

e.l. konigsburg

FROM THE MIXED-UP FILES OF MRS. BASIL E. FRANKWEILER

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To David, with love and pluses

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Summary: Having run away with her younger brother to live in the Metropolitan
Museum of Art, twelve-year-old Claudia strives to keep things in order in their
new home and to become a changed person and a heroine to herself.

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To my lawyer, Saxonberg:

I can't say that I enjoyed your last visit. It was obvious that you had too much on your mind to pay any attention to what I was trying to say. Perhaps, if you had some interest in this world besides law, taxes, and your grandchildren, you could almost be a fascinating person. Almost. That last visit was the worst bore. I won't risk another dull visit for a while, so I'm having Sheldon, my chauffeur, deliver this account to your home. I've written it to explain certain changes I want made in my last will and testament. You'll understand those changes (and a lot of other things) much better after reading it. I'm sending you a carbon copy; I'll keep the original in my files. I don't come in until much later, but never mind. You'll find enough to interest you until I do.

You never knew that I could write this well, did you? Of course, you don't actually know yet, but you soon will. I've spent a lot of time on this file. I listened. I investigated, and I fitted all the pieces together like a jigsaw puzzle. It leaves no doubts. Well, Saxonberg, read and discover.

Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler

1

CLAUDIA KNEW THAT SHE COULD NEVER PULL OFF the old-fashioned kind of running away. That is, running away in the heat of anger with a knapsack on her back. She didn't like discomfort; even picnics were untidy and inconvenient: all those insects and the sun melting the icing on the cupcakes. Therefore, she decided that her leaving home would not be just running from somewhere but would be running to somewhere. To a large place, a comfortable place, an indoor place, and preferably a beautiful place. And that's why she decided upon the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

She planned very carefully; she saved her allowance and she chose her companion. She chose Jamie, the second youngest of her three younger brothers. He could be counted on to be quiet, and now and then he was good for a laugh. Besides, he was rich; unlike most boys his age, he had never even begun collecting baseball cards. He saved almost every penny he got.

But Claudia waited to tell Jamie that she had decided upon him. She couldn't count on him to be that quiet for that long. And she calculated needing that long to save her weekly allowances. It seemed senseless to run away without money. Living in the suburbs had taught her that everything costs.

She had to save enough for train fare and a few expenses before she could tell Jamie or make final plans. In the meantime she almost forgot why she was running away. But not entirely. Claudia knew that it had to do with injustice. She was the oldest child and the only girl and was subject to a lot of injustice. Perhaps it was because she had to both empty the dishwasher and set the table on the same night while her brothers got out of everything. And, perhaps, there was another reason more clear to me than to Claudia. A reason that had to do with the sameness of each and every week. She was bored with simply being straight-A's Claudia Kincaid. She was tired of arguing about whose turn it was to choose the Sunday night seven-thirty television show, of injustice, and of the monotony of everything.

The fact that her allowance was so small that it took her more than three weeks of skipping hot fudge sundaes to save enough for train fare was another example of injustice. (Since you always drive to the city, Saxonberg, you probably don't know the cost of train fare. I'll tell you. Full fare one way costs one dollar and sixty cents. Claudia and Jamie could each travel for half of that since she was one month under twelve, and Jamie was well under twelve—being only nine.) Since she intended to return home after everyone had learned a lesson in Claudia appreciation, she had to save money for her return trip, too, which was like full fare one way. Claudia knew that hundreds of people who lived in her town worked in offices in New York City and could afford to pay full fare both ways every day. Like her father. After all, Greenwich was considered an actual suburb of New York, a commuting suburb.

Even though Claudia knew that New York City was not far away, certainly not far enough to go considering the size and number of the injustices done to her, she knew that it was a good place to get lost. Her mother's Mah-Jong club ladies called it the city. Most of them never ventured there; it was exhausting, and it made them nervous. When she was in the fourth grade, her class had gone on a trip to visit historical places in Manhattan. Johnathan Richter's mother hadn't let him go for fear he'd get separated from the group in all the jostling that goes on in New York. Mrs. Richter, who was something of a character, had said that she was certain that he would "come home lost." And she considered the air very bad for him to

breathe.

Claudia loved the city because it was elegant; it was important; and busy. The best place in the world to hide. She studied maps and the Tourguide book of the American Automobile Association and reviewed every field trip her class had ever taken. She made a specialized geography course for herself. There were even some pamphlets about the museum around the house, which she quietly researched.

Claudia also decided that she must get accustomed to giving up things. Learning to do without hot fudge sundaes was good practice for her. She made do with the Good Humor bars her mother always kept in their freezer. Normally, Claudia's hot fudge expenses were forty cents per week. Before her decision to run away, deciding what to do with the ten cents left over from her allowance had been the biggest adventure she had had each week. Sometimes she didn't even have ten cents, for she lost a nickel every time she broke one of the household rules like forgetting to make her bed in the morning. She was certain that her allowance was the smallest in her class. And most of the other sixth graders never lost part of their pay since they had full-time maids to do the chores instead of a cleaning lady only twice a week. Once after she had started saving, the drug store had a special. Hor FUDGE, 27¢, the sign in the window said. She bought one. It would postpone her running away only twentyseven cents worth. Besides, once she made up her

mind to go, she enjoyed the planning almost as much as she enjoyed spending money. Planning long and well was one of her special talents.

Jamie, the chosen brother, didn't even care for hot fudge sundaes although he could have bought one at least every other week. A year and a half before, Jamie had made a big purchase; he had spent his birthday money and part of his Christmas money on a transistor radio, made in Japan, purchased from Woolworth's. Occasionally, he bought a battery for it. They would probably need the radio; that made another good reason for choosing Jamie.

On Saturdays Claudia emptied the wastebaskets, a task she despised. There were so many of them. Everyone in her family had his own bedroom and wastebasket except her mother and father who shared both—with each other. Almost every Saturday Steve emptied his pencil sharpener into his. She knew he made his basket messy on purpose.

One Saturday as she was carrying the basket from her parents' room, she jiggled it a little so that the contents would sift down and not spill out as she walked. Their basket was always so full since there were two of them using it. She managed to shift a shallow layer of Kleenex, which her mother had used for blotting lipstick, and thus exposed the corner of a red ticket. Using the tips of her forefinger and thumb like a pair of forceps, she pulled at it and discovered a ten-ride pass for the New York, New Haven, and

Hartford Railroad. Used train passes normally do not appear in suburban wastebaskets; they appear in the pockets of train conductors. Nine rides on a pass are marked off in little squares along the bottom edge, and they are punched one at a time as they are used; for the tenth ride the conductor collects the pass. Their cleaning lady who had come on Friday must have thought that the pass was all used up since rides one through nine were already punched. The cleaning lady never went to New York, and Claudia's dad never kept close track of his pocket change or his train passes.

Both she and Jamie could travel on the leftover pass since two half fares equal one whole. Now they could board the train without having to purchase tickets. They would avoid the station master and any stupid questions he might ask. What a find! From a litter of lipstick kisses, Claudia had plucked a free ride. She regarded it as an invitation. They would leave on Wednesday.

On Monday afternoon Claudia told Jamie at the school bus stop that she wanted him to sit with her because she had something important to tell him. Usually, the four Kincaid children neither waited for each other nor walked together, except for Kevin, who was somebody's charge each week. School had begun on the Wednesday after Labor Day. Therefore, their "fiscal week" as Claudia chose to call it began always on Wednesday. Kevin was only six and in the first

grade and was made much over by everyone, especially by Mrs. Kincaid, Claudia thought. Claudia also thought that he was terribly babied and impossibly spoiled. You would think that her parents would know something about raising children by the time Kevin, their fourth, came along. But her parents hadn't learned. She couldn't remember being anyone's charge when she was in the first grade. Her mother had simply met her at the bus stop every day.

