her violin case was hidden. And why was there all that commotion about her? The man had come to take pictures. There would be something about it in tomorrow's paper. They could find out from the newspapers.

She spoke to Jamie, "We'll have to buy a New York Times tomorrow to see the picture."

Jamie was still mad about that shove. Why would he want to buy the paper? He wouldn't be in the picture. He chose to fight Claudia with the one weapon he had ?the power of the purse. He answered, "We can't afford a New York Times. It costs a dime."

"We've got to get one, Jamie. Don't you want to know what's so important about that statue? Why everyone is standing in line to see it?"

Jamie felt that letting Claudia know that she couldn't get away with shoving him in public was more important than his curiosity. "Well, perhaps, tomorrow you can push someone down and grab his paper while he's trying to get up. I'm afraid, though, that our budget won't allow this expense."

They walked for a short while before Claudia said, "I'll find out some way." She was determined about that.

She was also determined about learning; they wouldn't skip a lesson so easily. "Since we can't learn everything about the Italian Renaissance today, let's learn everything about the Egyptian rooms. That will be our lesson instead."

Jamie liked the mummies even if he didn't like lessons, so they walked together to the Egyptian wing. There they encountered a class that was also touring the halls. Each child in the class wore a round circle of blue construction paper on which was written in magic marker: Gr . 6, W.P.S. The class was seated on little rubber mats around a glass case within which was a mummy case within which was the mummy they were talking about. The teacher sat on a folding stool. Both Claudia and Jamie wandered over toward the class and soon became part of it ?almost. They listened to the guide, a very pretty young lady who worked for the museum, and they learned a lot. They didn't even mind. They were surprised that they could actually learn something when they weren't in class. The guide told them how mummies were prepared and how Egypt's dry climate helped to preserve them. She told them about digging for tombs, and she told them about the beautiful princess Sit Hat-Hor Yunet whose jewelry they would see in another room. Before they left this room, however, she wanted to know if there were any questions. Since I'm sure this group was typical of all the school groups that I've observed at the museum, I can tell you what they were doing. At least twelve members of Gr. 6, W.P.S. were busy poking at each other. Twelve were wondering when they would eat; four were worried about how long it would be before they could get a drink of water.

Only Jamie had a question: "How much did it cost to become a mummy?"

The pretty guide thought he was part of the class; the teacher thought that he was planted in the audience to pep up the discussion; the class knew that he was an impostor. When they bothered to notice Claudia, they knew that she was one, also. But the class had the good manners that come with not caring; they would leave the impostors alone. The question, however, would have caused at least ten of them to stop poking at each other; six to forget about eating and three others to find the need for drink suddenly less urgent. It caused Claudia to want to embalm Jamie in a vat of mummy fluid right that minute. That would teach him inconspicuous.

The guide told Jamie that some people saved all their lives so that they could become mummies; it was indeed expensive.

One of the students called out, "You might even say it costs him his life."

Everyone laughed. Then they picked up their rubber mats and walked to the next room. Claudia was ready to pull Jamie out of line and make him learn another part of the museum today, but she got a glimpse of the room they were to go to next. It was filled with jewelry: case after case of it. So they followed the class into that hall. After a short talk there, the guide bid them good-bye and mentioned that they might enjoy buying some of the museum pamphlets on Egypt. Jamie asked if they were expensive.

The guide answered, "Some are as inexpensive as a copy of the Sunday New York Times. Others cost much more."

Jamie looked over at Claudia; he shouldn't have. Claudia looked as satisfied as the bronze statue of the Egyptian cat she was standing near. The only real difference between them was that the cat wore tiny golden earrings and looked a trifle less smug.

They got the New York Times the next day. Neither Claudia nor Jamie bought it. The man who left it on the counter while he was looking at the reproductions of antique jewelry bought it. The Kincaids stole it from him. They left the museum immediately thereafter.

Claudia read the paper while they ate breakfast at Horn and Hardart's . That morning she didn't eat breakfast food for breakfast. Crackers and roasted chestnuts in bed at night satisfied only a small corner of her hunger. Being hungry was the most inconvenient part of running away. She meant to eat heartily for every cent Jamie gave her. She bought macaroni and cheese casserole, baked beans, and coffee that morning. Jamie got the same.