Jamie wanted to sit with his buddy, Bruce. They played cards on the bus; each day meant a continuation of the day before. (The game was nothing very complicated, Saxonberg. Nothing terribly refined. They played war, that simple game where each player puts down a card, and the higher card takes both. If the cards are the same, there is a war which involves putting down more cards; winner then takes all the war cards.) Every night when Bruce got off at his stop, he'd take his stack of cards home with him. Jamie would do the same. They always took a vow not to shuffle. At the stop before Bruce's house, they would stop playing, wrap a rubber band around each pile, hold the stack under each other's chin and spit on each other's deck saying, "Thou shalt not shuffle." Then each tapped his deck and put it in his pocket.

Claudia found the whole procedure disgusting, so she suffered no feelings of guilt when she pulled Jamie away from his precious game. Jamie was mad, though. He was in no mood to listen to Claudia. He sat



slumped in his seat with his lips pooched out and his eyebrows pulled down on top of his eyes. He looked like a miniature, clean-shaven Neanderthal man. Claudia didn't say anything. She waited for him to cool off.

Jamie spoke first, "Gosh, Claude, why don't you pick on Steve?"

Claudia answered, "I thought, Jamie, that you'd see that it's obvious I don't want Steve."

"Well," Jamie pleaded, "want him! Want him!" Claudia had planned her speech. "I want you, Jamie, for the greatest adventure in our lives."

Jamie muttered, "Well, I wouldn't mind if you'd pick on someone else."

Claudia looked out the window and didn't answer. Jamie said, "As long as you've got me here, tell me."

Claudia still said nothing and still looked out the window. Jamie became impatient. "I said that as long as you've got me here, you may as well tell me."

Claudia remained silent. Jamie erupted, "What's the matter with you, Claude? First you bust up my card game, then you don't tell me. It's undecent."

"Break up, not bust up. Indecent, not undecent," Claudia corrected.

"Oh, boloney! You know what I mean. Now tell me," he demanded.

"I've picked you to accompany me on the greatest adventure of our mutual lives," Claudia repeated.

"You said that." He clenched his teeth. "Now tell me."

"I've decided to run away from home, and I've chosen you to accompany me."

"Why pick on me? Why not pick on Steve?" he asked.

Claudia sighed, "I don't want Steve. Steve is one of the things in my life that I'm running away from. I want you."

Despite himself, Jamie felt flattered. (Flattery is as important a machine as the lever, isn't it, Saxonberg? Give it a proper place to rest, and it can move the world.) It moved Jamie. He stopped thinking, "Why pick on me?" and started thinking, "I am chosen." He sat up in his seat, unzipped his jacket, put one foot up on the seat, placed his hands over his bent knee and said out of the corner of his mouth, "O.K., Claude, when do we bust out of here? And how?"

Claudia stifled the urge to correct his grammar again. "On Wednesday. Here's the plan. Listen carefully."

Jamie squinted his eyes and said, "Make it complicated, Claude. I like complications."

Claudia laughed. "It's got to be simple to work. We'll go on Wednesday because Wednesday is music lesson day. I'm taking my violin out of its case and am packing it full of clothes. You do the same with your trumpet case. Take as much clean underwear as

possible and socks and at least one other shirt with you."

"All in a trumpet case? I should have taken up the bass fiddle."

"You can use some of the room in my case. Also use your book bag. Take your transistor radio."

"Can I wear sneakers?" Jamie asked.

Claudia answered, "Of course. Wearing shoes all the time is one of the tyrannies you'll escape by coming with me."

Jamie smiled, and Claudia knew that now was the correct time to ask. She almost managed to sound casual. "And bring all your money." She cleared her throat. "By the way, how much money do you have?"

Jamie put his foot back down on the floor, looked out the window and said, "Why do you want to know?"

"For goodness' sake, Jamie, if we're in this together, then we're together. I've got to know. How much do you have?"

"Can I trust you not to talk?" he asked.

Claudia was getting mad. "Did I ask you if I could trust you not to talk?" She clamped her mouth shut and let out twin whiffs of air through her nostrils; had she done it any harder or any louder, it would have been called a snort.

"Well, you see, Claude," Jamie whispered, "I have quite a lot of money."

Claudia thought that old Jamie would end up

being a business tycoon someday. Or at least a tax attorney like their grandfather. She said nothing to Jamie.

Jamie continued, "Claude, don't tell Mom or Dad, but I gamble. I play those card games with Bruce for money. Every Friday we count our cards, and he pays me. Two cents for every card I have more than he has and five cents for every ace. And I always have more cards than he has and at least one more ace."

Claudia lost all patience. "Tell me how much you have! Four dollars? Five? How much?"

Jamie nuzzled himself further into the corner of the bus seat and sang, "Twenty-four dollars and fortythree cents." Claudia gasped, and Jamie, enjoying her reaction, added, "Hang around until Friday and I'll make it twenty-five even."

"How can you do that? Your allowance is only twenty-five cents. Twenty-four forty-three plus twentyfive cents makes only twenty-four dollars and sixtyeight cents." Details never escaped Claudia.

"I'll win the rest from Bruce."

"C'mon now, James, how can you know on Monday that you'll win on Friday?"

"I just know that I will," he answered.

"How do you know?"

"I'll never tell." He looked straight at Claudia to see her reaction. She looked puzzled. He smiled, and so did she, for she then felt more certain than ever that she had chosen the correct brother for a partner in escape. They complemented each other perfectly. She was cautious (about everything but money) and poor; he was adventurous (about everything but money) and rich. More than twenty-four dollars. That would be quite a nice boodle to put in their knapsacks if they were using knapsacks instead of instrument cases. She already had four dollars and eighteen cents. They would escape in comfort.

Jamie waited while she thought. "Well? What do you say? Want to wait until Friday?"

Claudia hesitated only a minute more before deciding. "No, we have to go on Wednesday. I'll write you full details of my plan. You must show the plan to no one. Memorize all the details; then destroy my note."

"Do I have to eat it?" Jamie asked.

"Tearing it up and putting it in the trash would be much simpler. No one in our family but me ever goes through the trash. And I only do if it is not sloppy and not full of pencil sharpener shavings. Or ashes."

"I'll eat it. I like complications," Jamie said.

"You must also like wood pulp," Claudia said. "That's what paper is made of, you know."

"I know. I know," Jamie answered. They spoke no more until they got off the bus at their stop. Steve got off the bus after Jamie and Claudia.

Steve yelled, "Claude! Claude! It's your turn to take Kevin. I'll tell Mom if you forget."

Claudia, who had been walking up ahead with Jamie, stopped short, ran back, grabbed Kevin's hand and started retracing her steps, pulling him along to the side and slightly behind.

"I wanna walk with Stevie," Kevin cried.

"That would be just fine with me, Kevin Brat," Claudia answered. "But today you happen to be my responsibility."

"Whose 'sponsibility am I next?" he asked.

"Wednesday starts Steve's turn," Claudia answered.

"I wish it could be Steve's turn every week," Kevin whined.

"You just may get your wish."

Kevin never realized then or ever that he had been given a clue, and he pouted all the way home.

On Tuesday Night Jamie found his list of instructions under his pillow pinned to his pajamas. His first instruction was to forget his homework; get ready for the trip instead. I wholeheartedly admire Claudia's thoroughness. Her concern for delicate details is as well developed as mine. Her note to Jamie even included a suggestion for hiding his trumpet when he took it out of its case. He was to roll it up in his extra blanket, which was always placed at the foot of his bed.

After he had followed all the instructions on the list, Jamie took a big glass of water from the bathroom and sat cross-legged on the bed. He bit off a large corner of the list. The paper tasted like the bubble

gum he had once saved and chewed for five days; it was just as tasteless and only slightly harder. Since the ink was not waterproof, it turned his teeth blue. He tried only one more bite before he tore up the note, crumpled the pieces, and threw them into the trash. Then he brushed his teeth.

The next morning Claudia and Jamie boarded the school bus as usual, according to plan. They sat together in the back and continued sitting there when they arrived at school and everyone got out of the bus. No one was supposed to notice this, and no one did. There was so much jostling and searching for homework papers and mittens that no one paid any attention to anything except personal possessions until they were well up the walk to school. Claudia had instructed Jamie to pull his feet up and crouch his head down so that Herbert, the driver, couldn't see him. He did, and she did the same. If they were spotted, the plan was to go to school and fake out their schedules as best they could, having neither books in their bags nor musical instruments in their cases.

They lay over their book bags and over the trumpet and violin cases. Each held his breath for a long time, and each resisted at least four temptations to peek up and see what was going on. Claudia pretended that she was blind and had to depend upon her senses of hearing, touch, and smell. When they heard the last of the feet going down the steps and the motor start again, they lifted their chins slightly and smiled-at each other.

Herbert would now take the bus to the lot on the Boston Post Road where the school buses parked. Then he would get out of the bus and get into his car and go wherever else he always went. James and Claudia practiced silence all during the ragged ride to the parking lot. The bus bounced along like an empty cracker box on wheels—almost empty. Fortunately, the bumps made it noisy. Otherwise, Claudia would have worried for fear the driver could hear her heart, for it sounded to her like their electric percolator brewing the morning's coffee. She didn't like keeping her head down so long. Perspiration was causing her cheek to stick to the plastic seat; she was convinced that she would develop a medium-serious skin disease within five minutes after she got off the bus.

The bus came to a stop. They heard the door open. Just a few backward steps by Herbert, and they would be discovered. They held their breath until they heard him walk down the steps and out of the bus. Then they heard the door close. After he got out, Herbert reached in from the small side window to operate the lever that closed the door.

Claudia slowly pulled her arm in front of her and glanced at her watch. She would give Herbert seven minutes before she would lift her head. When the time was up, both of them knew that they could get up, but both wanted to see if they could hold out a little bit longer, and they did. They stayed crouched down for about forty-five more seconds, but being cramped and uncomfortable, it seemed like forty-five more minutes.

When they got up, both were grinning. They peeked out of the window of the bus, and saw that the coast was clear. There was no need to hurry so they slowly made their way up to the front, Claudia leading. The door lever was left of the driver's seat, and as she walked toward it, she heard an awful racket behind her.

"Jamie," she whispered, "what's all that racket?" Jamie stopped, and so did the noise. "What racket?" he demanded.

"You," she said. "You are the racket. What in the world are you wearing? Chain mail?"

"I'm just wearing my usual. Starting from the bottom, I have B.V.D. briefs, size ten, one tee shirt . . ."

"Oh, for goodness' sake, I know all that. What are you wearing that makes so much noise?"

"Twenty-four dollars and forty-three cents."

Claudia saw then that his pockets were so heavy they were pulling his pants down. There was a gap of an inch and a half between the bottom hem of his shirt and the top of his pants. A line of winter white skin was punctuated by his navel.

"How come all your money is in change? It rattles."

"Bruce pays off in pennies and nickels. What did you expect him to pay me in? Traveler's checks?"

"O.K. O.K.," Claudia said. "What's that hanging from your belt?"

"My compass. Got it for my birthday last year."

"Why did you bother bringing that? You're carrying enough weight around already."

"You need a compass to find your way in the woods. Out of the woods, too. Everyone uses a compass for that."

"What woods?" Claudia asked.

"The woods we'll be hiding out in," Jamie answered.

"Hiding out in? What kind of language is that?" "English language. That's what kind."

"Who ever told you that we were going to hide out in the woods?" Claudia demanded.

"There! You said it. You said it!" Jamie shrieked.

"Said what? I never said we're going to hide out in the woods." Now Claudia was yelling, too.

"No! you said 'hide out in.'"

"I did not!"

Jamie exploded. "You did, too. You said, 'Who ever told you that we're going to *hide out in* the woods?' You said that."

"O.K. O.K.," Claudia replied. She was trying hard to remain calm, for she knew that a group leader must never lose control of herself, even if the group she leads consists of only herself and one brother brat.

"O.K.," she repeated. "I may have said hide out in, but I didn't say the woods."

"Yes, sir. You said, 'Who ever told you that . . .' "

Claudia didn't give him a chance to finish. "I know. I know. Now, let's begin by my saying that we are going to hide out in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City."

Jamie said, "See! See! you said it again."

"I did not! I said, 'The Metropolitan Museum of Art.'"

"You said hide out in again."

"All right. Let's forget the English language lessons. We are going to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan."

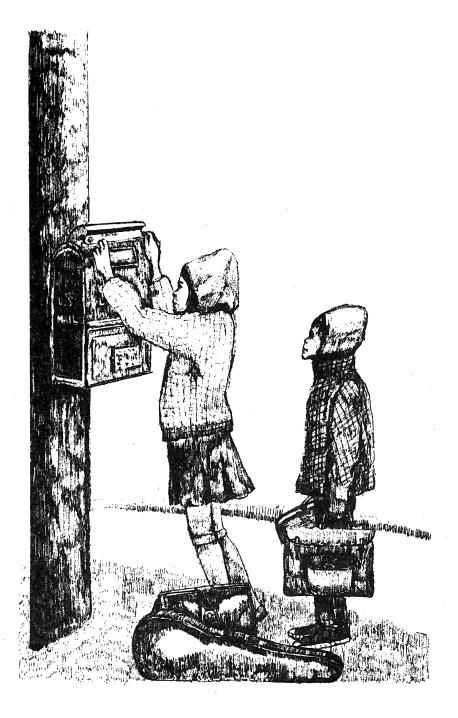
For the first time, the meaning instead of the grammar of what Claudia had said penetrated.

"The Metropolitan Museum of Art! Boloney!" he exclaimed. "What kind of crazy idea is that?"

Claudia now felt that she had control of herself and Jamie and the situation. For the past few minutes they had forgotten that they were stowaways on the school bus and had behaved as they always did at home. She said, "Let's get off this bus and on the train, and I'll tell you about it."

Once again James Kincaid felt cheated. "The train! Can't we even hitchhike to New York?"

"Hitchhike? And take a chance of getting kidnapped or robbed? Or we could even get mugged," Claudia replied.



"Robbed? Why are you worried about that? It's mostly my money," Jamie told her.

"We're in this together. Its mostly your money we're using, but it's all my idea we're using. We'll take the train."

"Of all the sissy ways to run away and of all the sissy places to run away to. . . ." Jamie mumbled.

He didn't mumble quite softly enough. Claudia turned on him, "Run away to? How can you run away and to? What kind of language is that?" Claudia asked.

"The American language," Jamie answered. "American James Kincaidian language." And they both left the bus forgetting caution and remembering only their quarrel.

They were not discovered.

On the way to the train station Claudia mailed two letters.

"What were those?" Jamie asked.