The information they wanted was on the first page of the second section of the Times. The headline said: RECORD CROWD VIEWS MUSEUM "BARGAIN." There were three pictures: one of the record crowd standing in line; one of the statue itself; and one of the director of the museum with an assistant. The article was as follows: (Saxonberg you can find an original of the newspaper in my files. It's in one of the seventeen cabinets that line the north wall of my office.)

Officials of the Metropolitan Museum of Art report that 100,000 people

climbed the great stairway to catch a glimpse of one of its newest

acquisitions, a twenty four inch statue called "Angel." Interest in the

marble piece arises from the unusual circumstances attending its

acquisition by the museum and from the belief that it may be the work of

the Italian Renaissance master, Michelangelo. If proof is found that it is

an early work of Michelangelo, the museum will have purchased the greatest

bargain in art history; it was purchased at an auction last year for

$225.00. Considering that recently Prince Franz Josef II accepted an offer

of $5 million for a small painting by Leonardo da Vinci, an artist of the

same period and of similar merit, will give some idea of how great a

bargain this is.

The museum purchased the statue last year when one of its curators

spotted it during a preview showing of works to be auctioned by the Parke-

Bernet Galleries. His initial suspicion that it might be the work of

Michelangelo was confirmed by several other museum officials, all of whom

kept their thoughts quiet in a successful effort to keep the bidding from

being driven higher. The statue has been the subject of exhaustive tests

and study by the museum staff as well as art experts from abroad. Most

believe it to have been done about 470 years ago when Michelangelo was in

his early twenties.

The statue was acquired by the Parke-Bernet Galleries from the

collection of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler. She claims to have purchased it

from a dealer in Bologna, Italy before World War II. Mrs. Frankweiler ' s

residence on East 63rd Street was long a Manhattan showplace for what many

considered one of the finest private collections of art in the Western

Hemisphere. Others considered it a gigantic hodgepodge of the great and

the mediocre. Mrs. Frankweiler closed her Manhattan residence three years

ago; important pieces from its contents have found their way to various

auctions and galleries since that time.

Mr. Frankweiler amassed a fortune from the corn oil industry and from

developing many corn products. He died in 1947. Mrs. Frankweiler now lives

on her country estate in Farmington, Connecticut. Her home, which at one

time was open to the greats in the worlds of art, business, and politics,

is now closed to all but her staff, her advisors, and a few close friends.

The Frankweilers had no children.

A museum spokesman said yesterday, "Whether or not conclusive proof

will be found that this was the work of Michelangelo, we are pleased with

our purchase." Although Michelangelo Buonarroti is perhaps best known for

his paintings of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, he always considered himself

a sculptor, and primarily a sculptor of marble. The question of whether

the museum has acquired one of his lesser known masterpieces still awaits

a final answer."

If Claudia's interests had been a little broader, if she had started with the national news on page one and had then read the continuations on page twenty-eight, she might have noticed a small article on that page, one column wide, that would have interested her. The date line was Greenwich, Connecticut, and it stated that two children of Mr. and Mrs. Steven C. Kincaid, Sr. had been missing since Wednesday. The article didn't mention any clues like Claudia's letter. It said that the children were last seen wearing nylon quilted ski jackets. Small help. Fourteen out of fifteen kids in the U.S.A. wear those. It went on to describe Claudia as brunette and pretty and Jamie as brunette and brown eyed. Police in the neighboring towns of Darien and Stamford in Connecticut and Port Chester, New York, had been alerted. (You see, Saxonberg, Claudia had found the article about the statue too easily. She didn't even look at the first section of the paper. I keep telling you that often the search proves more profitable than the goal. Keep that in mind when you're looking for something in my files.)

Claudia and Jamie read about the statue with great interest. Claudia read the article twice so that she could memorize it all. She decided that mysterious .

Jamie said, "I don't think $225 is cheap. I've never had that much money in my whole life. Totaling up all my birthday and Christmas presents since I was born nine long years ago wouldn't make $225.

Claudia said, "You wouldn't consider two and a quarter cents very much, would you?"

Jamie answered, "I might."

"That's right. You might, but most people wouldn't. Well, if this statue is by Michelangelo, it's worth about $2,250,000 instead of $225. That's the same as saying that suddenly two and a quarter cents is worth $225."

Jamie thought this over a minute. He was impressed. "When I grow up, I'm going to find a way to know for certain who did a statue."