"One was a note to Mom and Dad to tell them that we are leaving home and not to call the FBI. They'll get it tomorrow or the day after."

"And the other?"

"The other was two box tops from corn flakes. They send you twenty-five cents if you mail them two box tops with stars on the tops. For milk money, it said."

"You should have sent that in before. We could use twenty-five cents more."

"We just finished eating the second box of corn flakes this morning," Claudia informed him.

They arrived at the Greenwich station in time to catch the 10:42 local. The train was not filled with either commuters or lady shoppers, so Claudia walked up the aisles of one car and then another until she found a pair of chairs that dissatisfied her the least with regard to the amount of dust and lint on the blue velvet mohair covers. Jamie spent seven of the twenty-eight-and-a-half railroad miles trying to convince his sister that they should try hiding in Central Park. Claudia appointed him treasurer; he would not only hold all the money, he would also keep track of it and pass judgment on all expenditures. Then Jamie began to feel that the Metropolitan offered several advantages and would provide adventure enough.

And in the course of those miles Claudia stopped regretting bringing Jamie along. In fact when they emerged from the train at Grand Central into the underworld of cement and steel that leads to the terminal, Claudia felt that having Jamie there was important. (Ah, how well I know those feelings of hot and hollow that come from that dimly lit concrete ramp.) And his money and radio were not the only reasons. Manhattan called for the courage of at least two Kincaids.

As soon as they reached the sidewalk, Jamie made his first decision as treasurer. "We'll walk from here to the museum."

"Walk?" Claudia asked. "Do you realize that it is over forty blocks from here?"

"Well, how much does the bus cost?"

"The bus!" Claudia exclaimed. "Who said anything about taking a bus? I want to take a taxi."

"Claudia," Jamie said, "you are quietly out of your mind. How can you even think of a taxi? We have no more allowance. No more income. You can't be extravagant any longer. It's not my money we're spending. It's our money. We're in this together, remember?"

"You're right," Claudia answered. "A taxi is expensive. The bus is cheaper. It's only twenty cents each. We'll take the bus."

"Only twenty cents each. That's forty cents total. No bus. We'll walk."

"We'll wear out forty cents worth of shoe leather," Claudia mumbled. "You're sure we have to walk?"

"Positive," Jamie answered. "Which way do we go?"

"Sure you won't change your mind?" The look on Jamie's face gave her the answer. She sighed. No wonder Jamie had more than twenty-four dollars; he was a gambler and a cheapskate. If that's the way he wants to be, she thought, I'll never again ask him for bus fare; I'll suffer and never, never let him know about it. But he'll regret it when I simply collapse from exhaustion. I'll collapse quietly.

"We'd better walk up Madison Avenue," she told her brother. "I'll see too many ways to spend our precious money if we walk on Fifth Avenue. All those gorgeous stores."

She and Jamie did not walk exactly side by side. Her violin case kept bumping him, and he began to walk a few steps ahead of her. As Claudia's pace slowed down from what she was sure was an accumulation of carbon dioxide in her system (she had not yet learned about muscle fatigue in science class even though she was in the sixth grade honors class), Jamie's pace quickened. Soon he was walking a block

and a half ahead of her. They would meet when a red light held him up. At one of these mutual stops Claudia instructed Jamie to wait for her on the corner of Madison Avenue and 80th Street, for there they would turn left to Fifth Avenue.

She found Jamie standing on that corner, probably one of the most civilized street corners in the whole world, consulting a compass and announcing that when they turned left, they would be heading "due northwest." Claudia was tired and cold at the tips; her fingers, her toes, her nose were all cold while the rest of her was perspiring under the weight of her winter clothes. She never liked feeling either very hot or very cold, and she hated feeling both at the same time. "Head due northwest. Head due northwest," she mimicked. "Can't you simply say turn right or turn left as everyone else does? Who do you think you are? Daniel Boone? I'll bet no one's used a compass in Manhattan since Henry Hudson."

Jamie didn't answer. He briskly rounded the corner of 80th Street and made his hand into a sun visor as he peered down the street. Claudia needed an argument. Her internal heat, the heat of anger, was cooking that accumulated carbon dioxide. It would soon explode out of her if she didn't give it some vent. "Don't you realize that we must try to be inconspicuous?" she demanded of her brother.

"What's inconspicuous?"

[&]quot;Un-noticeable."

Jamie looked all around. "I think you're brilliant, Claude. New York is a great place to hide out. No one notices no one."

"Anyone," Claudia corrected. She looked at Jamie and found him smiling. She softened. She had to agree with her brother. She was brilliant. New York was a great place, and being called brilliant had cooled her down. The bubbles dissolved. By the time they reached the museum, she no longer needed an argument.

As they entered the main door on Fifth Avenue, the guard clicked off two numbers on his people counter. Guards always count the people going into the museum, but they don't count them going out. (My chauffeur, Sheldon, has a friend named Morris who is a guard at the Metropolitan. I've kept Sheldon busy getting information from Morris. It's not hard to do since Morris loves to talk about his work. He'll tell about anything except security. Ask him a question he won't or can't answer, and he says, "I'm not at liberty to tell. Security.")

By the time Claudia and Jamie reached their destination, it was one o'clock, and the museum was busy. On any ordinary Wednesday over 26,000 people come. They spread out over the twenty acres of floor space; they roam from room to room to room to room. On Wednesday come the gentle old ladies who are using the time before the Broadway matinee begins. They walk around in pairs. You can tell they are

a set because they wear matching pairs of orthopedic shoes, the kind that lace on the side. Tourists visit the museum on Wednesdays. You can tell them because the men carry cameras, and the women look as if their feet hurt; they wear high heeled shoes. (I always say that those who wear 'em deserve 'em.) And there are art students. Any day of the week. They also walk around in pairs. You can tell that they are a set because they carry matching black sketchbooks.

(You've missed all this, Saxonberg. Shame on you! You've never set your well-polished shoe inside that museum. More than a quarter of a million people come to that museum every week. They come from Mankato, Kansas where they have no museums and from Paris, France, where they have lots. And they all enter free of charge because that's what the museum is: great and large and wonderful and free to all. And complicated. Complicated enough even for Jamie Kincaid.)

No one thought it strange that a boy and a girl, each carrying a book bag and an instrument case and who would normally be in school, were visiting a museum. After all, about a thousand school children visit the museum every day. The guard at the entrance merely stopped them and told them to check their cases and book bags. A museum rule: no bags, food, or umbrellas. None that the guards can see. Rule or no rule, Claudia decided it was a good idea. A big

sign in the checking room said NO TIPPING, so she knew that Jamie couldn't object. Jamie did object, however; he pulled his sister aside and asked her how she expected him to change into his pajamas. His pajamas, he explained, were rolled into a tiny ball in his trumpet case.

Claudia told him that she fully expected to check out at 4:30. They would then leave the museum by the front door and within five minutes would re-enter from the back, through the door that leads from the parking lot to the Children's Museum. After all, didn't that solve all their problems? (1) They would be seen leaving the museum. (2) They would be free of their baggage while they scouted around for a place to spend the night. And (3) it was free.

Claudia checked her coat as well as her packages. Jamie was condemned to walking around in his ski jacket. When the jacket was on and zippered, it covered up that exposed strip of skin. Besides, the orlon plush lining did a great deal to muffle his twenty-four-dollar rattle. Claudia would never have permitted herself to become so overheated, but Jamie liked perspiration, a little bit of dirt, and complications.