This was all Claudia needed. Something that had been smoldering inside her since she first saw the statue, that had been fed by the Times article, now flared into an idea.

"Jamie, let's do it now. Let's skip learning everything about everything in the museum. Let's concentrate on the statue."

"Can we still take class tours as we did yesterday?"

Claudia answered, "Of course. We don't have to skip learning something about everything. We just won't learn everything about everything. We'll concentrate on Michelangelo."

Jamie snapped his fingers. "I've got it!" he exclaimed. He held up his hands for Claudia to see.

"What does that mean?"

"Fingerprints, silly. If Michelangelo worked on that statue, his fingerprints would be on it."

"Fingerprints? Almost five-hundred-year-old fingerprints? How would you know that they belonged to Michelangelo? He didn't have a police record. I don't suppose he did. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure people were fingerprinted in those days even if they did."

"But what if we were to find identical fingerprints on something they knew that he did? We could compare them."

Claudia kept looking at the picture of the statue as she finished eating her baked beans.

"Jamie," she said, "do you think the statue looks like anyone special?" She folded her arms and gazed into the distance.

"No one I know looks like an angel."

"Think a minute." She cleared her throat and lifted her chin slightly and gazed into the distance. "Don't think about the hair style or the clothes or anything. Just think about the face." She nudged the page of the New York Times closer under Jamie's nose and resumed her pose. Jamie looked at the picture.

"Nope," he said looking up.

"Can't you see any resemblance?"

"Nope." He looked at the picture again. "Who do you think it looks like?"

"Oh, I don't know," she stammered.

Jamie noticed Claudia blushing. "What's the matter? You getting a fever?"

"Don't be silly. I just feel that the statue looks like someone in our family. "

"You sure you don't have a fever? You're talking out of your head."

Claudia unfolded her arms and lowered her distant gaze. "I wonder who posed for it," she said half aloud.

"Probably some fat old lady. Then the chisel slipped, so he made a skinny angel instead.

"Jamie, you have as much romance in you as the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood . "

"Romance! Boloney! But I do like the mystery part."

"So do I!" Claudia answered. "But I like more than that about Angel."

"We going to look for fingerprints then?"

Claudia reconsidered, "Well, we might look for fingerprints. That's one way. For a start." She looked at Jamie and sniffed, "But I'm sure it won't work. We'll look tomorrow. Even though it won't work." And she looked some more at the picture.

On the second day the crowd going up the broad staircase to see the little Angel was even greater. The newspaper article had made people curious. Besides, it was a cloudy day, and museum attendance always improves in bad weather. Some people who had not been to the Metropolitan Museum for years came. Some people who had never been there ever, came; they got directions from maps, subway conductors, and police. (I'm surprised, Saxonberg, that seeing my name in the paper in connection with Michelangelo didn't bring even you to the museum. You would have profited more than you would have thought by that trip. Are photo albums of your grandchildren the only pictures you look at? Are you altogether unconscious of the magic of the name of Michelangelo? I truly believe that his name has magic even now; the best kind of magic because it comes from true greatness. Claudia sensed it as she again stood in line. The mystery only intrigued her; the magic trapped her.)

Both children were annoyed when the guards plus the push of the crowd hurried them past the Angel . How could they possibly look for fingerprints when they were so rushed? After this hurried visit to the statue, they decided to do their research when they had the statue and the museum to themselves. Claudia especially wanted to make herself important to the statue. She would solve its mystery; and it, in turn, would do something important to her, though what this was, she didn't quite know.

As they once again reached the back stairs, Claudia asked Jamie, "With whom shall we dine today, Sir James?"

"Jamie answered, "Oh, I don't know, dear Lady Claudia. Shall we find a good and proper group?"

"Yes, let us, Sir James."

Thereupon, Jamie held out his arm, Claudia rested the tips of her fingers on the top of his hand, and they descended the stairs. They proved to be as fussy in their selection as Goldilocks. This group was too old; that group, too young; this, too small; that, all girls. But they found a good and proper group in the American wing where they spent a lovely and informative hour and a half learning about the arts and crafts of colonial days. They dined with the group, staying always at the rear of the line, always slightly apart. Both Jamie and Claudia had acquired a talent for being near but never part of a group. (Some people, Saxonberg, never learn to do that all their lives, and some learn it all too well.)