Right now, however, he wanted lunch. Claudia wished to eat in the restaurant on the main floor, but Jamie wished to eat in the snack bar downstairs; he thought it would be less glamorous, but cheaper, and as chancellor of the exchequer, as holder of the veto

power, and as tightwad of the year, he got his wish. Claudia didn't really mind too much when she saw the snack bar. It was plain but clean.

James was dismayed at the prices. They had \$28.61 when they went into the cafeteria, and only \$27.11 when they came out still feeling hungry. "Claudia," he demanded, "did you know food would cost so much? Now, aren't you glad that we didn't take a bus?"

Claudia was no such thing. She was not glad that they hadn't taken a bus. She was merely furious that her parents, and Jamie's too, had been so stingy that she had been away from home for less than one whole day and was already worried about survival money. She chose not to answer Jamie. Jamie didn't notice; he was completely wrapped up in problems of finance.

"Do you think I could get one of the guards to play me a game of war?" he asked.

"That's ridiculous," Claudia said.

"Why? I brought my cards along. A whole deck."

Claudia said, "Inconspicuous is exactly the opposite of that. Even a guard at the Metropolitan who sees thousands of people every day would remember a boy who played him a game of cards."

Jamie's pride was involved. "I cheated Bruce through all second grade and through all third grade so far, and he still isn't wise."

"Jamie! Is that how you knew you'd win?"
Jamie bowed his head and answered, "Well, yeah.

Besides, Brucie has trouble keeping straight the jacks, queens, and kings. He gets mixed up."

"Why do you cheat your best friend?"

"I sure don't know. I guess I like complications."

"Well, quit worrying about money now. Worry about where we're going to hide while they're locking up this place."

They took a map from the information stand for free. Claudia selected where they would hide during that dangerous time immediately after the museum was closed to the public and before all the guards and helpers left. She decided that she would go to the ladies' room, and Jamie would go to the men's room just before the museum closed. "Go to the one near the restaurant on the main floor," she told Jamie.

"I'm not spending a night in a men's room. All that tile. It's cold. And, besides, men's rooms make noises sound louder. And I rattle enough now."

Claudia explained to Jamie that he was to enter a booth in the men's room. "And then stand on it," she continued.

"Stand on it? Stand on what?" Jamie demanded.

"You know," Claudia insisted. "Stand on it!"

"You mean stand on the toilet?" Jamie needed everything spelled out.

"Well, what else would I mean? What else is there in a booth in the men's room? And keep your head down. And keep the door to the booth very slightly open," Claudia finished.

to spend the night."

"Feet up. Head down. Door open. Why?"

"Because I'm certain that when they check the ladies' room and the men's room, they peek under the door and check only to see if there are feet. We must stay there until we're sure all the people and guards have gone home."

"How about the night watchman?" Jamie asked. Claudia displayed a lot more confidence than she really felt. "Oh! there'll be a night watchman, I'm sure. But he mostly walks around the roof trying to keep people from breaking in. We'll already be in. They call what he walks, a cat walk. We'll learn his habits soon enough. They must mostly use burglar alarms in the inside. We'll just never touch a window, a door, or a valuable painting. Now, let's find a place

They wandered back to the rooms of fine French and English furniture. It was here Claudia knew for sure that she had chosen the most elegant place in the world to hide. She wanted to sit on the lounge chair that had been made for Marie Antoinette or at least sit at her writing table. But signs everywhere said not to step on the platform. And some of the chairs had silken ropes strung across the arms to keep you from even trying to sit down. She would have to wait until after lights out to be Marie Antoinette.

At last she found a bed that she considered perfectly wonderful, and she told Jamie that they would spend the night there. The bed had a tall canopy,



supported by an ornately carved headboard at one end and by two gigantic posts at the other. (I'm familiar with that bed, Saxonberg. It is as enormous and fussy as mine. And it dates from the sixteenth century like mine. I once considered donating my bed to the museum, but Mr. Untermyer gave them this one first. I was somewhat relieved when he did. Now I can enjoy my bed without feeling guilty because the museum doesn't have one. Besides, I'm not that fond of donating things.)

Claudia had always known that she was meant for such fine things. Jamie, on the other hand, thought that running away from home to sleep in just another bed was really no challenge at all. He, James, would rather sleep on the bathroom floor, after all. Claudia then pulled him around to the foot of the bed and told him to read what the card said.

Jamie read, "Please do not step on the platform."

Claudia knew that he was being difficult on purpose; therefore, she read for him, "State bed—scene of the alleged murder of Amy Robsart, first wife of Lord Robert Dudley, later Earl of . . ."

Jamie couldn't control his smile. He said, "You know, Claude, for a sister and a fussbudget, you're not too bad."

Claudia replied, "You know, Jamie, for a brother and a cheapskate, you're not too bad."

Something happened at precisely that moment.

Both Claudia and Jamie tried to explain to me about it, but they couldn't quite. I know what happened, though I never told them. Having words and explanations for everything is too modern. I especially wouldn't tell Claudia. She has too many explanations already.

What happened was: they became a team, a family of two. There had been times before they ran away when they had acted like a team, but those were very different from feeling like a team. Becoming a team didn't mean the end of their arguments. But it did mean that the arguments became a part of the adventure, became discussions not threats. To an outsider the arguments would appear to be the same because feeling like part of a team is something that happens invisibly. You might call it caring. You could even call it love. And it is very rarely, indeed, that it happens to two people at the same time—especially a brother and a sister who had always spent more time with activities than they had with each other.

They followed their plan: checked out of the museum and re-entered through a back door. When the guard at that entrance told them to check their instrument cases, Claudia told him that they were just passing through on their way to meet their mother. The guard let them go, knowing that if they went very far, some other guard would stop them again. However, they managed to avoid other guards for the

remaining minutes until the bell rang. The bell meant that the museum was closing in five minutes. They then entered the booths of the rest rooms.

They waited in the booths until five-thirty, when they felt certain that everyone had gone. Then they came out and met. Five-thirty in winter is dark, but nowhere seems as dark as the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The ceilings are so high that they fill up with a lot of darkness. It seemed to Jamie and Claudia that they walked through miles of corridors. Fortunately, the corridors were wide, and they were spared bumping into things.

At last they came to the hall of the English Renaissance. Jamie quickly threw himself upon the bed forgetting that it was only about six o'clock and thinking that he would be so exhausted that he would immediately fall asleep. He didn't. He was hungry. That was one reason he didn't fall asleep immediately. He was uncomfortable, too. So he got up from bed, changed into his pajamas and got back into bed. He felt a little better. Claudia had already changed into her pajamas. She, too, was hungry, and she, too, was uncomfortable. How could so elegant and romantic a bed smell so musty? She would have liked to wash everything in a good, strong, sweet-smelling detergent.

As Jamie got into bed, he still felt uneasy, and it wasn't because he was worried about being caught. Claudia had planned everything so well that he didn't concern himself about that. The strange way he felt

had little to do with the strange place in which they were sleeping. Claudia felt it, too. Jamie lay there thinking. Finally, realization came.

"You know, Claude," he whispered, "I didn't brush my teeth."

Claudia answered, "Well, Jamie, you can't always brush after every meal." They both laughed very quietly. "Tomorrow," Claudia reassured him, "we'll be even better organized."

It was much earlier than her bedtime at home, but still Claudia felt tired. She thought she might have an iron deficiency anemia: tired blood. Perhaps, the pressures of everyday stress and strain had gotten her down. Maybe she was light-headed from hunger; her brain cells were being robbed of vitally needed oxygen for good growth and, and . . . yawn.

She shouldn't have worried. It had been an unusually busy day. A busy and unusual day. So she lay there in the great quiet of the museum next to the warm quiet of her brother and allowed the soft stillness to settle around them: a comforter of quiet. The silence seeped from their heads to their soles and into their souls. They stretched out and relaxed. Instead of oxygen and stress, Claudia thought now of hushed and quiet words: glide, fur, banana, peace. Even the footsteps of the night watchman added only an accented quarter-note to the silence that had become a hum, a lullaby.

They lay perfectly still even long after he passed.

Then they whispered good night to each other and fell asleep. They were quiet sleepers and hidden by the heaviness of the dark, they were easily not discovered.

(Of course, Saxonberg, the draperies of that bed helped, too.)

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 blood-stream, 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.

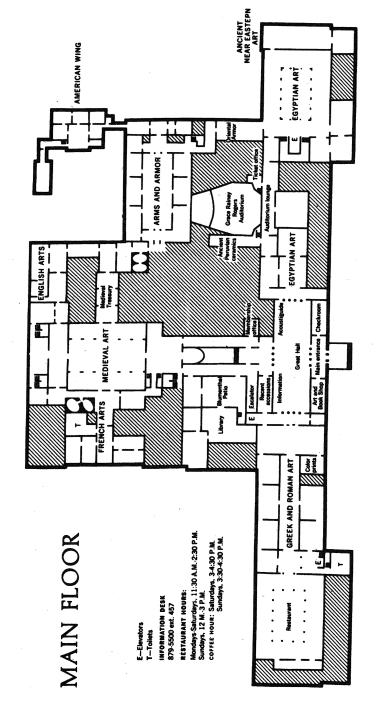
The museum restaurant wouldn't open until eleven thirty and the snack bar wouldn't open until after that, so they left the museum to get breakfast. They went to the automat and used up a dollar's worth of Bruce's nickels. Jamie allotted ten nickels to Claudia and kept ten for himself. Jamie bought a 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.

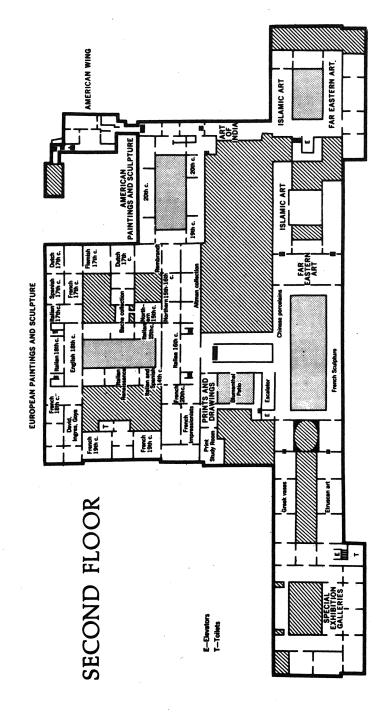
They were better organized that second day. Knowing that they could not afford more than two meals a day, they stopped at a grocery and bought small packages of peanut butter crackers for the night; they hid them in various pockets in their clothing. They decided to join a school group for lunch at the 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 in-

formed 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* stencilled 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 imposter. 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 imposters 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 twentyeight, 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 eved. 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 the statue was not only the most beautiful in the world but also the most 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 to-day, 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.)

They had been cone from home for three days now. Claudia insisted on a fresh change of underwear every day. That was the way she had been brought up. She insisted for Jamie, too. No question about it; their laundry was becoming a problem. They had to get to a laundromat. That night they removed all their dirty clothes from their instrument cases and stuffed those that would fit into various pockets. Those that didn't fit, they wore. A double layer of clothes never hurts anyone in winter, as long as the clean ones are worn closest to the skin.

Saturday seemed a good day for housekeeping chores. There would be no school groups for them to join. Claudia suggested that they eat both meals outside the museum. Jamie agreed. Claudia next suggested a real sit-down restaurant with tablecloths on the tables and waiters to serve you. Jamie said "NO" with such force that Claudia didn't try to persuade him.

From breakfast at the automat they went to laundry at the laundromat. They emptied their pockets of underwear and removed the layer of soiled socks. No one stared. Someone before them had probably done the same thing some time that week. They bought soap from a machine for ten cents and deposited a quarter into the slot in the washer. Through the glass in the door they watched their assorted clothing spill and splash over and over and around and around. Drying cost ten cents for ten minutes, but it took twenty cents worth of minutes to dry everything. When all was done, they were disappointed; all of it looked dismally gray. Very unelegant. Claudia had thought that their white underwear should not have been washed with the red and navy blue socks, but she would not have considered asking for more money for anything as unglamorous as dirty socks.

"Oh, well," she moaned, "at least they smell clean."

Jamie said, "Let's go to the TV department of Bloomingdale's and watch TV."

"Not today. We've got to work on the mystery of the statue all morning tomorrow, because tomor-

row the museum doesn't open until one o'clock. Today we must learn all about the Renaissance and Michelangelo to prepare ourselves. We'll do research at the big library at 42nd Street."

"How about the TV department of Macy's instead?"

"To the library, Sir James."

"Gimbels?"

"Library."

They packed their gray-looking laundry back into their pockets and walked to the door of the laundromat. At the door Claudia turned to Jamie and asked, "Can we . . .?"

Jamie didn't let her finish, "No, dear Lady Claudia. We have not the funds for taxis, buses, or subways. "Shall we walk?" He extended his arm. Claudia placed her gloved fingertips on top of Jamie's mittened ones. Thus they began their long walk to the library.

Once there, they asked the lady at the information booth where they could find books on Michelangelo. She directed them first to the children's room, but when the librarian there found out what they wanted to know, she advised them to go to the Donnell Branch Library on Fifty-third Street. Jamie hoped this would discourage Claudia, but it didn't. She didn't even seem to mind back-tracking up Fifth Avenue. Her determination convinced Jamie that Saturday should be spent just this way. Once at the

library, they examined the directory which told what was available where and when the library was open. In the downstairs Art Room the librarian helped them find the books which Claudia selected from the card catalogue. She even brought them some others. Claudia liked that part. She always enjoyed being waited on.

Claudia began her studies never doubting that she could become an authority that morning. She had neither pencil nor paper to make notes. And she knew she wouldn't have a lot of time to read. So she decided that she would simply remember everything, absolutely everything she read. Her net profit, therefore, would be as great as that of someone who read a great deal but remembered very little.

Claudia showed the executive ability of a corporation president. She assigned to Jamie the task of looking through the books of photographs of Michelangelo's work to find pictures of Angel. She would do the reading. She glanced through several thick books with thin pages and tiny print. After reading twelve pages, she looked to the end to see how many more pages there were to go: more than two hundred. The book also had footnotes. She read a few more pages and then busied herself with studying some of Jamie's picture books.

"You're supposed to do the reading!"

"I'm just using these pictures for relief," Claudia whispered. "I have to rest my eyes sometime."



"Well, I don't see any pictures that look like that statue," Jamie sighed.

"Keep looking. I'll do some more reading."

A few minutes later Jamie interrupted her. "Here he is," he said.

"That doesn't look anything like the statue. That's not even a girl," Claudia said.

"Of course not. That's Michelangelo himself."

Claudia replied, "I knew that."

"Two minutes ago you didn't. You thought I was showing you a picture of the statue."

"Oh, I meant . . . I meant. Well . . . there's his broken nose." She pointed to the nose in the picture. "He got in a fight and had his nose broken when he was a teenager."

"Was he a juvenile delinquent? Maybe they do have his fingerprints on file."

"No, silly," Claudia said. "He was a hot-tempered genius. Did you know he was famous even when he was alive?"

"Is that so? I thought that artists don't become famous until after they're dead. Like mummies."

They studied a while longer before Jamie's next interruption. "You know, a lot of his works were lost. They say *lost* in parentheses under the picture."

"How can that be? A statue isn't something like an umbrella that you leave in a taxi and lose. That is, those people who actually ride taxis; something you wouldn't know about." "Well, they weren't lost in taxis. They were lost track of."

"What kind of a sentence is that? Lost track of?"

"Oh, boloney! There are whole long books about the lost works of Michelangelo. Picture works and sculptor works that people lost track of."

Claudia softened. "Is the little angel one of

them?"

"What's the difference between an angel and a cupid?" Jamie inquired.

"Why?" Claudia asked.

"Because there's a lost cupid for sure."

"Angels wear clothes and wings and are Christian. Cupids wear bows and arrows; they are naked and pagan."

"What's pagan?" Jamie asked. "Boy or girl?"

"How would I know?" Claudia answered.

"You said they are naked."

"Well, pagan has nothing to do with that. It means worshipping idols instead of God."

"Oh," Jamie nodded. "The statue in the museum is an angel. It's dressed in its altogether. I don't know yet if an angel was lost . . ." Then he glanced over at his sister and muttered, "track of."

Claudia had begun her research confident that a morning's study would make her completely an expert; but Michelangelo had humbled her, and humility was not an emotion with which she felt comfortable; she was irritable. Jamie ended his research where Claudia had begun: very confident and happy. He felt that his morning had been well spent; he had seen a lot of pictures and he had learned about pagan. He leaned back and yawned; he was becoming bored with pictures of David and Moses and the Sistine Ceiling; he wanted to find clues. Already he knew enough to tell if Michelangelo had sculptured the little angel. All he needed was a chance to investigate. Without the guards hurrying him. He would know, but would his opinion be accepted by the experts?

"I think we should find out how the experts decide whether or not the statue belongs to Michelangelo. That will be better than finding out about Michelangelo himself," Jamie said.

"I know how they find out. They gather evidence like sketches he did and diaries and records of sales. And they examine the statue to see what kind of tools were used and how they were used. Like no one living in the fifteenth century would use an electric drill. How come you didn't take art appreciation lessons with me?"

"The summer before last?"

"Yes. Before school started."

"Well, the summer before last, I had just finished the second half of first grade."

"So what?"

"So boloney! It was all I could do to sound out the name of Dick and Jane's dog." Claudia had no answer for Jamie's logic. Besides, Jamie agreed with her, "I guess it is better to look for clues. After all, we're doing something that none of the experts can do."

Claudia's impatience surfaced. She had to pick a fight with Jamie. "Don't be silly. They can read all this stuff, too. There's certainly plenty of it."

"Oh, I don't mean that. I mean that we're living with the statue. You know what they always say: The only two ways to get to know someone are to live with him or play cards with him."

"Well, at least the little statue can't cheat at cards like someone else I know."

"Claudia, dear, I'm no angel. Statue or otherwise."

Claudia sighed, "O.K. Sir James, let's go." And they did.

As they were walking up the steps, Jamie spied a Hershey's almond bar still in its wrapper lying in the corner of the landing. He picked it up and tore open one corner.

"Was it bitten into?" asked Claudia.

"No," Jamie smiled. "Want half?"

"You better not touch it," Claudia warned. "It's probably poisoned or filled with marijuana, so you'll eat it and become either dead or a dope addict."

Jamie was irritated. "Couldn't it just happen that someone dropped it?"

"I doubt that. Who would drop a whole candy bar and not know it? That's like leaving a statue in a taxi. Someone put it there on purpose. Someone who pushes dope. I read once that they feed dope in chocolates to little kids, and then the kids become dope addicts, then these people sell them dope at very high prices which they just can't help but buy because when you're addicted you have to have your dope. High prices and all. And Jamie, we don't have that kind of money."

Jamie said, "Oh, well, bottoms up." He took a big bite of the candy, chewed and swallowed. Then he closed his eyes, leaned against the wall and slid to the floor. Claudia stood with her mouth open, stunned. She was on the verge of screaming for help when Jamie opened his eyes and smiled. "It's delicious. Want a bite?"

Claudia not only refused the bite, she also refused to talk to Jamie until they got to the restaurant. Lunch cheered her. She suggested that they play in Central Park for a while, and they did. They bought peanuts, chestnuts, and pretzels from the vendor outside the museum. They knew that since the museum opened late on Sunday, they would accumulate a lot of hunger before they got out. Their bulging pockets were now full of the staples of life: food and clothing.

Jamie entered the men's room. He had arrived, as was his custom, shortly before the first bell rang, the bell that warned everyone that the museum would close in five minutes. He waited; the bell rang. He got into a booth. First bell, second bell, it was routine

just as boarding the school bus had once been routine. After the first day, they had learned that the staff worked from nine A.M. until five P.M., a work schedule just like their father's. Routine, routine. The wait from nine when the staff came until ten when the public came seemed long. Claudia and Jamie had decided that the washrooms were good for the shorter evening wait when the help left at the same time as the visitors, but the washrooms were less satisfactory for the long morning wait . . . especially after Jamie's close call that first morning. So time from eight fortyfive until some safe time after ten in the mornings was spent under various beds. They always checked for dust under the bed first. And for once Claudia's fussiness was not the reason. Reason was the reason. A dustless floor meant that it had been cleaned very recently, and they stood less chance of being caught by a mop.

Jamie stood on the toilet seat waiting. He leaned his head against the wall of the booth and braced himself for what would happen next. The guard would come in and make a quick check of his station. Jamie still felt a ping during that short inspection; that was the only part that still wasn't quite routine, and that's why he braced himself. Then the lights would be turned out. Jamie would wait twelve minutes (lag time, Claudia called it) and emerge from hiding.

Except.

Except the guard didn't come, and Jamie couldn't

relax until after he felt that final ping. And the lights stayed on, stayed on. Jamie checked his watch ten times within five minutes; he shook his arm and held the watch up to his ear. It was ticking slower than his heart and much more softly. What was wrong? They had caught Claudia! Now they would look for him! He'd pretend he didn't speak English. He wouldn't answer any questions.

Then he heard the door open. Footsteps. More footsteps than usual. What was happening? The hardest part was that every corpuscle of Jamie's nine-year-old self was throbbing with readiness to run, and he had to bind up all that energy into a quiet lump. It was like trying to wrap a loose peck of potatoes into a neat four-cornered package. But he managed to freeze. He heard the voices of two men talking over the sound of water running in the sink.

"I guess they expect even more people tomorrow."

"Yeah. Sundays are always jammed up anyway."

"It'll be easier to move the people in and out of the Great Hall."

"Yeah. Two feet of marble. What do you figure it weighs?"

"I dunno. Whatever it weighs, it has to be handled delicate. Like it was a real angel."

"C'mon. They probably have the new pedestal ready. We can start."

"Do you think they'll have as many people as they had for the Mona Lisa?"

"Naw! The Mona Lisa was here for a short time only. Besides it was the real McCoy."

"I think this one's . . ."

The men left, turning off the lights as they did so. Jamie heard the door close before he melted. Legs first. He sat down on the seat as he allowed the familiar darkness as well as new realization to fill him.

They were moving Angel. Did Claudia know? They wouldn't have women moving the statue. There would be no one in the ladies' room washing up. Who would give her the information? He would. By mental telepathy. He would think a message to Claudia. He folded his hands across his forehead and concentrated. "Stay put, Claudia, stay put. Stay put. Stay put. Claudia, stay put." He thought that Claudia would not approve of the grammar in his mental telegram; she would want him to think stay in place. But he didn't want to weaken his message by varying it one bit. He continued thinking STAY PUT.

He must have thought STAY PUT exactly hard enough, for Claudia did just that. They never knew exactly why she did, but she did. Perhaps she sensed some sounds that told her that the museum was not yet empty. Maybe she was just too tired from running around in Central Park. Maybe they were not meant to get caught. Maybe they were meant to make the discovery they made.

They waited for miles and miles of time before they came out of hiding. At last they met in their bedroom. Claudia was sorting the laundry when Jamie got there. In the dark, mostly by feel. Although there is no real difference between boys' stretch socks and girls', neither ever considered wearing the other's. Children who have always had separate bedrooms don't.

Claudia turned when she heard Jamie come up and said, "They moved the statue."

"How did you know? Did you get my message?"

"Message? I saw the statue on my way here. They have a dim light on it. I guess so that the night guard won't trip over it."

Jamie replied, "We're lucky we didn't get caught."

Claudia never thought very hard about the plusluck she had; she concentrated on the minus-luck. "But they held us up terribly. I planned on our taking baths tonight. I really can't stand one night more without a bath."

"I don't mind," Jamie said.

"Come along, Sir James. To our bath. Bring your most elegant pajamas. The ones embroidered in gold with silver tassels will do."

"Where, dear Lady Claudia, dost thou expect to bathe?"

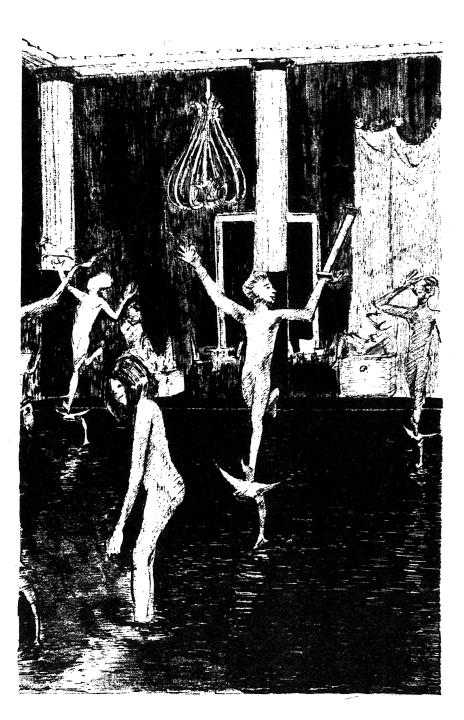
"In the fountain, Sir James. In the fountain."

Jamie extended his arm, which was draped with his striped flannel pajamas, and said, "Lady Claudia, I knew that sooner or later you would get me to that restaurant." (It makes me furious to think that I must explain that restaurant to you, Saxonberg. I'm going to make you take me to lunch in there one day soon. I just this minute became determined to get you into the museum. You'll see later how I'm going to do it. Now about the restaurant. It is built around a gigantic fountain. Water in the fountain is sprayed from dolphins sculptured in bronze. The dolphins appear to be leaping out of the water. On their backs are figures representing the arts, figures that look like water sprites. It is a joy to sit around that wonderful fountain and to snack petit fours and sip espresso coffee. I'll bet that you'd even forget your blasted ulcer while you ate there.)

Lady Claudia and Sir James quietly walked to the entrance of the restaurant. They easily climbed under the velvet rope that meant that the restaurant was closed to the public. Of course they were not the public. They shed their clothes and waded into the fountain. Claudia had taken powdered soap from the restroom. She had ground it out into a paper towel that morning. Even though it was freezing cold, she enjoyed her bath. Jamie, too, enjoyed his bath. For a different reason.

When he got into the pool, he found bumps on the bottom; smooth bumps. When he reached down to feel one, he found that it moved! He could even pick it up. He felt its cool roundness and splashed his





way over to Claudia. "Income, Claudia, income!" he whispered.

Claudia understood immediately and began to scoop up bumps she had felt on the bottom of the fountain. The bumps were pennies and nickels people had pitched into the fountain to make a wish. At least four people had thrown in dimes and one had tossed in a quarter.

"Someone very rich must have tossed in this quarter," Jamie whispered.

"Someone very poor," Claudia corrected. "Rich people have only penny wishes."

Together they collected \$2.87. They couldn't hold more in their hands. They were shivering when they got out. Drying themselves as best they could with paper towels (also taken from the restroom), they hurried into their pajamas and shoes.

They finished their preparations for the night, took a small snack and decided it was safe to wander back into the Great Hall to look again at their Angel.

"I wish I could hug her," Claudia whispered.

"They probably bugged her already. Maybe that light is part of the alarm. Better not touch. You'll set it off."

"I said 'hug' not 'bug!' Why would I want to bug her?"

"That makes more sense than to hug her."

"Silly. Shows how much you know. When you hug someone, you learn something else about them.

An important something else."

Jamie shrugged his shoulders.

Both looked at Angel a long time. "What do you think?" Jamie asked. "Did he or didn't he?"

Claudia answered, "A scientist doesn't make up his mind until he's examined all the evidence."

"You sure don't sound like a scientist. What kind of scientist would want to hug a statue?"

Claudia was embarrassed, so she spoke sternly, "We'll go to bed now, and we'll think about the statue very hard. Don't fall asleep until you've really thought about the statue and Michelangelo and the entire Italian Renaissance."

And so they went to bed. But lying in bed just before going to sleep is the worst time for organized thinking; it is the best time for free thinking. Ideas drift like clouds in an undecided breeze, taking first this direction and then that. It was very difficult for Jamie to control his thoughts when he was tired, sleepy, and lying on his back. He never liked to get involved just before falling asleep. But Claudia had planned on their thinking, and she was good at planning. So think he did. Clouds bearing thoughts of the Italian Renaissance drifted away. Thoughts of home, and more thoughts of home settled down.

"Do you miss home?" he asked Claudia.

"Not too much," she confessed. "I haven't thought about it much."

Jamie was quiet for a minute, then he said, "We

probably have no conscience. I think we ought to be homesick. Do you think Mom and Dad raised us wrong? They're not very mean, you know; don't you think that should make us miss them?"

Claudia was silent. Jamie waited. "Did you hear my question, Claude?"

"Yes. I heard your question. I'm thinking." She was quiet a while longer. Then she asked, "Have you ever been homesick?"

"Sure."

"When was the last time?"

"That day Dad dropped us off at Aunt Zell's when he took Mom to the hospital to get Kevin."

"Me, too. That day," Claudia admitted. "But, of course, I was much younger then."

"Why do you suppose we were homesick that day? We've been gone much longer than that now."

Claudia thought. "I guess we were worried. Boy, had I known then that she was going to end up with Kevin, I would have known why we were worried. I remember you sucked your thumb and carried around that old blanket the whole day. Aunt Zell kept trying to get the blanket away from you so that she could wash it. It stank."

Jamie giggled, "Yeah, I guess homesickness is like sucking your thumb. It's what happens when you're not very sure of yourself."

"Or not very well trained," Claudia added. "Heaven knows, we're well trained. Just look how

nicely we've managed. It's really their fault if we're not homesick."

Jamie was satisfied. Claudia was more. "I'm glad you asked that about homesickness, Jamie. Somehow, I feel older now. But, of course, that's mostly because I've been the oldest child forever. And I'm extremely well adjusted."

They went to sleep then. Michelangelo, Angel, and the entire Italian Renaissance waited for them until morning.